

EI-145

WILLIAM KONZE

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SIGRIST: Good morning. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Thursday, May 7, 1992. I'm here at the Ellis Island Recording Studio with William Konze, who came from Germany in 1923 when he was eight years old.

SIGRIST: Good morning, Mr. Konze.

KONZE: Good morning.

SIGRIST: Could you please start off by giving me your date of birth?

KONZE: I was born on the 13th of August, 1914.

SIGRIST: And where were you born, sir?

KONZE: I was born in a little hospital on the Innenalster [sic: a special part of the river Alster] in Hamburg, Germany.

SIGRIST: I see. Did you grow up in Hamburg, or were you just born there?

KONZE: I was born there and probably spent perhaps a year there and because of the war children were moved out into the countryside. And my first memories, of course, clear memories, were of the countryside.

SIGRIST: When you were moved out, where were you moved to?

KONZE: It would have been in Bavaria, the southern part of Germany, which would have been furthest from the action of the war itself.

SIGRIST: And where did you stay when that was happening?

KONZE: Uh, the town, of course, I really don't remember. I know it was farm, and I was there with a couple of other children, and I do remember farm animals and trucks going by with soldiers but, again, the town, I guess I never

asked my parents where it was.

SIGRIST: Now, were your parents responsible for moving you out there, or was this a sort of city-wide kind of arrangement?

KONZE: It was a city-wide arrangement, a national arrangement, if you will, to get children and dependents out of the cities.

SIGRIST: Were you moved to, like, a compound of some sort, do you know, or did you go to a relative's house?

KONZE: No, it wasn't a relative, but it was a, it was a farm, and it wasn't a compound, as I say. As I recall there was one other child, and I wouldn't even know whether it was the farmer's youngster or another child from Hamburg, but there were just the two of us.

SIGRIST: How long did you stay?

KONZE: This would, I would have been there until 1918.

SIGRIST: Oh, so a chunk of time.

KONZE: Right. About three-and-a-half years.

SIGRIST: I see. What was your father's name?

KONZE: My father's name was Karl, and he was born in Fulda.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

KONZE: F-U-L-D-A, and that's down in Bavaria. As a matter of fact, it's about twenty miles from Frankfurt. And he was educated there, had two maiden sisters who ran a shop. And he was educated in animal husbandry, which he went back to after the war, after he got out of the hospital. He was one of those unfortunate people who was gassed twice, so he didn't get out of the hospital about until 1919.

SIGRIST: Was he gassed as a civilian, or in serving?

KONZE: No, he was in the German Engineer Corps.

SIGRIST: Oh. What kind of shop did his sisters run?

KONZE: It was a, sort of a little general store, you know, groceries of the daily type.

SIGRIST: Was that unusual at that time in Germany for women to run a business like that, do you think?

KONZE: No. No, because, excuse me, my grandmother ran a dry cleaning establishment in Harburg. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Interesting. What was your mother's name?

KONZE: Erna. E-R-N-A.

SIGRIST: And her maiden name?

KONZE: Was Schwarz.

SIGRIST: S-C-H-W-A-R-T-Z?

KONZE: No T.

SIGRIST: No T, just a Z. Was she from Hamburg, from that area?

KONZE: She was born in Hamburg, uh-huh, and was educated in Hamburg. And in those days young ladies, if you might recall, were not working in offices, so if you were sort of in the middling classes, as it were, you studied a little foreign language so that you could be hired out as a governess which, of course, my mother eventually was.

SIGRIST: Did she do that in Germany?

KONZE: Yes.

SIGRIST: What did your mother look like when you were a kid?

KONZE: My mother was a beautiful woman, and, of course, I remember that quite well. But, again, of course I didn't see her, I would say, until about 1919.

SIGRIST: What was her temperament like as a person?

KONZE: Uh, very sweet, easygoing. I know she hated to discipline me. A very sensitive person.

SIGRIST: So that time that you were in this, out of Hamburg, into the country, you had no interaction with your parents, or...

KONZE: None whatsoever.

SIGRIST: None whatsoever. Do you know, you said your father was in the hospital until 1919. What was your mother doing during the war?

KONZE: (he pauses) As I recall, my mother, you know, of conversations, my mother basically stayed in the Hamburg area and worked as a volunteer in the hospitals around Hamburg.

SIGRIST: Obviously the war affected your father in a physical way. How do you suppose the war affected your mother? Did she ever talk about that?

KONZE: I, not really, except, well, I say not really, the separation and the breakup of the family did have an affect on her. And, of course, obviously she was bitter as a result of losing everything she and my father had hoped to build up. And then, of course, his physical condition being another retardant to recouping things, as it were.

