DP-29
EMERY KANARIK
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HUNGARY, 1922
AGE 13
PASSAGE ON "THE MAJESTIC"

PHILLIPS: This is interview number 403 with Mr. Emery Kanarik, K-A-N-A-R-I-C-K.

KANARIK: No C.

PHILLIPS: I'm sorry. K-A-N-A-R-I-K. This is Andrew Phillips, and this is Wednesday the 24th of May 1989. We're beginning the interview at about ten past ten. Mr. Kanarik is from Budapest in Hungary. What was your year of immigration?

KANARIK: 1922.

PHILLIPS: 1922. And what year were you born?

KANARIK: I was born in 1909.

PHILLIPS: Okay. Mr. Kanarik, can you tell me a little bit about, I want to talk something about your early days in Hungary. Can you tell us exactly the town you were born in? As we go through these names, if the spellings are difficult could you spell them?

KANARIK: Sure. I was born in a summer resort in northeastern Hungary, and the name of the resort in Hungarian was Bartfa Fudo, and that's spelled B-A-R-T-F-A, and then a new word, F-U-D-O, F-U-with an umlaut-D-O, with an umlaut. It means Bartfa Spa. And we spent, we had a villa there and we spent every summer there. And, uh, I was actually born in that place because it was summer at the time. But when I was two years old we moved permanently to Budapest, but we still visited Bartfa Fudo which was, we considered our home. Then in 1921 my father and, I had four older sisters, my father and two of the sisters came to the United States chiefly to see whether it would be possible for one of them, who's an opera singer, to get into

the Metropolitan Opera House. Because in spite of the fact that she graduated from the Hungarian Music Academy with the highest honors and excellent soprano voice, they wouldn't give her a job in the opera, which was almost always taken for granted, because we were Jewish. And anti-Semitism was starting to crop up in Hungary at that time. So my father, who was a big Hungarian patriot, was very upset and said, "Well, we'll have to show them by getting you into the Metropolitan," which, naturally, has a great reputation. So they came in 1921 and it took almost a year for her to get an audition. And when she finally got the audition, they complimented her, but they didn't give her a job, and said, "Try again sometime." So my father wrote that he, they're coming back. Now, my mother and my younger sister and I were still there. I was going to school. And Mother wrote back that under no circumstances does she want to stay in this anti-Semitic country. My older sister was married and had a child, was very happy there.

PHILLIPS: By that country, by that country she meant the United States?

KANARIK: No, no, no. Hungary, Hungary. She didn't want to stay in Hungary. So my father said okay, and then in October of 1922 we came to the United States. My father and my two sisters were already living in New York for a year. They had an apartment. And they came up to fetch us from the, from the ship. We were on the Majestic, which at that time was the largest ship in the country. We came in Third Class, which is now called Tourist Class. But that's not steerage. It was fairly comfortable and interesting, for me particularly.

PHILLIPS: Before we get to that trip to the United States could you take us back to your home country and to your early life in Hungary? Could you describe that?

KANARIK: Yes, yes.

PHILLIPS: You can start by giving us a sense of who your parents were and what they did for a living.

KANARIK: Well, my father, I was the last of six children, so my father was fairly old by the time I was born and, in fact, he retired from his job. He worked as a, as a bank accountant in Bartfa. And when I was two, he

had twenty-five years and he retired on a good pension because in Europe at that time the pension was almost the same as the salary. So we moved to Budapest. He had rented very nice apartment. And he had something, he was only in his early thirties, and he had to do, early fifties, I mean, and he wanted to do something. So he bought a seat on the Budapest stock exchange and did some business on the stock exchange. And we were quite comfortable. You know, the dowry is an accepted arrangement in Europe, and my father even had enough dowry for four girls, which is a substantial amount. And, uh, I was sort of a latecomer, and I went to school and after four years of elementary school . . .

PHILLIPS: Just, before, could you explain a little bit about how the dowry system worked?

KANARIK: Yes. Uh, a young woman was expected to bring a dowry to her, uh, fiance, because it's very hard to get started. Jobs are not so easy to get and they, it's a sort of a grubstake to get started living their own lives. And, uh, it's not as serious, in some places in India, for example, if you renege on your dowry, sometimes the mother-in-law manages to kill the

daughter. Well, it's nothing like that in Hungary, but you are expected. If the girl is very gorgeous and very desirable and the boy's crazy about her and they're poor, he may say okay, well, I'll marry her anyway. But the usual custom is to take a certain amount of money and devote it to the dowry, and it's easier for the daughters to find husbands that way.

PHILLIPS: So your father had to pay quite a number of daughters.

KANARIK: Well, only one of his daughters got married in Europe. She married a man who was working as an executive in a sugar factory in a very, in a smaller town. It was a very happy marriage. They had a daughter an, uh, after we left the United States we corresponded a great deal. And during the Holocaust they were all killed. They were taken to Auschwitz and they all died. My oldest sister, her husband, and their daughter. Their daughter was just a few years younger than I, because my older sister was twenty years older than I was. She was married when I was three or maybe four, something like that.

PHILLIPS: What was life like in your home? What was the . . .

