

EI-260
ANNA KUPINSKY
BIRTH DATE: DECEMBER 23, 1905
INTERVIEW DATE: 3/4/1993
RUNNING TIME: 52:00
INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.
RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME
INTERVIEW LOCATION: DAUGHTERS OF MIRIAM HOME
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 8/1994
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: IRV SILBERG

AUSTRIA-HUNGARY, 1914
AGE 8

SHIP: "THE KAISERIN AUGUSTE VICTORIA"
PORT: HAMBURG
RESIDENCES:
? AUSTRIA HUNGARY: CHERNOWITZ; KUTSMAN
? US: CATSKILLS, NEW YORK, NY; Clifton, N.J.
? ISRAEL:

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and it's March 4, 1993, and I'm here in Clifton, New Jersey at the home of Anna Kupinsky who came from Austria-Hungary in 1914 when she was eight years old. Okay. Well, I'm very happy to be here, and I look forward to your story, which I'm sure is going to be good. Okay. Why don't we start by your telling me your birth date.

KUPINSKY: My birth date is December the 23rd, 1905.

LEVINE: And the town that you were born in?

KUPINSKY: Chernowitz.

LEVINE: Would you spell that, please?

KUPINSKY: It's C-H-E-R-N-O-W-I-T-Z, and it's in Austria.

LEVINE: And did you live in Chernowitz the whole time until you came to the United States?

KUPINSKY: No. We moved to a smaller town.

LEVINE: How old were you then?

KUPINSKY: I must have been about three, four years when we moved to the smaller town.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KUPINSKY: I still remember the trip.

LEVINE: You do?

KUPINSKY: I was sitting on a wagon next to the driver, one of the peasants, and all our belongings were in the wagon. And I was holding a flower pot. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about Chernowitz?

KUPINSKY: Well, very little.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KUPINSKY: It's a big town in Austria. See, Vienna is the capital, but this is a smaller town.

LEVINE: So, do you remember why your family moved, or did your mother or father ever tell you?

KUPINSKY: Well, my father wasn't with us. He was in the United States.

LEVINE: Oh. When did your father come?

KUPINSKY: He came back to visit us when I was five years old, and I didn't know him. I was afraid to go near him. That's true. He asked me for a drink of water, so I says, "Here!" (she laughs) I didn't know him. He left when I was an infant, and he didn't come back until I was five years. And then a few months later he went back to the States.

LEVINE: Do you remember any experiences with him when you were still in Austria?

KUPINSKY: Well, he didn't stay very long with us. He left when I was an infant, so I really didn't know him.

LEVINE: But when he came back for those few months.

KUPINSKY: Well, I guess I got used to him and I wasn't afraid any more. After all, he was still my father. He didn't beat me. (they laugh)

LEVINE: Well, what was your father's name?

KUPINSKY: David.

LEVINE: And his last name, your maiden name?

KUPINSKY: Hochstadt.

LEVINE: Will you spell that, please?

KUPINSKY: H-O-C-H-S-T-A-D-T.

LEVINE: And, yeah. It's on the form. And your mother's name, and her maiden name?

KUPINSKY: My mother's name was Rosenblatt. Her maiden name was Rosenblatt. Of course, when she married it was Hochstadt, but her maiden name was Rosenblatt.

LEVINE: And her first name?

KUPINSKY: Esther.

LEVINE: And did you have brothers and sisters?

KUPINSKY: I had three, I had one brother that was born in Europe, and he came with me to America.

LEVINE: That's Leo.

KUPINSKY: Yes. And I had two, and I had a sister born when we first came here, and then two brothers.

LEVINE: So when you were in Austria it was just you and Leo and your mother, mainly.

KUPINSKY: Well, when my father left my mother was pregnant, and she had a little girl. But the little girl only lived a year, and she died. She was so beautiful. I think I have a picture of her.

LEVINE: Well, when we finish maybe you can show me. What did your little sister die of?

KUPINSKY: I don't know. I was never told.

LEVINE: So when you were three or so, you moved, your family moved. And where did you move to?

KUPINSKY: They called it Kutsman, Kutsman.

LEVINE: Could you spell that?

KUPINSKY: K-T -- K-U-T-S-M-A-N. That's what I think.

LEVINE: What kind of a place was that? What kind of, a town, village?

KUPINSKY: Well, the other place was a big city. Now, this place was a small place. It was only one block long. The village was only one block long. They had a couple of stores. That's what I can remember.

LEVINE: And you stayed there until you were eight, and you left for the United States?