SIGRIST: Did you have brothers or sisters at that time?

KONZE: No, I was an only child.

SIGRIST: An only child. Well, let's talk about this time when you were out of Hamburg and you remember the farm animals and sort of a bucolic existence for that amount of time. Talk about what happened afterwards, when you were brought back.

KONZE: When I was brought back we, as I recall, we started out in Harburg, which was where my grandparents lived.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

KONZE: H-A-R-B-U-R-G. That was a big munitions center, and that's where my grandfather had worked.

SIGRIST: And where your grandmother had the dry cleaning establishment.

KONZE: That's right.

SIGRIST: Uh, which side of the family are these grandparents?

KONZE: That would be my maternal grandparents. And my mother and I stayed with my grandmother, my maternal grandmother in Harburg, and she had been a teacher and I guess when she gave up the teaching, about the time of World War I, she opened this dry cleaning establishment and that was her way of, I should go back and say that my grandfather died at an early age and so, of course, left her a widow with four children.

SIGRIST: So you and your mother are living with your grandmother.

KONZE: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: And this is in Harburg.

KONZE: Right.

SIGRIST: Um, can you talk a little bit to me about what life was like with your grandmother and your mother? Your father's not living in the house with you.

KONZE: That's right. He's in the hospital at this time.

SIGRIST: I see. What was life like at that time?

KONZE: Well, of course, about that time I started school, and that was an interesting period because, of course, having come from the country where obviously I didn't go to school, then to suddenly find myself in a schoolroom sitting with three of us at sort of a long desk and with a teacher with a long pole. I can well remember that. And if William Moore, whomever, sounded off when he shouldn't, why, that pole just hit you on the knuckles and that brought you back to reality. The other thing I think that I remember mostly about that time, which fascinated me, was you can well imagine we didn't have paper and pencils in Germany to any degree, so we all had the slate boards. And one of the sides of the slate board was lined and the other was squared. So you did your arithmetic, of course, on the squared side and any writing on the lined side. And you were checked into the classroom. I can remember that. And the first thing you did was to show that your slate was clean on both sides and that you had the little sponge. That's about all I remember about school in Germany.

SIGRIST: Did you learn any other languages while you were in school? Were you taught anything else?

KONZE: No, basically German.

SIGRIST: I thought maybe after the war they might have instituted other language programs?

KONZE: Not at that level because, you see, that was first and second grade.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the house that you lived in with your grandmother and your mother?

KONZE: Uh, not a house because, again, if you reflect on that period of time, you were lucky to have a decent size apartment. And, as I recall, my mother, my grandmother, had a two-bedroom apartment. The toilet facilities, of course, were out in the hall, which everybody on that floor, and as I recall there were four apartments on the floor, would have used. A very small kitchen. I can remember that. However, big enough so that you could put a metal tub in the middle of the kitchen floor with cold water and get dunked in it. That was the way I started out with my baths because it was considered a healthy thing to get your blood really running. And we must have been on the second or third floor, because I can remember going up and down the steps. And it was in, the apartment was in a little inner park type of thing because I can remember very little grass and a few plants. And, of course, the moment that you got out in the street, the most fascinating thing for me there was the big fire station, which was about two doors down. And, of course, in those days horse and buggy and, always fascinating. I was always late home from school because I had to stop and look at all the fire engines and fire men, and talk to them, I'm sure.

SIGRIST: What were you like as a little kid? It sounds like you were rather inquisitive?

KONZE: I was. I was probably precocious. Probably got my fingers rapped quite frequently because I liked to talk. I think I was an easier learner, and basically other than that I, just like any child, you know, normal child, nothing outstanding.

SIGRIST: Was any education conducted in the home? Did your grandmother teach you things, or your mother, or maybe stories of some sort or music? Some kind of exchange of information?

KONZE: There was always a gramophone, which I guess played in, mostly in the evenings. And I remember that, I guess, more in my great-grandparents' home than there. But as far as teaching at home was concerned, the main emphasis was what were you supposed to do for tomorrow. And having in mind at that level and under those circumstances, there were no books. So what I had to do was more or less wrote maybe some words or letters given to us before we left school, and then to make sure we did those properly, and the same thing with addition and subtraction, I'm sure, but nothing more complicated.

SIGRIST: How long did you stay with your grandmother?

KONZE: Until the time that we got on the boat to come to America.

SIGRIST: Okay. So you're living with her for, what, three, four, five years, something like that.

KONZE: Uh, it would have been three, four, four-and-a-half years, yes.

SIGRIST: Now, there were great-grandparents, yes?

KONZE: Right.

SIGRIST: Talk a little bit about your great-grandparents. That's unusual to...