KANARIK: Well, we were, we were considered, uh, fairly well-to-do. We lived in a very nice apartment building, and we had a maid. Everybody had a maid in Hungary. (he laughs) It's taken for granted, at that time, of course. This is sixty-odd years ago. And, uh, my sisters had a very busy social life. My, I had a, my second oldest sister, the one who was married was not with us. My second oldest sister was the one who had the beautiful voice. The next sister was very, very pretty and had a lot of boyfriends, very busy with her boyfriends. And my younger sister, the only one that was, she was only eight years older than I, so we had some sort of rapport. The other ones, they were in a different entirely different arrangement. And my youngest sister was very political. She, uh, she was the, there as a Hungarian socialist newspaper for which she worked. And I remember when I was about eight years old or nine years old there was a big rally, a communist rally, and I spoke at this rally. She told me to learn a poem. I had no idea what I was doing, but I read this poem, and I got a big hand, and I was delighted. (he laughs) This is a great arrangement, I thought.

PHILLIPS: Did you know what the, do you remember what the poem was?

KANARIK: I haven't the faintest idea.

PHILLIPS: So what about school? What was that like?

KANARIK: School was very interesting. We happened to live in a street, across the street from us was a public elementary school and my, and I went there for the first year. And my father decided that he didn't think this was a very good school. It wasn't, really, compared to private schools. So he took me out of there and put me into a Jewish Hungarian School, an orphan asylum. But the orphan asylum had the orphans who lived there, and so-called outsiders who came from the outside. I was an outsider. And, uh, it's very interesting that the orphan elementary school had a social system very similar to what was going on outside. The orphans were poor. They were given very un-interesting food. And we outsiders brought our lunches. And I remember it was a regular arrangement that every outsider would have an insider servant who would do things for him, who would fetch

things for him, help him with his homework, in exchange for part of the lunch, because they got such poor food. And this was taken for granted, this terrible, inhuman arrangement. I couldn't understand why they did it, but I took advantage of it like any other child would. But it was, the school was possibly a little better than the elementary school, but it wasn't noticeably better. Then in Europe . . .

PHILLIPS: Was that system instigated or encouraged by the authorities?

KANARIK: I don't think so. No, it's just, just amongst the children. I'm sure that the authorities didn't encourage, but they probably knew about it because it was obvious that . . . I had a certain boy who was going to do for me. Every one of the outsiders was lord of the manor. Very, very stupid. Anyway, then the arrangement for schooling in Hungary in Central Europe is four years of elementary school and eight years of high school. The other, not like in California or in the United States. So after four years my father decided to put me into a German

school, not Hungarian. I didn't speak German, but he loved German, Germany, and he thought this would be, either Hungarian language isn't of any use outside Budapest, and it would be much more advantageous for my future to know another language. And I was very miserable because I didn't, I knew a little bit of German, there's no similarity between German and Hungarian, as you probably know. It's an entirely different language. So, and the school, it was a very small school. It happened to be close to our home. But it was basically for the children of German businessmen and German, uh, representative of the government who would be there. So he put me in there, and I was very unhappy about it. And for three years I was in that German school. And there were some incipient little Nazis there who made my life miserable, and I had to do a lot of fighting to maintain my self respect in that German school.

PHILLIPS: What year was this?

KANARIK: This was between 1919 and 1922. But I managed, and I learned German, of course. I had to. I had no choice. But it was, I never liked it, because when I

left that school, everything was Hungarian again. I never spoke another German word until the next morning when I went back to school. But, strangely enough, my knowledge of German later on came in so handy that it enabled me, in the, uh, Depression, to make a living from my knowledge of German.

PHILLIPS: It enabled you to make a . . .

KANARIK: My father was, it's almost as if he looked into the future because it helped me here in the United States. Later on, this is jumping quite a few years, I came to Los Angeles. As you know, I'm an architect, and I graduated in 1932 from Columbia. And at no time was the Depression worse than in 1932. It was absolutely impossible to get an architectural work job. There was no architectural work. Nothing. So then I started getting work because of my translation abilities. I translated for studios from Hungarian and from German, even, even from French, which I know very badly. And eventually I became a secretary and assistant to a German director who came here from Germany in a period of the Nazis and didn't speak English and I had to be his right hand in

directing movies.

PHILLIPS: Can I just, one moment, I'd like to get back, obviously a little later, if you could talk a little bit about those experiences. Before we do that, can we stay a little bit longer with your life back in Hungary as you grew up there. Could you perhaps tell us a little bit about the atmosphere there during the first World War years.

KANARIK: Well, naturally, since we were in Hungary, we were on the opposite side from the Allies and we kept seeing in the newspaper great accounts on how we were conquering the hated British and the hated French and the hated whoever it was against us. And then eventually when we lost the war it was a big surprise. Nobody expected that to happen. And then there was big turmoil in Hungary. There was a communist regime of Bela Kun, and there was all kinds of problems when they dismembered Hungary. Part of it went to Czechoslovakia, part of it went to Roumania, part of it went to Italy, part of it went to Yugoslavia and, uh, it was, it was a time of great turmoil and, of course, for a young child, it's just

a little bit strange and incomprehensible, but he was, I was aware that there was a lot of changes taking place in the world, and but, for a child, he doesn't realize that before that it was serene. My family used to say that they were so sorry for me because I didn't live through the good days when everything was peaceful, and I didn't know what they were talking about because for every child every experience is new and interesting regardless, even if there's, if it's bad it's interesting. There was, just before, in Budapest, uh, we had, you had to heat your own apartments. We had a very nice apartment. And every room had one of these tile ovens that would heat the room.

PHILLIPS: What did it look like?

KANARIK: It was a, something like a, it was always (?) in the corner, and it would be about, I would say, five feet by five feet. And it would have a big door into which you put either wood or coal and the maid's job was to come early in the morning and start the fire so that by the time we got up it was nice and cozy in the room. And this, this was an accepted procedure.