KUPINSKY: And then we left for the United States. We came to Hamburg, Germany. From there we boarded the boat.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, before we talk about the voyage, what do you remember? Did you go to school while you were still in Austria?

KUPINSKY: Yes, I was in school. We were learning German, and I found it very hard, because we only spoke Yiddish in the house.

LEVINE: Did you have a religious family?

KUPINSKY: Yes. My mother and father were religious, and so am I. My - you see my handsome son? He's an ordained rabbi and a sociologist. He has a PhD in sociology. They call him Doctor, Rabbi Doctor. He lives in Israel.

LEVINE: Oh. Well, did you have grandparents over there that you saw?

KUPINSKY: I had a - I had a grandfather. My father's father, with his second wife. And they had a little, they have a son. I have a picture of them.

LEVINE: Well, did you see them, much of them?

KUPINSKY: Yeah. We used to see them quite often. They lived a few miles away. I would spend some time there with them. And they had a son from a second marriage. The son must have been about a year or two older than me, and he would spend it with us.

LEVINE: What did you do for fun when you were over there, when you lived there? What kind of activities did you enjoy doing?

KUPINSKY: Well, my step-grandmother had geese. He took care of geese. She would fatten them up and sell them. She had quite a few of them. She was always hollering at them and screaming at them. And she would take them out to a place where they had a lot of grass and they would eat there, then she would bring them back.

LEVINE: How did she transport them? Did they walk?

KUPINSKY: Yes.

LEVINE: Or she was just . . .

KUPINSKY: It was right near the house. They had their own home, one room. In the back of the house they had two walnut trees. You know, when walnuts grow they're green, and that shell comes off, and then it's brown.

LEVINE: And do you remember the school? What was the school like that you went to there?

KUPINSKY: That I don't remember. That was in the place where we lived, but we had quite a walk. It was far from where we live.

LEVINE: And what did you, when your father was in the United States, did your mother work at all, or . . .

KUPINSKY: No.

LEVINE: Your father sent money back to her, or . . .

KUPINSKY: He didn't send her so much because he didn't make too much. Then they didn't make so much money. If they made six dollars or five it was a lot of money, and out of that money my mother had to pay rent. We had to live by other people. She had to pay for Hebrew learning. She would send him to a Hebrew school.

LEVINE: Send Leo?

KUPINSKY: Yes.

LEVINE: But not you?

KUPINSKY: Oh, I was too young to learn Hebrew. But I did learn like one time. I was a tomboy. I'd climb up all the trees, so she would send me there for a while. So the rabbi made us work in his garden. We would take care of his garden. That I remember.

LEVINE: What are your fondest memories of Austria, of your, when you were a little girl?

KUPINSKY: Well, it's hard for a child of my age. I know we had relatives. I had an aunt there and cousins. They're all gone already. They all died here in America. Then my -- I have -- older brother is gone, and one other brother that was born here died. My parents are gone. I'm the next to go. And I'm not so young any more.

LEVINE: Let's see. How old are you now?

KUPINSKY: Eighty-seven. You know, I started a new doctor. (she laughs) So he wanted to know when I was born. So he tells me, "You're eighty-seven." I says, "No, I'm eighty-six." So we were arguing. But I figured it out, I'm eighty-seven. (they laugh) I never had a birth certificate. My brother had one, but I never had one. I became an American citizen through my h-my husband. He became a citizen, and I became. My father was not -- wasn't an American citizen, so it didn't make me any, or my mother.

LEVINE: I see. Well, what was the reason that you and your mother and your brother came here when you did?

KUPINSKY: Well, life was harder in Europe. My father was here, and we were there. We were poor. We didn't have any luxuries. We hardly had enough for food. We had to pay rent. We had to pay, we had to have shoes, we had to have clothing. We didn't have that either.

LEVINE: Did you, do you remember the kind of food that you ate there?

KUPINSKY: Not like here. We didn't have oranges. That was a, how do you call it? That was a . . .

LEVINE: Delicacy?

KUPINSKY: Delicacy. We didn't have bananas in Europe.

LEVINE: Do you remember any dishes that your mother prepared when you were over there?

KUPINSKY: Well, we had chicken, we had soup. I guess we made fish. My mother was a great cook. Well, we had simple things. We didn't have expensive things. She made a lot of things herself.

LEVINE: Was it farm country, or what was happening in the little village where you moved to? What kind of work did people do?

KUPINSKY: Well, some people were in business, and some people, their husbands were in the States like my husband, my father.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you heard about the United States before you actually came here, what you expected?

KUPINSKY: Well, I really don't remember that. I remember when the great boat sunk. You know, the Titanic. In fact, I had a picture of it. My father brought it home. Now, this happened in 1912.