KONZE: Well, just marvelous people. As I recall, my great-grandmother was a very short lady, but obviously a very pleasant person, because I know I loved her very much. And my great-grandfather had a marvelous white goatee and a white moustache, and never stepped out without his bowler on.

And, of course, the thing, several things I remember about the times with them, and I used to go there weekends, incidentally, would be every Sunday morning whatever crumbs of bread had accumulated during the week would be in a paper bag and my great-grandfather and I would go, walk out, this is Hamburg, incidentally, where they lived. And we would go out to the Innenalster, which is a little lake in the center of Hamburg, and he would feed the swan. And after that we would come back and have lunch. And then he would indicate to me that if I was quiet while the grandparents took their nap that in his desk on the right hand side, and I'll always remember that drawer, there were some chocolates and I could choose a chocolate if I was quiet. And I also learned at that time, just a little vignette, that if you touch you eat. Because I had touched a piece of candy, chocolate that was soft and I decided that I was going to try something else, and my grandfather patted me and let me know that that was the piece I was going to eat, so I learned that very early.

SIGRIST: Was this sort of something you looked forward to, spending weekends?

KONZE: Oh, absolutely.

SIGRIST: Was it, was this sort of matter of habit? Did you go with them every weekend to stay?

KONZE: Not every weekend, but certainly it was something I looked forward to because, again, I couldn't put the exact time on it, but he taught me to play dominoes and he taught me to play solitaire. So I always thought that was great.

SIGRIST: So your great-grandfather liked the kids? I mean, he was good with you?

KONZE: Oh, absolutely.

SIGRIST: Was there a favorite food or something that your great-grandmother would prepare for you when you came to visit, or was there something that she was really good at cooking that you can recall.

KONZE: I really don't recall, except that the memory of being with them has always been one of the highlights, you know, the pleasant times in Germany.

SIGRIST: You mentioned before that they had a gramophone. Do you remember what kinds of music you were exposed to at that time?

KONZE: Classical and semi-classical.

SIGRIST: Did your great-grandfather have a favorite composer, or did you develop a certain taste for something because of that?

KONZE: It wouldn't surprise you if I said Wagner, would it?

SIGRIST: No, it wouldn't surprise me at all. (they laugh) I was expecting that answer. That's very interesting. What do you remember about their house in Hamburg?

KONZE: Well, there, again, it was an apartment and they had a three-bedroom because at that age, I guess, they decided that they could sleep better each of them in their own room. And then, of course, I would have the spare room. And it was a larger apartment. My memory would say that it was a more elegant apartment than my grandmother had. Again, a walkup. And that's about it.

SIGRIST: Do you, and you may not know the answer to this, but do you know how your great-grandparents felt about World War I and how they felt about what had happened, because they come from an older generation, and bring a whole different kind of sensibility to thinking about things like this.

KONZE: I must, in all honestly, say I don't recall, except I do know that they urged my mother not to let the opportunity to come to America go by. I can remember that, because there was some hesitancy on her part because her mother was now alone, the boys were gone. And so she hesitated. And, of course, my father was still down in Fulda completing a contract he had down there.

SIGRIST: Your father got out of the hospital in 1919, you said.

KONZE: '19. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Then what happened to him? What did he do at that point?

KONZE: Well, he went back to Fulda because he knew the people there. He had worked on this big farm. As I said, he was educated in animal husbandry. And since those people were willing to hire him back, even with his disability, you know, not being able to do heavy work any more, he felt the necessity to go down there. Because obviously in Hamburg, just like all cities whether, you know, after a major war, there really isn't much in the way of work. So he went back to Fulda, as I said, and worked there. And the reason he didn't join us in coming to America in February of '23 was because he had signed a contract to help bring in the harvest that fall.

SIGRIST: Was there any interaction between you or your mother and your father from the time he got out of the hospital to when he went down to take this

contract, or those years after he got out of the hospital?

KONZE: They corresponded. I don't remember, in all honesty, of seeing my father until he came to America. I know he was not able to see us off when we left in January of '23.

SIGRIST: As a little kid in Germany, what did you know about America?

KONZE: Nothing.

SIGRIST: Did it, what did it mean to you? You said your mother hesitated. She didn't necessarily want to do this. How did you feel about it as a kid? I mean, did you understand the importance of it all?

KONZE: I don't think, number one, I was asked, and I must say I don't recall anybody asking me whether I'd like to go or not. I'm sure, Paul, that I was probably told we were going to a place where we would be much better off. I would assume that that would be it. But as for any specific conversation and remembering there again, I was just in the second, or the first half of my second year in school. I don't believe that the subject really came up, you know, to the degree where I would have known anything about America, and obviously wouldn't have gotten into a discussion about who was at fault, as between the Germans and the Allies for the war.