But we had to have fuel for it. We had to have either wood or coal. And, uh, in order to store that, you had to get quite a bit of it. Everybody in the big apartment house, I don't know, there were thirty-six apartments or something like that, had a bin in the basement for his coal, for his, or whatever he wanted, use he wanted to put it to. It was metal, a metal grating was around it, and you had a key to it. Everything had a key to it in Hungary. We would get, uh, we would get deliveries. My father would order a wagonload of wood, or a wagonload of coal and then the people would come and unload it in front of the building and take it by sack down into our compartment. And I remember the last year we were there things were very bad. There were a lot of poor people. And when they, when they, uh, put the, uh, stuff down, let's say, the wood, then people would come and steal some of it. So I remember, I'm twelve years old, and my folks said, "Now, go down there and guard the thing." So I'm standing there with a piece of wood in my hand. And kids my age and younger come to steal the thing, and I would chase them away over there, and another guy over there would steal some wood. This was taken for granted.

And it's very interesting that when we came to the United States and started living in the apartment my father had, my mother was absolutely flabbergasted to see that people would leave milk and newspapers in front of their door. In Budapest it wouldn't last five minutes. She couldn't understand how they can, this is such a great country, they're trusting, they don't, there's so much wealth that they don't care whether they take, somebody takes their milk. I'll never forget that. And there was that big difference. There was a big difference. One of the other differences, when I came to go to school, I went to school with my European clothing on. And I had short pants. That was the funniest thing in America because all the kids wore knickers at that time. 1922 was the year that golf knickers were used by every child. So after my first day of school, I told my father I'm not going back to school till you get me knickers. (he laughs) So we had to go down to Delancy Street and he got me a suit, an American suit. But, strangely enough, the kids were so nice. They laughed at my funny clothes, but they didn't make, they were not unpleasant. It was such a difference in attitude. In Hungary, I know, they

would have torn him apart. They would have said, "You idiot. Look at the way he dresses," if he dresses differently.

PHILLIPS: Where was it that you were living, here?

KANARIK: We were living in Manhattan. We were living on 93rd Street and Park Avenue. We had a walk-up brownstone apartment on the top floor.

PHILLIPS: Okay. Once again, before we get there, I wanted to get that sense of you leaving Hungary and travelling to the United States. But since you mentioned that, I just wanted to place that story about the knickers. Maybe you can just explain to us, very briefly, for those of us who don't know what knickers look like, what they look like.

KANARIK: Well, the, they're sort of baggy pants. They look like bloomers, like ladies bloomers. They go down below the knee and then you, they turn up, and we put, uh, there's an elastic, and this looks like just baggy, baggy pants. But just a little bit below the knee. And under that you, of course, have high stockings. And this was, everybody wore that. All

the boys in school, high school, wore this.

PHILLIPS: Now, you were in school. Can you tell us what the conditions were like in school, your teachers? What, how they . . .

KANARIK: Well, it was, I think I got a fairly good education. The German school I had the difficulty of not only, for instance, the French class. I had to study French with an English, with a German base, and both languages were strange to me. So I had to learn French in a base which was not familiar to me. So it was a very difficult subject. And the teachers were not particularly sympathetic to my lack of German because they expected a boy coming to that school to speak fluent German. And, uh, they were not very, very helpful. But, of course, by the time, the second year I really spoke enough German so that I could hold my own. But I didn't get as good grades as I would have in Hungarian because that was my native tongue. Then coming to the United States, the contrast was dramatic, because I fell in love with English right away, and I haven't lost my love for it, for the language. (he laughs)

PHILLIPS: What about being Jewish in Hungary during those periods? Can you tell us . . .

KANARIK: Well, I, uh, we didn't have any problems in Budapest but, for example, there was an episode, I remember, uh, my brother-in-law, who was this executive in the sugar factory, I went for, one winter I spent in school going to school over there in this town, because food was so scarce in g that my mother thought that I would be fed better in the country, and it was true. So I spent one semester in, from elementary school in this place. And, uh, I remember I was an outstanding student, because I came from Budapest where we got a pretty good education. And in this small town the teachers weren't very good, and most of the kids were peasant's children, and they hardly knew anything. And I was considered a brilliant student just because of the contrast. And, uh, there were very few Jewish boys in the school. But I didn't have any problem with the children. But I remember the sugar factory had sugar beet fields out of the town. And the beets were picked and gathered out of the town and brought into the town by oxcarts, slow-moving oxcarts. And the young, peasant

boys would be with long whips, would be whipping the oxen to bring them into town. So, uh, some days I was just sitting in front of my sister's house and watching these oxcarts coming by. And, uh, one of the young drivers saw me and he started screaming at me, "You stinking Jew." So I said, "You're a stinking Christian." So that he got very mad at, and he started taking his whip to whip me with it, and I ran into the yard and I managed to escape hi, but I'll never forget this. And, uh, I told my brother-in-law and he said, "Well, you shouldn't provoke them." I didn't provoke him. The other guy provoked me. As a child, you don't know, you just lash out. So this was one experience. And, uh, otherwise, I personally didn't have any anti-Semitism. In school, in the German school, some of the Nazi kids would say something about what a dirty Jew I was, and I'd fight them. But it wasn't a daily occurrence. It happened several times, though.

PHILLIPS: When you say Nazi kids what, did you, were you aware of that term Nazi?

KANARIK: No, no, no, no, no. That's, that knowledge came

later. But they were . . .

PHILLIPS: So what sort of, how would you have described those kids . . .