LEVINE: Yes.

KUPINSKY: My father came home maybe a year later. And I don't know what happened to the picture, it disappeared.

LEVINE: You remember that that happened and the story about it.

KUPINSKY: Yes. Well, it couldn't have been bad. We would have been all together with my father. This way we were separated. It would have been so hard on my mother. It was very hard on her.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, do you remember what your mother packed when you came here, things that she wanted to take with her?

KUPINSKY: Well, she packed - you know, in Europe we used featherbed -- you know, feather quilt. The women would have a season when they would, you know, the feathers from, uh . . .

LEVINE: From the geese?

KUPINSKY: From geese. Not from ducks, from geese. They would take out the . . .

LEVINE: The part that's hard.

KUPINSKY: That's right. All the women would get together, and they would all make that. And they would make pillows out of that, and quilts. We took along two quilts and some pillows. And I guess our clothing, which wasn't too many, and not too much money either. And that's how we came to America.

LEVINE: Was your mother looking forward to coming?

KUPINSKY: When she lost that little girl, she had my brother write to my father that she wants to come, she don't want to stay in Europe any more. So when we came she had three more children. She never had time to learn English. We all had to speak Yiddish in the house. And I knew how to speak quite well, but I didn't know how to read and write Yiddish. My older brother showed me a few times. He wrote out the ABC in Yiddish. He used the same ABC in Hebrew, and I learned how to read and write Yiddish. And my mother was so happy I would read for her. You know, the newspapers, but now I'm not reading it, I'm forgetting it. But -- I could remember.

LEVINE: Well, do you remember leaving the little village and going to get on the boat that you took?

KUPINSKY: When we left the little village we went to stay with my grandfather, because my mother went to the big town to arrange for us, you know, for her things to take along.

LEVINE: The passport or papers?

KUPINSKY: Yeah. Well, when she wanted us to come, the peasant came with all our things that we had to take along. And they took my brother and myself, and he met us at my grandfather's place, and he took us to the big town, where we met my mother. And after she had all the arrangements made, we took a train and we went to Hamburg, Germany. And we stayed there for about a week until we boarded the big ship in Hamburg to come to the States.

LEVINE: And the name of the ship?

KUPINSKY: Kaiser-- Augusta Victoria. It was named after the German Emperor's wife. Auguste Victoria, that was the girl's name.

LEVINE: And what were your experiences aboard the ship?

KUPINSKY: Well, we were sick. But my mother and brother were more sick. I was the well one. I would go down. I had to walk down steps, and the boat would shake, and I had to hold on to something, and I would bring them up food to eat, but they couldn't eat it. They were sick. And then one day we all had to be up on deck, because they were vaccinating us. They locked the cabins. They wouldn't let us in until they were finished. And when they got through they gave us candy.

LEVINE: And were you, what were your accommodations on the ship? Where were you staying, your sleeping quarters?

KUPINSKY: Well, we had cabins, and my brother stayed with us. My mother didn't want to be separated with him. She was afraid she was going to lose him.

LEVINE: And then did you go down into steerage at all?

KUPINSKY: I used to go there quite often and play with the children. I used to see coffins, all kinds of junk in there.

LEVINE: Coffins? For bodies?

KUPINSKY: Yes. I wasn't afraid. We didn't look inside. We saw them around, but we weren't afraid. We were a number of small children playing together.

LEVINE: Do you remember what steerage was like? Could you describe it?

KUPINSKY: Well, it wasn't like first class. If we had come first class we wouldn't go through Ellis Island. That can you know. Well, it was rough. The food was terrible.

LEVINE: Did you eat food in the dining room, or did you have to bring your own food?

KUPINSKY: I don't remember the dining room. Really, I don't remember it. It's such a long time ago. Must have been about seventy-eight, seventy-nine years. I remember getting food and bringing it up to my mother. I don't know, see, I don't think she ate it. I probably ate it.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, do you remember when the ship came into the New York Harbor?

KUPINSKY: Yeah. I remember passing the Statue of Liberty.

LEVINE: Did you know what that was?

KUPINSKY: No.

LEVINE: What was happening on the ship when you came into the Harbor?

KUPINSKY: Well, a lot of people were on deck, and we all looked. We never saw that before. And I was happy to see her. I knew we were going to be united with my father. We'd be together.

LEVINE: And then what happened at Ellis Island? Do you remember your impression of that?