SIGRIST: Did, before we start the process to America I wanted to ask about religious life. What religion were you?

KONZE: Lutheran.

SIGRIST: And were you devout or Lutheran in name, you know, what was your religious life in the family at that time?

KONZE: I do remember going to church. (he coughs) Excuse me, every Sunday. And I don't recall that we made any visits to church other than on Sundays. And, of course, you know, you went there in whatever your finery was and you walked home, or back to the apartments, wherever. But I would say that when we came over to America we were Lutherans, we were practicing Lutherans, and we went to the Lutheran church in Newark.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me, in Germany, a Christmas celebration? How did you celebrate Christmas when you were a kid in Germany?

KONZE: I remember the trees, and I guess the one reason I remember the tree, the trees, more than anything else is the fact that we had live candles, you know, no electricity on the trees, and the live candles. I also remember that we were not allowed in the front room after Christmas Eve dinner because the tree was trimmed by the elders and then in the morning you saw your gifts and whatever.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you'd eat on Christmas Eve dinner?

KONZE: Yes. And I wasn't too fond of it. It was carp. That is a German Christmas Eve dinner. You know, the carp with the horseradish, boiled potatoes and would you believe I can't remember what the green vegetable was, if there was one. But I remember I was not too enthused about the fish.

SIGRIST: Well, good. Well, let's get you to America. So your great-grandfather is encouraging your mother to make this decision. Now, she and your father,

are they corresponding about this also?

KONZE: Oh, yes. The emphasis, of course, to come to America, came from an uncle, my mother's uncle, who had come to America by way of Guatemala. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: That's interesting.

KONZE: Just before the beginning of the war. He would have had to serve, and he just decided that he was not interested in what he later called the "Kaiser's War." So he signed on a ship and left the ship in Guatemala and then wound his way up to America.

SIGRIST: What did he do when he got here?

KONZE: He, my Uncle Teddy was a very brilliant man, and he tied in almost immediately in Newark, New Jersey with the Ozite Corporation which, it's probably been out of business now, but it used to make the rug cushions, you know, out of wool waste and the same kind of material that was used in the old days in the gun turrets of ships to deaden the recoil. And he just worked his way up in that, but that's where he went immediately. He started working in the factory as a laborer, and by the time we got here he was the manager of the Newark factory.

SIGRIST: So he's corresponding with your mother, also.

KONZE: He is the one that is urging us to come to America because this is where the future is. You have nothing in Germany. I can remember those discussions, you know, a little bit. And he was also trying to get my mother's younger brother, who had gone to South America to Ecuador,

because there was nothing to do in Germany, to come. And I think my uncle had a dream of making the Ozite Corporation a Schwarzwilde company. (he laughs) But my Uncle Otto stayed in South America, and just died a few years ago, he did not come, but the older brother, Hans, came, and he lived here in New York City.

SIGRIST: Did he come before you did?

KONZE: Uh, yes. He came immediately after the war.

SIGRIST: So your mother, actually, so she's got family on both sides of the ocean.

KONZE: Uh, right.

SIGRIST: Talk a little bit about her hesitancy to leave. What was it that was really holding her?

KONZE: The two things that I recall were holding her were, as I said earlier, was my grandmother being left alone. My grandmother positively would not leave Germany. Her story was, "You can't transplant an old tree." And the other thing, I have to assume, was her, my mother's worries about my father's health, whether, you know, that would be a good thing for him to move to a strange country, and she certainly would have known that he was not familiar with the language. I'm sure he knew, obviously had to know about America, but those were the two things that made her hesitate.

SIGRIST: Was she stubborn by nature?

KONZE: No.

SIGRIST: No. So these were very real concerns to her, then.

KONZE: Her older brother, the one that came to America right after World War I, he was the stubborn one, as we say in German, the *dickköpfig* [stubborn]. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Now, do you remember any of the process of getting papers and that sort of thing, or who took care of that?

KONZE: Now, that bring in another uncle on my great-grandfather's side. It was his son, Uncle Louie was the accountant, and he, I know, was the one that took care of the paperwork for my mother because paperwork was always something my mother did not necessary enjoy. So I know it was Uncle Louie took care of those things.

SIGRIST: It sounds like your mother had a very strong family network.

KONZE: She did, indeed.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you took with you, what you packed?

KONZE: No, my mother did the packing. I do remember, Paul, that obviously I had to have new clothes and I guess what was available in those days was a sailor hat which had to be bought, I guess. And the European kids, you know, we always had knit suits, knee-length, and the long socks and I remember all of that being new. I know there was a trunk that was shipped over. I don't know what was in it. And I can remember the conversation about the new pair of shoes that I had on costing something around nine billion marks, if you remember the inflation just kept going and going and

going. The story about the wheelbarrows, you know, full of money. That's about the extent of that.