KANARIK: Well, they, they felt lord of the manor because they were German, first of all, in this backward little Hungarian country. And they, there were very few of us Hungarians in that school. Most of them were Germans. And I was a sort of outsider. Even if I hadn't been Jewish I would have been an outsider. So the two together made me conspicuous, and that's another reason I wasn't particularly happy about the school. (he laughs)

PHILLIPS: What were the Germans doing there?

KANARIK: No, they were business people or children of the people in the German consulate, the consul's children and the children of German officials and military attaches and stuff like that.

PHILLIPS: Why, did they have this superior attitude just because they were in the majority, or . . .

KANARIK: No, no, no. They had a superior attitude because

they were Germans, and the Germans were looked up at in Hungary a great deal. My father was a great admirer of Germany. It's almost as a lot of the countries feel about the United States today. In Europe they looked up, and Germany was, had the finest steel, the finest machinery. If you wanted to (?), I mean, I'd hear all these German phrases from my father. He looked up with a great deal of admiration to everything German. In fact, my father liked, preferred speaking German to Hungarian.

PHILLIPS: As well as the manufacturing products, the cultural . . .

KANARIK: Well, that too, you know. The German operas, Wagner and the German theater was, and Hungary had a very strong theater life, very, very imaginative stuff came from Hungary. And,uh, that the Germans weren't superior in. And Hungarians, of course, in order to make a lot of money they had to leave Hungary. They usually went to Vienna, and that's where most of the Viennese operatic composers and lyricists were Hungarian, quite a few. And most of them are Jewish. They would change their names. In Hungary a Jewish

write or a Jewish playwright couldn't possibly use Goldstein or Feinstein. It was impossible. You had to get a Hungarian name. In fact, I have a very good friend here in Los Angeles who was a screenwriter and who has a very Hungarian name. And the father, he was Jewish, and he had it changed from Goldberg to Gorog. Gorog means Greek in Hungarian. So it's an interesting sidelight.

PHILLIPS: At what age were you when you left Hungary to come to the United States?

KANARIK: I was thirteen.

PHILLIPS: All right. Can you give us, just built up to that time when you actually left? What was the atmosphere like? In fact, could you tell us a little bit about the post First World War environment? What was it that, give us a feel of Hungary just before you left, in those few years.

KANARIK: Well, there was, there was this political turmoil. You know, we had a communist regime for a while. And, uh, my . . .

PHILLIPS: What years was that?

KANARIK: This was in, right after the war in 1920. 1919, 1920, '21. Just before I left. From my age ten to age thirteen. And, of course, I wasn't politically conscious of what, but I, you know, you could just get a feel of it. One connection we had was that my third oldest sister, the very pretty one, married a Hungarian medical student who was, that's a very interesting side story. He, my sister had an emergency operation for appendix and the wound would not heal. It was very strange. It was pussy and it wouldn't heal. She was home already and, uh, somebody had to come from the hospital and put dressings on it and see what's going on and why this wouldn't heal. Well, after she was home for about several weeks and this doctor kept coming every day to dress her wound, they fell in love. He was not a doctor. He was medical student, but he was doing work at the hospital. And about three weeks after she was home, a piece of rubber glove came out of the wound, and that was what caused the whole problem. Can you imagine? They cut the rubber glove and they sewed it up with her. But anyway, after that, of course, she got better, and they were married. My

father was very much against the marriage because this man, whose name doesn't matter, was a very charming and fat little man, whose name doesn't matter, was a very charming and fat little man who charmed everybody, including me. I was, he used to talk to me as if I were an adult and, you know, nothing is more flattering to a child than to be treated as an adult. He would really speak to me in a serious vein. I just adored him. But, uh, he was very lazy, and he never finished medical school. He wouldn't finish the last year or so, he didn't take the exams, and never made a dime except, you know, in the hospital he was getting peanuts, and they lived with us. So my father was very unhappy that this ne'r-do-well, and eventually there was enough pressure on my sister to say that the marriage had to come to an end, and they were divorced. I was absolutely heartbroken because I loved this man. But before the divorce he became a big shot in the communist party. And he managed to get an apartment for themselves in a very elegant home that was taken away from the nobility that owned it. But they only lived there a couple of months because then the Hungarian, the communist government was kicked out of

Hungary and he, they had to come back and live with us. It's a good thing that nothing more serious happened to them. But it was a time of great turmoil in Hungary. We didn't know what kind of government would be in next. And, of course, the thing to remember, that for a child, all of this is very interesting, very exciting. I was getting the history in big gulps and I loved it because I, every day was some interesting new development.

PHILLIPS: You said your younger sister who was an active participant in the communist party.

KANARIK: Not really. She was in the newspaper, socialist newspaper and she, but we had discussions. She would have friends over, and they would discuss politics and I would hover around the background to, uh, see what I could pick up, and I didn't pick up very much. This hovering around reminds me of how I started learning English. But when we finally decided that w were going to come to the United States, my mother hired an English teacher, who was British. I mean, she was Hungarian, I think, but she learned British English. So, uh, she would . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

PHILLIPS: This is side two of interview number 403 [DP-29]. The Hungarian woman who was speaking British English was teaching you.

KANARIK: So, she was teaching my sister Blanche, who was my youngest sister. And, uh, I managed to hover around, and she finally said, "All right, come on." (he laughs) So I was taking some lessons, too. And, of course, my English, whatever it was, was very British accented. I remember when we came across on the Majestic I wanted to show off that I could speak English, and I told the waiter, "Fetch me a glass of water." Well, he was, he was an American, and he thought that was the funniest thing he had ever heard. (he laughs) This Hungarian kid asking for a glass of water.