KUPINSKY: Well, then we were examined by the doctors, and they were pretty rough with us. One doctor examined our eyes. I think he had my eye inside out, it hurted so. They were very rough with us. And my brother had overturned heels. I guess my mother didn't have the money to have it fixed, or we didn't have the time, so they made him walk back and forth. They thought there's something wrong with his feet. There was nothing wrong with his feet. Theu8 shoes, the heels were turned over. And my poor mother was so worried. She thought they wouldn't let him in with us. He'd have to go back. Where would he go back, by himself? But thank God they let him through, but we had to sleep overnight there.

LEVINE: And what was that like? Do you remember the, where you slept, and what it was like?

KUPINSKY: I don't remember where we slept, it's such a long time ago. You know, it's hard to remember.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything else about Ellis Island? What else?

KUPINSKY: I remember they - they --they gave us a room to sleep, and I guess my brother slept in the same room with us. But then when I went to the ladies room by myself I was a big girl and my mother didn't have to go with me. I only opened the door, and I saw that nice, I only saw her back, a black skirt and a white blouse and a hat. When she turned around, that's when trouble started. I was so frightened. I had never seen a colored woman. Where we lived we didn't see black faces. Well, I frightened her, too. (she laughs) I think everybody heard me outside. They all came running in. (she laughs) It seems it only happened yesterday, but it's a long time ago. See, something like that, you remember.

LEVINE: So then did your father come for you?

KUPINSKY: He probably came too late, and they wouldn't leave us out. So he had to come back the next morning. He didn't want to take off the day. You know, a day meant a lot of money. So he came back the next morning and he took us out, and we went on a certain barge to South Ferry. And then we, I think he took the elevator to Eighth Street where my - where his aunt lived, and we stayed with his aunt. We came three days before Passover. And we stayed there until after Passover. Then my father got us an apartment in the same building. Three rooms, no kitchen window in the kitchen, with lots of mice and rats and roaches. We didn't stay there very long.

LEVINE: Would you remember the Passover? Do you remember anything about it, when you first arrived?

KUPINSKY: No, that I don't remember.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything that struck you as odd or different in those first few weeks when you were here in New York?

KUPINSKY: I know when my father would take us out for a walk, all the pushcarts with all the food. I wasn't used to that.

LEVINE: And then did you start in to school?

KUPINSKY: Yeah. But then an aun -- another aunt of mine, a daughter to this aunt took me to a school, and she registered me. My mother couldn't come because she didn't speak English, and she, so my aunt came with me, and I started school.

LEVINE: How was the school different from the one that you . . .

KUPINSKY: Well, I didn't understand the language. And years ago they didn't speak Yiddish like they speak Spanish to the Puerto Ricans. They don't know how well they have it.

LEVINE: Do you, were there a lot of other children who had immigrated?

KUPINSKY: Yes. And then we moved to Rivington Street, 103 Rivington Street. Now there are projects there. And I went to a school, P.S. 92. And we had one teacher that kept all the immigrants. I remember her. She was a lovely teacher, Miss Lawrence. And she kept us in her class until we learned English. And we learned how to read and write. And one day I remember my penmanship paper came out so nice, she sent it up to the teacher - to the principal, and it came down to me. I got such a kick out of it. And then we moved again. We moved to Suffolk Street. Ever hear of that street?

LEVINE: Suffolk.

KUPINSKY: That's the Lower East Side.

LEVINE: I don't know it.

KUPINSKY: We moved to Suffolk Street. I still used to go to that school. Till one day I was hit by an i-- cake of ice. See, my younger sister was born on Broome Street, my only sister. So I used to go to Clinton Street with ten cents, and I would pay for a bottle of milk and get two cents change and come home again. Well, one day on the sidewalk they were delivering ice, and I was in a rush to walk, and the ice fell on one of my legs. And someone had to carry me home, so I had to stay home. I didn't go to no hospital and find out if it's broken or not, I stayed home. Years ago you didn't know going to a hospital. And I stayed home until I was better, and then I walked around in a house shoe. Well, one morning the, I was away from school for so many weeks. What do you call that man? The--

LEVINE: Oh, the truant officer?

KUPINSKY: The truant officer came and he saw me walking. I was washing the dishes for my mother. He says, "If you can wash the dishes, you can come to school with the house-shoe." So I did. I had to cross Delancey Street. You know how Delancey Street is wide and busy?-- with the house shoe? Well, I didn't go there. I went through, under the bridge where there weren't any streets, any cars running, and it was closer to the school, and I came to school. The teacher was happy to see me. And then we moved again. Then we moved to 7th Street between A and B.

LEVINE: Did each apartment get better, or why did you move so often?