SIGRIST: Who paid for your passage?

KONZE: I would have to say it was probably Uncle Teddy, the one that was here that urged my parents to make the move.

SIGRIST: I see. Well, we're going to pause for a second and Kevin's going to flip the tape, and we'll get you on the boat and to America.

KONZE: (he laughs) Okay.

END OF SIDE ONE
BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: Do you remember saying goodbye to your great-grandparents?

KONZE: I know I must have, and it was probably a tearful session but, specifically, no. One reason I remember Uncle Louie. Uncle Louie was the one that brought us to the ship.

SIGRIST: Uncle Louie is your great-grandfather's brother or son? Is he a great-uncle to you, or an uncle?

KONZE: He would have been a great-uncle.

SIGRIST: A great-uncle.

KONZE: Right. Well, let's talk about Uncle Louie bringing you to the boat. What do you remember of that whole process in getting to the boat?

KONZE: Well, I do remember the horse carriage and going down to Bremen. Because, of course, this is where you, well, the horse carriage to the station in Hamburg and then down to Bremen by train. And, of course, it was at (he pauses), Lord, I don't remember. I think Uncle Louie left us on the train in Hamburg. I think when we got to Bremen we were on our own, the papers and get on the ship and find your cabin.

SIGRIST: Is this the first time you'd seen a large boat?

KONZE: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: As a kid, what did you think of that?

KONZE: Thrilled, you know. Just looked up at this thing, and this is where I'm going to be riding, as it were, for two weeks or more, depending on how the seas were. Yes, it was just an awesome experience in that sense.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the boat?

KONZE: The S. S. Thuringia.

SIGRIST: Could you spell that, please, for us?

KONZE: T-H-U-R-I-N-G-I-A.

SIGRIST: And do you remember what line?

KONZE: Hapag-Lloyd. Was there any other in that time?

SIGRIST: There were, but they were in different places. (they laugh)

KONZE: I mean, out of Germany.

SIGRIST: Talk about your accommodations on the boat. What was that like?

KONZE: Well, my mother and I had a small cabin and I remember that the upper bunk was mine. Obviously, you know, I scrambled up. It would have been, well, no sense in guessing, I was going to say about mid-ships, but anyway it was a, I do remember a porthole. As I say, a small cabin but adequate for the two of us. In those days, you know, all the facilities, particularly on those kinds of ships, were small. And that's about it.

SIGRIST: Tell me about the trip.

KONZE: Well, uh, for me it was a ball all the way. For my mother it was an agony because I doubt if we get far out of Bremen. I don't think we even got to the North Sea before my mother got sick and remained seasick until, with some effort, she came aboard, up top deck, to see the Statue of Liberty about sixteen days later. But, again, ships in those days did not have all those, all the modern facilities of intercom and so forth and so on. And I do remember that within, obviously, a couple of days, I was given the job by a steward or somebody of going up and down the gangways ringing the bell for the meals. And, of course, I just loved every minute of that. I recall one very rough meal because the tables had little edges on them so the dishes wouldn't fall, but it didn't keep them from sliding. And I can always recall the first course being soup going down one end of the table and getting

this wonderful gentleman. I guess one reason I remember it so well is he reminded me so much of my great-grandfather. Here he was sitting at the end of the table, always immaculately dressed, and with his white goatee, and here all this soup just went all over him. (Mr. Sigrist laughs) And, other than that, as I say, I sort of have the freedom of the ship. I obviously found a place to play. I don't remember what I played at. I know I didn't miss a meal. And then we, as I said, my mother would not miss seeing the Statue of Liberty, but it was a bitter cold morning, again the 5th of February, ice on the deck, and we sort of slid there. As I think I told you before, disaster would strike my mother in two ways. Not only didn't she feel well, but we got on deck and there went my new sailor hat, which I'd hardly worn, and I think the big grief on my mother's part was the cost that was involved in what went down over the side of the ship. Then we waited and got off the ship here at Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: What do you think your mother's thinking about? She's on this boat, she's sick as a dog, she's, I'm sure, sad about leaving her family. What do you think is going through her mind, or did she ever talk about that later?

KONZE: Well, the only comment she ever made was that for the first few days she wished she had never gotten on the ship. And then, I guess, in terms of the point of no return she figured the sooner we got to America the better and she hoped that things would improve. But, yeah, no, she was, once the sickness was over and we settled here, why, she was extremely happy that we made the voyage.