PHILLIPS: Tell us about actually leaving your home country. How did that come about? What was the feeling?

KANARIK: Well, we had an apartment full of furniture and I don't know how my mother disposed of it. My sister

was way out of town. It would probably cost more to ship the furniture to her than to sell, to leave it here. But we probably gave her some of our things. And we gave up the apartment. We had a maid, and she helped pack. Not only did she help pack, but she took us to the, she came with us to the railroad station and she stood there and was waving goodbye till the last minute when we left Hungary. And this was expected of her. And she was glad to do it because she was fond of us, and we were fond of her. And, uh, I remember when we were, our, the train somehow circles around Budapest up to a high point and you see a panorama of the city, as you go by the train. And even though I was very excited about coming to the United States and leaving Hungary, I felt a pang of regret when I saw Hungary. And I knew that all the anti-Semitism and everything, you can't help it. You know, and I was just thirteen. Uh, this is not, has nothing to do with Hungary but, you know, at thirteen, a Jewish person has to, a boy, has to have a bar mitzvah. And it's very unusual for the father not to be around for the bar mitzvah, but he was in New York and we were in Bartfa Fudo, in my birthplace, so my mother had to arrange for me to

have bar mitzvah in Bartfa Fudo. So in Budapest, she hired somebody to teach me the Hebrew for that week's prayer, which is the job of the bar mitzvah boy. Well, it's completely Greek to us, you know. We never, we never learned Hebrew as a language. We just learned it by rote to repeat it. And it's one of the many reasons why I left the religion. (he laughs) I didn't leave the religion, but I don't practice it. Because I saw it irresponsible and ridiculous to do this sort of thing. And I managed to go through my bar mitzvah because Hungary, Bartfa Fudo had a lot of very religious, Orthodox Jews who were friends of my father's, and they decided to come and help me and go through this ordeal. And my, I remember this episode clearly. My sister was, of course, helping mother to take care of all this. And it was taken for granted that after the Bar Mitzvah in the synagogue, all the elders who helped me would come to the house for a drink of schnapps. So my sister was worried because we only had a couple of schnapps glasses, and there would be about fifteen men coming. So she had to scrounge around all over Bartfa Fudo to borrow some schnapps glasses. So, sure enough, we, the men came over

there, and there were fifteen seat and fifteen schnapps glasses, and my sister's looking to see if everything is all right, and the first old man drinks to me in this schnapps glass and gives it over to the next guy, who drinks from the same one. They never touched the other fourteen. My sister had conniption fits. She went through all this trouble to get the glasses, and it wasn't necessary. I thought it was the funniest experience in my bar mitzvah.
(he laughs)

PHILLIPS: They just passed the glass along.

KANARIK: They just passed the same glass along. They drank from the same glass. That's, you know, most of the time they don't have more than one glass, so they, my sister was being, you know, from Budapest she was, she had entirely different ideas about etiquette than these small town people.

PHILLIPS: The name of that town where you did your bar mitzvah, I think you've spelled that.

KANARIK: Yes, that's the place.

PHILLIPS: Okay. So you left on the train.

KANARIK: Yes. We went to Cherbourg.

PHILLIPS: Your father had already left. Is that . . .

KANARIK: My father was in New York for a year.

PHILLIPS: Tell us why it was that your father had already left.

KANARIK: I mentioned it to you. Maybe you weren't listening. The, my father left with my two sisters to get my sister into the Metropolitan Opera House. And after they found out that she didn't make it, he said that he's coming back with my two sisters, and my mother said, "Nothing doing. We don't want to live here any more. We're going to come to New York."

PHILLIPS: Right. We got that at the beginning of the interview.

KANARIK: That's right.

PHILLIPS: So how long was it that you left, after that. What was the time?

KANARIK: One year. One year later. My father came in the Fall of 1921, and we came in the Fall of '22.

PHILLIPS: So he, had he decided, when he left the first time

to, in fact, stay in the United States?

KANARIK: No, he didn't.

PHILLIPS: He was only going to introduce your sister to the opera.

KANARIK: That's right. That's right. And the reason my mother didn't want to stay is that the anti-Semitism was more virulent by 1922. One of my father's best friends, a man named Landau, was murdered by the fascist regime in Hungary. He was taken, it was a very famous case all over Europe, the Landau case. They took him and killed him in jail.

PHILLIPS: How do you spell Landau?

KANARIK: L-A-N-D-A-U.

PHILLIPS: What year was that/

KANARIK: This was while we were, in 1921, while we were in. If Father had known about this he would have not wanted to come back but my mother knew about it. In fact, Mr. Landau's son lives in Sydney, in Australia. And we visited them. He's a very old gentleman. He's even older than I am. And, uh, we have

maintained the friendship. Now my father, of course, had to make a living because although the pension he got was still coming there wa great inflation in Hungary. And, uh, his pension, which was ample to take care of all our needs, became almost completely worthless. In fact, after a while you didn't even send for it because the postage was more than the pension he would have gotten. So he had to get to work, and he had been a bookkeeper and an accountant all his life. So he started looking for work, but he does, his English was practically non-existent. So he managed to get some work from Hungarian bank in Yorkville. And then he got some Hungarian people whom he knew in business, in the head business or something. And he did some bookkeeping, in the head business or something. And he did some bookkeeping for them. So he managed to get a little work. But he was already in his sixties, and it was very difficult for him to know enough English to work for an American firm.

PHILLIPS: It must have been difficult also because he came from a fairly high social caste back in Budapest.