KUPINSKY: Well, the first apartment only had three rooms. The second apartment also had three rooms. And then when we moved to Suffolk Street we also had three rooms, but it was up higher and it was nicer. Well, it was different. So then I had to get a transfer. But I don't remember what school I went. No, I still went to 92. Then we lived -- from 7th

Street I had to go to school. The school - the school was between 7th and 6th. When I had to go to a certain class, I had to go to 6th Street. They wouldn't let me go through the school. And then when we moved to 6th Street I had to go to school on 7th Avenue. On 7th Street. I had to go all around. They wouldn't let me go through the school. Isn't that ridiculous?

Well, and I went to that school for a while. I remember my teachers. I had, I had a very nice teacher. She was married to a doctor. And then I had another teacher, but she was so mean to me. I wasn't good in arithmetic. I didn't remember good. I didn't have time to do homework. I came home. I had to help my mother wash dishes or wash the floor, go shopping. It was hard on my mother. She couldn't speak English. And she didn't have too much money to go shopping with either. You know, then they didn't make much money. I guess you heard about that.

LEVINE: Right. Well, what was your father doing for work?

KUPINSKY: My father worked by fur. He was a fur finisher. He finished the fur coats. He would take a pattern and cut out the lining inside of the sleeves, and he would baste it. And other people would finish it -- or not, he finished it. That was his, he didn't make much. And then we lived there for a while. I'm trying to remember the number of the school. I think P.S. 72. And then from there we moved to Harlem, on Park Avenue between 117 and 118th Street. So I went to school to P.S. 59 on Madison Avenue. That was when the war was on. I remember when they rationed the sugar, and the wheat. But you wouldn't remember that.

LEVINE: No. Is there anything else you can say about when the war was on and how it affected you, or what you remember about it?

KUPINSKY: Like they rationed sugar and they rationed meat. We didn't have too much. But we had it better than in Europe. In Europe we didn't have that much, even. Here at least my father was working. He was working in a shop all day, and at night he would work in a store, in a fur store, on Madison Avenue. He would do the same thing, you know, fur coats, so he made extra money so we had enough money. And then in our building there was a couple of people living that their uncle had a country ho-- had a home in the Catskills. And they rented out the rooms for the uncle. So we rented a room, too, the bedroom. And the kitchen was downstairs. We would all cook together on the same stove, coal stove. So we went away for the summer.

LEVINE: You mean, this was in the Catskills, that you're talking about, where you would all cook together?

KUPINSKY: Yeah. But that wasn't our place. That were -- belonged to somebody that lived in the building.

LEVINE: I see.

KUPINSKY: She was a niece to this uncle and aunt.

LEVINE: And you would go away for the whole summer?

KUPINSKY: So we went away that summer. I was the biggest girl there. Wherever I went, the kids followed me. They were all smaller, you know, other children, not only mine. The mailman wouldn't give anyone the mail, only to me.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: Was it nice being in the country?

KUPINSKY: Yes! You know, it was different from New York, being in the country. You know, the air that we had in Harlem or even on the east side. Well, my father would come out every weekend, and he liked it so much he decided to buy his own farm. So after the summer he and my older brother, my older brother was about five years older than I am. The two of them went out to the Catskills looking for a little farm. While they were gone, the Spanish flu came around. Have you heard about the Spanish flu?

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, you tell me your experience.

KUPINSKY: As soon as they left, my mother got sick. So I had to take care of her. I couldn't go to school, and I was making two grades at one time. What do you call that?

LEVINE: Skipping?

KUPINSKY: Not skipping. Two grades at one time, I was making 7B and 8A. I forgot what you call it. I'm getting forgetful too, like the rest of the women. The rest of the women, if they want to know the waitress's name, they ask me, they don't know her name. I'm supposed to remember.

LEVINE: I don't know what you call that, but you were doing two grades at the same time. Uh-huh.

KUPINSKY: Yeah. And I had to stay home, I had to take care of my mother. We had the doctor every day. And none of the neighbors would come in because they were sick, too. They were afraid to come in. And my father was away. He didn't come back so soon with my brother, and we didn't know where he was. And then the other children got sick. My sister got sick, and then my brother got sick. And I had to take care of them. I had to be in the drug store every day getting medicine or cooking. I had to cook for them. I had to cook chicken and give them soup or give them breakfast. Yeah, it was hard for me. How old was I then? About twelve, thirteen.

Well, finally my father came back and told us he bought a place. We weren't too happy, but, look. When you didn't have the money, he had to borrow money from all our relatives and friends. Look, when you go to buy something and you don't have the money, it's not lucky. It's hard luck. If you have your own money, it's different. But when you have to borrow, it doesn't work right. Well, anyway, the following spring we moved out. We had somebody move us with all our furniture and

everything, and all our, whatever we had, and we moved. And about a block before the house, the car -- the truck broke down, so they had to carry everything to the house. And the one that owned the place didn't know we were coming.