SIGRIST: When she was sick on board the boat, were there any special tasks that you had to do for her during that time? Getting medicine or food or something along those lines?

KONZE: Well, the thing that was always recommended, and the chore, the duty I had, was the recommended diet for people like my mother, was dry toast and tea, you know, no, obviously none of these heavy German meats or anything else. And I do remember, and I can't tell you whether it was on a regular basis, but of course obviously I would have checked with my mother, and I do remember going to the galley and getting her tea and dry toast and obviously I must have gotten sea legs early because I don't remember ever being criticized for having the tea all over the tray.

SIGRIST: You had fun on the boat.

KONZE: Oh, absolutely. I had a ball all the way.

SIGRIST: Well, so the boat comes in, you see the Statue of Liberty, you lose your hat, billions and billions of marks (they laugh) into New York Harbor. And let's get to Ellis Island. Tell me about what happened at Ellis Island.

KONZE: Well, the, all the intricacies of checking through and so forth I don't recall except massive lines of people and being checked in. And I know that my mother was absolutely confused because this was not the way she had understood it was supposed to be, you know. We were supposed to get off the ship and be immediately in New York City, not on this little island. But my mother was not one who would fight the system, as it were. So we just did what people did on Ellis Island and, again, to me it was an interesting experience in the sense that I had never been in a place with so many people, you know, out in the open. Not understanding most of what I was hearing, because, of course, there must have been, what eight or nine different languages and dialects in German, which are almost as bad as, you know, New York versus Texas. And, but the big dining hall, I remember that. I remember the cages that we had to sleep in, and the fact

that most people didn't dare to take even their shoes off because they were afraid of losing something.

SIGRIST: Now why did you have to stay overnight here?

KONZE: Well, uh, back to my Uncle Theo, who was the guy that came in through Guatemala. Apparently, in order to get someone to get off the ship, you had to do the right thing, you know, as Near-Easterners would say, somebody had to get some "baksheesh." And apparently he was unwilling to pay that because he just, and I can remember it years later, he never wanted any involvement with the courts. So I have to assume that he had to go somewhere to a court to sign us in or something, but he said, "So you go overnight, you get processed, and I'll pick you up, you know, the next day." And that's what happened.

SIGRIST: What do you remember the most about staying overnight at Ellis Island?

KONZE: Well, as I mentioned, the sleeping in these sort of open cages.

SIGRIST: Can you describe that specifically?

KONZE: Well, they were sort of, the best description is cages, you know. They were wires, and they were upper and lower bunks and you were assigned, depending on the size of the family and, as you can imagine, some were large families, maybe, you know, six or seven kids. And so all through this session I do remember, above everything else, how the ladies all, the very personal things, plus trying to keep control of their children, just hugging everything, and wherever they moved, you know, big European pocketbooks, and whether they were little overnight bags or whatever, everybody sticking close to those things. As I say, wide open, about the

only privacy you had, or semi-privacy, were the toilet facilities, and that's why people obviously didn't take off their clothes. The other thing I remember, of course, is the examination that the women had to go through and I do remember that vividly because I had never seen a female stripped to the waist. And these poor women, you know, even my mother, trying to cover up their breasts with their pocketbooks and trying to keep control of the kids and move along in the line. And I remember my mother not having to go through the eye examination, and I've always attributed that to the fact that at thirty-one she was still a beautiful woman and I think the doctors, or whoever the inspectors were, they got the look that they wanted, the examination they needed (he laughs) and you go on to the next station.

SIGRIST: You know, we smile talking about the women stripped and trying to hide themselves and keep control of the children, but I'm sure it was actually quite a traumatic experience for these women.

KONZE: It had to be for many of them because in, again, not, you know, remembering too much detail, but I can, in the back of my mind I think remember people being, the ladies being told, "You must do this in order, if you're going to go through." Because, as I said earlier, I know they all hesitated, and this was one of the things I remembered.

SIGRIST: Your mother was probably thinking she wished she'd stayed in Germany again. (they laugh)

KONZE: At that moment, yes.

SIGRIST: What do you remember of the dining room and eating at Ellis Island?

KONZE: Uh, the thing I remember there was the closeness with, you know, the way we had to sit. And there, again, the bags get in the way, and people are tripping over them. And as I recall, golly, I think it was cafeteria-style. As I recall, everything had to go on two plates. You know, your soup plate, which most Europeans were used to anyway, and then everything else you wanted was on a big plate, whether it was rolls, butter, meat, whatever. And then finding a place to sit. There were no assignments.

SIGRIST: Was it a pleasant eating experience?

KONZE: I don't remember, Paul, you know. I guess part of it was the urgency, "Where do we go next? This is not like it was on the ship." (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Now, did Uncle Teddy come to Ellis Island to get you?