KANARIK: Well, you know, you don't discard the caste regardless of your financial circumstances. Even in Hungary, if you, if you're in the middle class, even if you're very poor, it's a different, it's almost an established thing. For instance, in Bartfa Fudo, this is, in a portion of Hungary where Hungarian was not used. This was Slovak country. It's now part of Czechoslovakia. And all the peasants spoke Slovak, not Hungarian. And, uh, they would bring produce into the little, the town. They would sell eggs, or cheese, or strawberries, or loganberries, and stuff like that. And I remember my mother, I was a little bit of eight or nine, would say, "I need some butter, so ask the people in Czech, 'What have you got?'" And I used to say, "What have you got, old lady?" And when she said, "(Czechoslovakian)," that was butter, and I knew the few words. And I'd say, "If you have (Czechoslovakian), come on in." And my mother would, this was barter, I mean, not, this was people from the countryside selling. This was accepted procedure. I don't know why I happened to mention it. But, uh, that way I happened to pick up a few words of Slovak.

PHILLIPS: Once your father was in, he was in New York?

KANARIK: Yes.

PHILLIPS: And your mother was back in Budapest, did they correspond very often?

KANARIK: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. They had a great deal of correspondence.

PHILLIPS: Did you have copies of those letters?

KANARIK: No, no.

PHILLIPS: Um, so you eventually leave on the train, you're looking back over Budapest, and you feel a little bit of nostalgia.

KANARIK: Yes.

PHILLIPS: What did you see in front of you at that point?

KANARIK: I saw the panorama of Budapest . . .

PHILLIPS: In terms of, emotionally. You were going into a whole new world.

KANARIK: Oh, that was very exciting, but I couldn't help

having a feeling of respect of leaving. But I, basically I was just looking forward. It was all, I remember the pictures of New York, with the skyscrapers were very exciting to me because, in that time, in all of Europe there were practically no buildings over five stories high. Now, of course, it's entirely different. But in '22, in Budapest, the highest building was five stories. And in, the same thing was true in Paris. We stopped in Paris for a short period, and then we went to Cherbourg, where we got the ship. We spent a few days in Cherbourg. In Paris, for some reason we got into town very late at night, and we had to go to the hotel along the, near the Champs d'Elysse, and it was deserted, because it was very late at night. And I saw a big rat walking across the Champs d'Elysse, which was very disappointing because Paris, the idea of Paris for anybody in central Europe, is like the center of the universe, you know. Paris is the intellectual capital of the world at that time.

PHILLIPS: So you leave for the United States.

KANARIK: Uh-huh. In Cherbourg. We spent a couple of days in

Cherbourg, which is, which smells of fish, I remember. And the first time in my life, I saw the ocean, the sea, and I was busy having a good time throwing flat stones in the water and seeing them skip, skipping stones was my major occupation in Cherbourg while we were waiting. Then we got on the ship and, as i said, we were in Third Class, and I was having a great time. This was big adventure. We had a restaurant, we got food. But I was very curious about the rest of the boat. So somehow I managed to get across the, you know, First, Second and Third Class were completely separated, and I don't know how I did it, but I got into First Class until somebody spotted me and saw that I was just wandering around and he said, "What's your cabin number?" So I told, I knew the cabin number, he said, "That's Third Class. What are you doing here?" So, uh, he was very upset. He was one of the stewards. And I think he took me by the ear, and I didn't like that at all so I kicked him and I think I bit him. (he laughs) While he was taking me back to Third Class. And I got hell from my mother, but I was having a good time and I didn't give a damn. And then we arrived in New York. Now we're getting to

Ellis Island and we, uh, docked somewhere on the west side and I could see the skyscrapers, which I was dreaming of, through the portholes of the ship. And, uh, I know that my father and sisters were waiting for us, but we couldn't get off. All the Americans got off, and the few immigrants, there were not very many of us, had to be taken to Ellis Island. So they took us, I think, by a small, uh, tender to Ellis Island. And, uh, we, it was a big, bare, empty room, and an official of the Immigration Service was a black man, the first black man I ever saw in my life, and we were just sitting there and sitting there and we were not called. All the other people were called. And we were left all by ourselves. And we know my father was probably terribly upset. So we got up there and in our poor English try to say what, so the man says, "Well, I called you." But, you know, our name in Hungary was Konorick, and he said something like "Karrick," you know. We had no idea who he was talking about, especially from the purely American accent. So we finally found it over there and, at long last, we got, this is the only experience I had in Ellis Island, and we got out. My father and sisters were waiting for us. Then we got

into a cab at, down at, the ship took us to the bottom of Manhattan, you know, Battery Place, is it? Yeah, Battery Place. And we took a taxi on Battery Place to go up to 93rd Street where their apartment was. And I remember one of the greatest astonishments, seeing women driving. It was a big, new experience, to see a, there was quite a lot of traffic going home. New York in 1922 had a lot of cars. And, uh, we were, I think, going on Third Avenue, on Third Avenue under the Elevated, which was another exciting thing. And we got up to the apartment, which was, as I told you, a five story walk-up.

PHILLIPS: And there must have been a great celebration.