You know, years ago we didn't know we had to write. (she laughs) Now we got educated. Well, she didn't know we were coming, so --. So she had another place a couple of blocks away, and she stayed there and she gave us the place. But we weren-- the ceiling was low, and it was so smoky. We weren't used to that. We didn't have that in our big apartment house. We had hot and cold water. We had a bathroom. They didn't even have a bathroom. We had to go outside. In the wintertime it was freezing. In summer the flies would annoy us. Well, we couldn-- that's what we found. They weren't Jews, they were Gentiles, but they were nice people. And they had a little hut outside where they killed the pork. And every time they wanted a slice, they would take a slice and cook it. It didn't bother us. Look, when they moved, they took it with them. Well, the next day she came and she took half the chickens and left us half the chickens, and she even left us her dog, a collie, for a few days.

And that's how we managed to live. And then we had to paint all the apa--all the rooms. They used to paper them, one paper on top of another. And we had to wet the walls and scrape off the paper, and my brother and father would paint it. And my mother had asthma, and she couldn't take that. It was hard. It was a hard life. We didn't have it easy. And then we would rent out the rooms. We had five, six extra rooms, bedrooms. The women would come, and they would do their own cooking. They had to bring their own bedding and pots and pans and dishes, and we would give them a place where to keep it.

And my father would shop for them, and then he would plant a garden. We would give them vegetables from the garden and milk we had from our cows. At the beginning we still had eggs from the chickens, and then we didn't have so many eggs any more. We had to buy eggs. Well, my father used to shop. I would write down what they, what he has to buy for them. We didn't charge too much, only a few cents. And, you know, after all a horse and a wagon and time. We were entitled. They didn't go shopping, because it was almost a mile away and they, sometimes they would go, so it was their business, we wouldn't question them.

LEVINE: So these people that you rented the rooms to, this would be in the summertime or all year?

KUPINSKY: Only in the summer.

LEVINE: Only in the summer.

KUPINSKY: They would go home before Labor Day.

LEVINE: I see. So it was like a little miniature hotel or a boarding house?

KUPINSKY: It was a rooming house.

LEVINE: A rooming house.

KUPINSKY: They did their own cooking. They would buy everything from us. Flour, eggs, potatoes, sugar, and I would measure it out, and I would always give them more. (she laughs) I always made sure I gave them more. And then I had to mark it down on the book, and once a week they would pay it.

LEVINE: So did you ever go back to school when you moved to the Catskills?

KUPINSKY: Yeah, I did go to school, but then I couldn't go any more. My mother had her baby. I had to stay home and take care of her. I was fifteen years old when she had her baby. I was like his mother. I had to diaper him. In fact, I sewed the diapers for him before he was born, flannel diapers. One of our guests, one of our roomers showed me how to work on a machine. You think my father would tell me? No. He never had time. So I learned how to sew, and I cut up diapers, flannel diapers, for my brother. I had to wash them, I had to diaper him, I had to bathe him. My mother was sick, she couldn't take care of him. She was nursing him for a month. So my brother and father planted hothouse strawberries outside in the garden. And my mother knew how to take care of that. She was the country girl. So she decided to go and weed the strawberries, and it was raining, and she caught poison ivy, so she couldn't nurse any more, so we had to give him bottles. I had to cook the milk from our cows, you know, pasteurize it. And they didn't have formulas then. They didn't have so many bottles. If we had two bottles it was a lot. Change off, and that was my job.

LEVINE: So did, was the baby all right?

KUPINSKY: Yeah. He's in his seventies now. He wants to come here, but he can't make up his mind.

LEVINE: So what was school like in the Catskills compared to in the city?

KUPINSKY: Well, I had to go in the village in one room. Upstairs were the little ones was a lady teacher, downstairs was a man teacher. So they put me down there. One time we were writing a story, and I was very good at writing stories. So the boys asked me to write it for them, so I wrote it for a few of them. And when he examined it and he saw it, he knew it was me. I'd just come from the city. Well, he punished me. He put me among the boys. So, I had long hair, so they would pull my hair and I would yell, so he had to put me back. So I didn't help them any more.

LEVINE: Then did you stay in school until you graduated?

KUPINSKY: No, I didn't graduate. I went back to evening school when we moved back to the, when we moved to the Bronx. Then my mother complained she can't take care of the children. Three children was too much for her. My father would yell in Polish skola. My brother would say in

German schule and my mother would say, "It's too hard." I had to give it up. I wanted to take up typing and shorthand and give it a chance, so I gave it up.