KONZE: No. Whatever the arrangement was, we got on the ferry and he met us at the Battery.

SIGRIST: Then what happened?

KONZE: Well, he, that was my first ride in an automobile. He had, I'll always remember that black, open Buick he had, you know. And in February, with these, I want to say plastic sides, you know, where the breeze just came through. But anyway, he packed us in that and we drove over to Newark and to his home.

SIGRIST: Talk to me about his home and his family situation, whatever that was.

KONZE: Well, my, at that time Grandma Pfeiffer, his mother-in-law, lived with them, and my aunt, two daughters, Shirley and Dorothy, who were a bit younger

than me. And there was adequate room, so it had to be a sizable house. And we stayed there, I guess, a few days for my mother to get some orientation, and she had already, in those days you more or less had to have a guarantee for, you either took the immigrant into your home, or had a job for, hmm, you know, self-supporting, as it were. And my mother had already gotten this job as, or my uncle had gotten her the job as a governess, and so we moved to Montclair, New Jersey, and my mother had a little one-bedroom apartment with bath up on the third floor. I remember that very pleasant house, all brick. I remember it, just marvelous. And, I'm sorry, that was Newark. That was still in Newark.

SIGRIST: How long did you stay with Uncle Teddy?

KONZE: I think we stayed with him, it was just a few days.

SIGRIST: I see. And then, so your mother got a governess position soon after that, or...

KONZE: Well, the position had already been acquired for her, and the reason it had to be just a few days because we landed on the 5th. We actually got to, you know, America per se on the 6th. And I was in school on the 12th of February. And, if I may just there, one of the reasons I learned English so fast was because the first grade teacher happened to have spent three years teaching in Germany just before the war broke out. So sitting next to her, a book you probably never even heard of, *The Little Red Hen*, was what we were reading in this little circle, so it was just a snap.

SIGRIST: Talk to me first about yourself. Other things you had to get adjusted to in America. What was different for you here than what you had been used to in Germany?

KONZE: Well, first the school room atmosphere. Again, in Germany, the three-length desk for youngsters. Now, here in America and, of course, I had to go back to the first grade. So sitting in these little chairs around the circle in a big room. It seemed much bigger than the school room in Hamburg. The, I enjoyed the learning, but the thing that one always remembers, I'm sure, if you're alert, was, of course I was looked at strangely because, of course, I had all these woolen pullover things which were non-American, so, and it was obvious and I'm sure the teacher said, you know, "This new boy is not one of ours," you know. But it wasn't until, oh, I guess the following year that I got any of the connotation, you know, "What are you doing over here?" type of thing. So to the degree that my clothes were different and I was looked at in that way, and obviously for those first, I'd have to say until almost June or at least until summer, I was sort of walking home alone from school. I have to back up, no, it wasn't summer, it would have to be spring, because all kids in America, you know, have to play baseball. Well, European kids don't throw a ball around. They do more now than they did then and I was not invited too much to participate in that. Number one, I was left-handed, and I threw a ball like a girl would, over-arm. So I wasn't invited to participate in playing ball. Those things I remember, you know, not with bitterness. At the time, perhaps, but it was a learning experience.

SIGRIST: Now, your father comes in the following October?

KONZE: No, he came in October of 1923.

SIGRIST: '23. So you came in February of '23.

KONZE: Right.

SIGRIST: So he came...

KONZE: In October.

SIGRIST: ...in October of '23. Talk to me a little bit about his coming here and then you seeing him again and your mother seeing him.

KONZE: Well, of course, there, again, my mother is still a governess, and obviously as a governess the people she is working for are not going to have a family move in with her.

SIGRIST: Did she live with them?

KONZE: Oh, yeah. We lived in the house where she was governess, yeah. See, that was, that used to be the style. They didn't particularly care for the governess to have a youngster, but apparently I behaved well enough so my mother didn't lose the job. But, so my father stayed with my uncle and that, again, Uncle Teddy, the one who sponsored us, and that made him real happy because his plan for my father had been to bring him into the business and build it up. Unfortunately if you have any sense about woolen mills and can picture those days back in 1923, no air conditioning. The heat in these pin cushion machines that are running, so that by March of 1924, of course, my father had contracted pneumonia and in three days he was dead. The, but back, again, to your initial question, the first thing I remember is sitting on his lap trying to really get away because of the cigar smoke. He was smoking cigars. And, as I said earlier, I think, or maybe before we started this interview, I don't remember, but I was told that I would listen to him in German, understand everything he was saying, but by October I was not speaking German. And part of that, of

course, again, is family, you know, 1923, basically German was a bad word here in America, and understandably so. So that when I came home from school my mother did not speak German to me except when it was absolutely necessary. She used her best English for whatever instructions, and I remember as clear as today, within a week of our getting here my mother had bought a copy of David Copperfield, and that was my first America reading. And I have to tell you, I wasn't that enthused about David Copperfield, but every day when I came home so many chapters, and then told my mother about what I'd read.