KANARIK: Well, we were very happy. And, of course, it was, school had already started, and my father wanted to get me to school right away. Well, the nearest school to 93rd Street would only be ten blocks away, so we walked down there. It was an elementary school that went only up to the sixth grade. So, uh, they took me to the principal, who knew some German, and he, I was thirteen, almost thirteen-and-a-half, and

he wanted to place me. And he asked me how much two third -and-a-half came to, and I told him, in German. And he said, "Well, you're too advanced for this school. Why don't you go down the street? There's an annex of DeWitt-Clinton High School down the street, which had only the first two years, last two years of elementary school and the first two years of high school." And I went over there, and they took me in. So I actually started high school a year ahead of my schedule. And this was in October, middle of October, 1922. And by the end of the semester, I passed math, I passed three out of five subjects. I failed English and Civics because it was, I couldn't understand what was going on, but I managed to pass the other three subjects. And by February my English was very fluid. I remember, by that time, I didn't, one of the first things I asked for from my father was a pair of rollerskates, because all the kids had rollerskates. And the rollerskates, I could, you know, ten blocks is quite a distance to go by walking, but by rollerskates I was there in a couple of minutes. And, uh, I started finding out that America had libraries. And that was a tremendous discovery. Not only did they have

libraries, but they had books in Hungarian. Now, we couldn't even conceive of a country where they're so solicitous of the people, that they would get books in their own language, and for free. It was marvelous. So I went to all the libraries in our vicinity, and got Hungarian books. But by February, we were given Ivanhoe to read, and it began to make sense in English. So from then on I, no more Hungarian books, I read only English. And by, my wife happens to be my first cousin. And after we were here a year, uh, her father bought a business in a small town in Pennsylvania that didn't have a high school. So my father and her father were brothers, so they said she can come to New York and go to high school in New York. So she came to New York and we met again. We knew each other when we were little babies in Hungary, because she was four when she left. And she claims today that when she met me a year later, I spoke English just as well as I do now. And I believe it, because, as I told you, the language was so easy to me compared to German, that I, just, it was marvelous. German had all these rules about feminine gender and neutral and masculine gender, and we'd only, the neutral gender is

absolutely insane in Germany. You know that the word for a girl is das Madchen, and it's a neutral. It's not feminine. I don't know why. They have, every noun has to have a gender. Paper has to have a gender. Your nose has to have a gender. It's just ridiculous. And learning this was almost impossible. And English, compared to this, was a cinch.
(he laughs)

PHILLIPS: So move us on a little bit. Perhaps take us through to the Depression when eventually you had to . . .

KANARIK: Well, this was, the Depression didn't come till '29, see.

PHILLIPS: What happened between that period . . .

KANARIK: My sisters started working. They were grown people. And I, there were three of them, my three, all the three sisters, except for, my oldest sister stayed in Hungary. And we had a, my father had a friend from Hungary who was in the manufacturing business downtown. He made bowties. It was a big business. He had twenty-five, thirty employees. And he gave work to my sisters, home work, to, raw materials for

bow ties and, uh, they would sew them together. And it was my job to fetch the raw materials and to return the finished bow ties, and I would get a slip for the amount of bow ties I did. So this, with my father's occasional jobs, kept us going. And, uh, we, it wasn't a very good living, but we managed to get by. And then Father had a lot of friends from Hungary and one of them was, uh, his son was a big real estate operator, and he had some property in Long Beach, New York, you know, out on Long Island. And, uh, he had a little hotel of about sixteen or eighteen rooms, and he needed a manager for that, and he mentioned it to my father, and we, we took the job of managing this hotel in Long Beach. So we moved out of New York to Long Beach and I, I didn't want to change schools, so I had to, I wanted to stay at DeWitt-Clinton High School to get my diploma from there. But you couldn't go to a New York high school if you lived in Long Beach. So my sister, uh, my second sister was already, my youngest sister was already married in and I used her address to allow me to stay at DeWitt-Clinton High School, which I graduated from in 1926.

PHILLIPS: So take us through to the Depression.

KANARIK: Well, I started working in Long Beach. This started when I was sixteen. Uh, my, uh, my father was, started a little business in Long Beach, a little restaurant. It's like the blind leading the deaf. He had no idea what to do with a restaurant, but my mother was an excellent cook and he, in the hotel there was a vacant store, and he put up a sign "Elias Kanarik's Hungarian Restaurant." Well, it was a disaster because I remember some, a large party came in and asked, and ordered chicken. Well, we didn't have that much chicken. I had to rush out to the butcher store and buy some chicken, bring it back, have my mother cook it. (he laughs) And the poor people were waiting for their meal. So after a year of this it went completely bust. But the butcher, the kosher butcher across the street from us, Mr. Kapchun, uh, once I was walking on the street and he said, "What is it?" He says, "I want you should do my books for me." I said, "I don't know anything about i." He said, "Oh, don't tell me. Your father is the greatest bookkeeper. I saw his beautiful handwriting." So I got a job bookkeeping for this

man. And from this bookkeeping I got a job in a dry good store bookkeeping, and in a garage bookkeeping. And then eventually the accountant who worked for the garage, he was a Greek, hired me to work for him. And then I, this was always after school. And I was able, my father marched me down to the bank and started a bank account. He said, "Now, you take care of your banking account." So that by the time I was ready to go to, uh, to go to Columbia, I had enough money to pay for my tuition. This was not in the Depression yet. But by the time I went to Columbia, in '28, it was still not the Depression, but then it was terrible. And, uh, I was commuting from Long Beach to Columbia, which is a long trip. And, uh, at that time I wasn't able to sleep. And in architectural school you get projects to do which go on for a long time and, uh, you work on the project till late at night. And I didn't have the money to go to their dormitory. I had to go home. Sometimes I took the last train to Long Beach and, uh, it's very lucky that I wasn't sleepy. I couldn't fall asleep sitting up, because otherwise I would have railed to take the transfer at Jamaica and ended up at Rockaway Park or someplace. But this went on for