LEVINE: What determined that the family moved back to the Bronx?

KUPINSKY: Well, we couldn't make a living. We didn't make enough money during the summer. It didn't pay enough. We had to pay mortgage. We had to pay interest. We had to pay insurance. We had to pay land tax, school tax. And there were other little things. We couldn't afford even food, so we had to give it up. After five years we moved back to the Bronx.

LEVINE: Were there people who had immigrated in the Catskills as well, when you were living there? Were there other people who had immigrated to the United States?

KUPINSKY: Yeah, but they came earlier. I didn't know them very well. I knew them as friends, but I didn't know what they were doing. One was a baker, one was some-one was something else. They all made a nice living, only we couldn't make a living.

LEVINE: Did you, was there a little community where you were? I mean, did you socialize with people at all?

KUPINSKY: Well, I had girlfriends and we would go down to the village in one of the hotels and we would meet there with boys and girls. And the woman that owned the place would bake cakes for us, and she would make sets for everybody, and the boys and girls danced. But we didn't go out with one another. I was too young. I was only about fifteen or sixteen. Then I'd come right home. I was needed around the farm. And when my father had to go work in New York when the season, you know, whenever the fur had its season, he would be in New York.

LEVINE: You'd be up in the Catskills, but he'd be in New York.

KUPINSKY: Yeah. I'd have to do all the man's work. My brother bought his own place. So he would bring his dirty clothes for me to wash, and my mother would cook food for him to take home.

LEVINE: Did your brother move back to the Bronx, too?

KUPINSKY: No, my brother lived on the east side. He went partners with a married man with a family. They were going to have a boarding house. Hope, you know, a hotel, but they didn't do good the first summer and they gave it up, and they owed a lot of money, and they left. They left everything behind. They - the man had a wife and three children. My so - brother was single. He went back to America, and he got a job, I mean, back to New York, and he got a job right away. One of our friends from Europe worked in a doll place. Ever hear F and V Doll Company?

LEVINE: No.

KUPINSKY: On Canal Street?

LEVINE: F&B Doll, D-O-L-L?

KUPINSKY: Yes.

LEVINE: No.

KUPINSKY: Well, he was the manager there, and he took up my brother, and my brother had a job there.

LEVINE: So then when you get back to the Bronx what did you do?

KUPINSKY: When wee lived in the Bronx, I stayed home. I had to take care of my mother and the children. My mother couldn't do anything. She was sick. She had asthma. She would cough. And then my mother went away to Montefiore Hospital for nine months. Ever hear of Montefiore Hospital? Then it was only a little place. Now it's big, and now they built another hospital by the side. So she was away for nine months. I had to take care of the children.

LEVINE: Was it her asthma that she was being treated for?

KUPINSKY: Yes. She was sick. And I had to take care of them. I had to cook, I had to wash and clean. We lived on the ground floor. I had to hang outside, on the line, I had to go through the window, in and out. It was too much for me, but I managed. And then we could only see my mother on Saturdays and Sundays, but if I wanted to see her during the week or bring her something, I would have to take the Third Avenue El or the bus on Webster Avenue and get off on 110th Street and walk up a big hill. And she would come down to the gate, if she was well enough, and I would give her the bundle.

One time one of them had the chicken pox, and the other two got it, too. And I had to go visit my mother on Saturday, and I couldn't leave them alone. And the doctor lived two houses away, so I went to see him to ask him what to do, how I should take care of them. As I came out I met one of my - one of -- somebody that we knew. So she asked me, "What are you doing here?" And I told her, "I have to see my mother, and I can't leave them alone." She was married, but she didn't have children yet. She says, "Okay, I'll come and stay with them." So she came and she stayed with them. When I came to see my mother, I didn't tell her anything, but she could see on my face that I was struggling. After they were all well she told me they were sick. I said, "How did you know?" "By looking at your face." You know, it wasn't fun taking care of three sick children. I was only a young girl myself.

LEVINE: How did you meet your husband?

KUPINSKY: We lived on the same block.

LEVINE: In the Bronx?

KUPINSKY: Yes.

LEVINE: And how did you, you just met? You just happened to see each other and . . .

KUPINSKY: No, I used to see him all the time. In fact, his mother had a candy store on the same side where we lived, so I used to cross the street I shouldn't have to cross, my mother would sit in his - in his mother's store and talk with her.

LEVINE: Was he also, did he also immigrate to the United States?