SIGRIST: How did your mother learn English?

KONZE: She studied a little English, again, in order to qualify as a governess, both English, a smattering of English, and French. So she had that little bit of background. Other than that my mother wanted to be a good American citizen and she, like my David Copperfield, she found something to read every day. And increasing, of course, then working for an American family you pick up a lot of it.

SIGRIST: What was really hard for her about America? Was there something that she may have conveyed to you later that you remember that she just couldn't quite get, or just couldn't quite understand about life over here. She's an intelligent woman, obviously, but I'm just wondering if there was just something that was so different that was hard for her.

KONZE: No. Interestingly enough, I can give you one vignette of bitterness that my mother had. Again, a bright woman, and she, the first thing she wanted to do, because from reading, listening and understanding, one of the first things that was important was to become a citizen of the United States. And in those days, you know, it was five years. You got your first papers,

second papers, third papers. And I do remember this. My mother studying the capitals, the states, the capitals, the presidents, the vice-presidents, and she could do all of them just like that. And the only real bitterness that I can recall on my mother's part was when she went to the federal court in Newark in 1928, hoping to have her citizenship so she could vote in the presidential election. And in those days you didn't have five hundred people becoming citizens and raising their hands. It was sort of an individualized type of thing. And the judge asked my mother what the capital of New Jersey was, and unfortunately she said, "Newark," knowing it was Trenton. He would hear nothing more, my mother had flunked, and she did not get her citizenship until I believe it was March of the following year. She never forgave the judge for depriving her of the right to vote in 1928. (he laughs) I can remember that being repeated.

SIGRIST: Oh, God. (he laughs)

KONZE: But, you know, other than that the only other thing wasn't bitterness, she just sort of considered that she had been stupid. Things have not changed, you know, but somebody got a hold of my mother and sold her about ten acres down in Florida which, of course, was even then under water. And years later she went down to look and it was, indeed, way out. And she got taken there. But she didn't blame that on America. She just blamed that on, but, you know, those are, I think, the two big mistakes she felt she made.

SIGRIST: I'm wondering that, your father was here for such a short time, and then he died. Did she blame this country for that, in a way? Especially since she had been reticent about his health to begin with, you know, when he was in Germany, and the whole coming over here. How did, I guess what I'm asking you is what do you remember about when your father died and

your mother's reaction to it, having only been here for a short time?

KONZE: Uh, number one, she never blamed, you know, this country for that. I would have to say, Paul, it was just a regret that he couldn't live to have enjoyed a little more and gotten acclimated and they could have made the life for themselves that they had hoped to make, but no bitterness. And my mother, again, was one of those type of people that this was something that happened and she was going to live with it. And, although as I said earlier she was a beautiful woman and had a couple of offers to get married, but the old school, that was her love, she's lost her love. Now she carries on.

SIGRIST: We have just a few minutes remaining and I want to ask you just a couple of questions. One is ultimately was your mother happy that she had made the decision to come over here?

KONZE: Oh, yes, definitely. Absolutely. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: How do you think things would have been different for her had she stayed in Germany?

KONZE: Oh, it would have been a struggle. I think it would have been an unhappy life for her because, number one, although, you know, family love and respect, there was not that closeness between my mother and her mother, except that my mother felt an obligation, you know. So, and with Otto, the middle brother, being down in South America, the older brother already being here in America, you know, the family had sort of transplanted itself anyway. So, no, I think life would have been hard for my mother because you sort of have to assume that my father would not have made it to an old age anyway, you know, being gassed twice and that weakness

inherent now with anything he catches.

SIGRIST: She would have ultimately been alone.

KONZE: Right, right.

SIGRIST: And how about you? Are you happy that you tagged along with them?
(they laugh)

KONZE: Oh, absolutely. I'm glad they brung me. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Did you ever get a chance to communicate with your great-grandparents again once you came here?

KONZE: No, because by the time I would have been old enough, you know, to even scribble something to them in German, you know, I would sign Christmas cards and things like that, but they had both died.

SIGRIST: I see. Well, Mr. Konze, I want to thank you for coming all the way from Maryland, actually, and for coming and adding your immigration story to our collection here.

KONZE: It's been a pleasure, Paul.

SIGRIST: Thank you. This is Paul Sigrist signing off for the National Park Service.

END OF THE INTERVIEW