years. Then one semester I decided to stay out because my money was running low, and I went to night school for that one semester and got a job in Brooklyn with an architect who was designing apartment houses, when I was in my junior year, I think. But I managed to finish. Then I worked for this man occasionally after school. So that was the beginning of my architectural work. And, uh, but by '29 and '30, the architectural work went on for a while. It's like a ship reversing its propellers and stopping. It goes another two miles before it stops. Same way with architectural work. In '29 it didn't stop. It didn't stop until '30, '31. So he had quite a bit of work while I was still in architectural school. And I managed to graduate in '32. But there was '32 and absolutely no work. No work in New York, and my youngest sister's husband was a writer, and he came out to Hollywood, and he had a job in Hollywood, which was, any job was a marvelous business. So I couldn't get any work in New York, and my sister, one of my, the opera singer sister, came out to visit with her sister and stayed here, and my sister said, "Why don't you all come out here?" So that's when I came to California. By that

time we were, my wife and I were secretly married. It was secret because in, she worked as a teacher in Pittsburgh and, uh, in the Depression if you got married, a woman got married, she was immediately fired, even if it was two days before graduation time, so she had to keep our marriage secret, that's why it was. The Depression was unbelievably sad. And I went around trying to get a job in New York and architects were glad to se me because they had somebody to talk to. There was nothing going on. Big drafting rooms completely empty. So I came out here and tried to get work here and I wasn't able to. So I was looking for work in architecture, and my brother-in-law was at Metro Goldwyn Mayer, and in the summer he got, in 1933, he got me a job as a reader of foreign materials at Metro. You know what a reader does? He syopsizes. (break in tape)

PHILLIPS: We just stopped the interview to try and wait for that noise in the background to quiet down a little bit. I think it has. You were describing your going out to become a reader at Metro Goldwyn Mayer.

KANARIK: Well, that was very exciting to me because the pay

was, for those days, was terrific. It's was $47.50, and that's like winning the lottery today to get a job like that. And I got material in Hungarian and German, and I would have to write synopses of it. And since I liked to write and interested in literature, it was a very elegant job. But after I was there for four weeks they thanked me very much, it seemed that I was a replacement of their regular foreign reader who became, later, a friend of mine. He was also Hungarian and he'd been there, he was an older man. He's been there for many, many years and he was an excellent reader, but they let me go, because that was the end of this. I didn't have any, I thought this was a permanent job, but it wasn't. So then I started looking for work either in the field of translation, or in architecture, and I wasn't successful. Well, my best friend in New York in architectural school was a very fine artist. And he was making very nice money designing greeting cards. And we were corresponding, and I told him how tough it was, I couldn't get anything. And he was starting a greeting card business and he said, "Why don't you come to New York and maybe we can, I can help you get, do something for you? Maybe we can

work something out." So I went back to New York in '34, I think. But I also took some recommendations to see some people in the studios for reading because I, I liked that. And I didn't know what, whether anything would come of it with my friend. So I went around, and sure enough, at Universal Pictures, I got a job as a reader. And, uh, it was not as much as in Los Angeles. I think the pay was only twenty-five dollars but I couldn't, twenty-five dollars a week in New York I could rent a room, I could go out for all my meals, and still have a few bucks to send to the family if they needed it. So that was like a great, successful endeavor. And I stayed with Universal until December 1936 as a reader. I remember after I was there for about a year, the job was wonderful, I read books and it wasn't necessarily foreign material, I read everything. In fact, I read Gone With The Wind for them, I remember. And, uh, when I read Gone With The Wind in galley form, nobody heard of it before, I knew right away this was a great movie script. So I said, I wrote a long synopses and my comment was, "It's not a question of whether we want to buy this or not, but how much can we get it For." But, see, a reader in New York getting twenty-

five dollars a week is a non-entity as far as the studios are concerned, so it was ignored. But that's the way studios operate. Anyway, after I was there for about a year, there was an item in the newspapers that the vice president of Universal Pictures, a man named P.D. Cochran, was making seventeen thousand five hundred dollars a week. And he was down the hall from my office. And I was getting twenty-five dollars, and when I asked for a raise from my boss he said, "Nobody gets a raise unless P.D. Cochran approves it." So I called up P.D. Cochran's secretary and made an appointment to see if I could get more than twenty-five dollars. And I go in there and Mr. Cochran has an office the size of Central Park and carpets this thick. In fact, my, I got a shock when I touched the door. I go in there, and before I said anything, Mr. Cochran said, "Mr. Kanarik, I have your resume in front of me. We're very pleased with your work, but if you want more money you'll have to go someplace else." This is what he said. And I said, thanked him, and turned around and went out. So this is the Depression. I had to, my tail between my legs, I went out the door, and I continued working there. Well, by, I think I

got a ten dollar raise another six months later, or something like that. So thirty-five dollars was big money. And I got a telephone call in December 1936 that my father died here in Los Angeles. So I took the next plane out here. It took seventeen hours, I think, to get here from New York on a DC-3. And, uh, I remember I, we made, I don't know, ten or twelve stops, and the last one was in albuquerque, and I sent a wire to my brother-in-law that I'm arriving tomorrow at such and such an hour. Well, there was nobody at their station because they didn't get the wire until the next day. So I phoned him, and he came to pick me up. And, uh, that's when I finally came to Los Angeles and stayed here, because my mother was absolutely heartbroken and I was her favorite little son and she would have been miserable. So I, I was in the movie business by that time, as a reader, and I decided to stay here and see if I could get something in there. And I managed. It was, first i had to do what they call piecework reading. You read manuscripts. (tape ends)