KUPINSKY: Yeah, but he came later than I did. When he came he was grown up already. He was supposed to go in the army in Europe. And, you know, for a Jew to go in the army is very hard, so he decided to come here. His mother was a citizen, so he was able to come with her. She didn't want to come here. America wasn't religious enough for her. Well, so he left her and he went to Warsaw, and she followed him, and then they both came.

LEVINE: Was he coming from Poland, or he was coming from Austria, too?

KUPINSKY: No, he came from Lithuania.

LEVINE: So his mother and your mother were friends?

KUPINSKY: No, my mother would only go in the store when she wanted to talk a little, talk with her. My mother didn't know English, so she spoke Yiddish with her. And The other one didn't know English either.

LEVINE: So did you see your husband for very long before you got married?

KUPINSKY: Yeah. I used to see him every day. But I didn't want to go with him, I wanted an American. But I didn't get no American. (she laughs) And my mother used to say, "Why don't you go out with him? You don't know a person till you go with him. Maybe you'll love him." I used to say, "You go with him."

LEVINE: So what changed your mind?

KUPINSKY: And then my mother died, and six months later, this is longer than the story. (they laugh) Six months later my father remarried and we moved to her house.

LEVINE: In the Bronx?

KUPINSKY: Yes. Let's see. A number of - a number of blocks away. You're not acquainted with the Bronx?

LEVINE: Very little, just a little bit.

KUPINSKY: Ever hear of Bathgate Avenue, now where there's shopping?

LEVINE: I don't know.

KUPINSKY: Well, that's where she lived. Well, we couldn't help it when he married her we had to move with her, with them. But she wasn't a nice person. I was the maid. When I was home Sunday I did all the cleaning, washing the windows, cleaning their room. So she used to go to the neighbors and complain I don't do anything, and the neighbors would tell me. Well, my father married her. I couldn't say anything. He didn't ask me. To me if she wasn't nice, he didn't give a damn. But she wasn't nice to my two brothers and my sister. (she clears her throat) They would come home for lun-for lunch from school. She was never home. Well, I lived too far away, and I couldn't come, and then I was pregnant, having a baby, my first child.

LEVINE: So did you get married after your mother died and before . . .

KUPINSKY: I li-I lived -- lived with them for six months, then I got married. I married a year-and-a-half after my mother died.

LEVINE: I see. Was that part of why you decided to get married, do you think?

KUPINSKY: Well, wherever I'd go I'd meet him. And I'd fight with him. "What are you following me around?" He says, "I'm not following you. I can't help it if you're going the same place." You know, it's destined to be, you can't stop it. He was a very nice man. He was good to me. He made a nice living. He made a wedding. He bought the furniture. He paid the rent. He even gave me money to buy a wed-- to rent a wedding dress and shoes, and a frie-0- a relative of mine that was married before me gave me her veil.

LEVINE: So then how many children did you have?

KUPINSKY: Well, I had four. My first child was almost seven when I lost him. A year later I had my younger daughter.

LEVINE: What's her name?

KUPINSKY: Betty. And three years later I had my son, and that's all. I didn't want any more children.

LEVINE: And what's your son's name?

KUPINSKY: Stanley.

LEVINE: And your, and that's your, that's Kupinsky, is the last name.

KUPINSKY: Yes. Well, their name isn't Kupinsky. My younger daughter's name is Weinstock. My older daughter's name is, what's the matter with me, I don't know names any more? (there is a disturbance with the microphone)

LEVINE: Be careful. You've got the mike on the floor.

KUPINSKY: Oh, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: When we finish we can fill that in. Okay. So when you think about your life and coming here and everything, thinking back on it, what difference do you think it made in your life, the fact that you started out in Austria and came here as a young girl and . . .

KUPINSKY: Well, I had different changes. As I was getting older I had different changes. I can't say that my life was too good. I didn't have it too good. I never have it good. But I'm happy. I don't complain. This is my home now. I can't go back to Israel and live with my son. I don't want to live with anyone. I can't live with my daughters here. This is my home. It's expensive, but at least I have a roof over my head. I don't have to cook, I don't have to clean, I don't have to shop. I do my own washing. I don't have to wash linen because they change the linen. For me alone I can wash in the sink and hang it over the shower and overnight it's dry.

LEVINE: And what about this period in your life, you know, this period called old age? What's it like for you?

KUPINSKY: Well, of course, it's better when you're younger. When you get older you have all different ills and ails. When you're younger you don't feel it so much. When you get older you begin to have this, that, and this. When I lived in Israel with my husband, I fell in my apartment. The floor's made out of stone. The houses are made out of stone, even the ceilings. I fell to my left side and I broke my arm here. I'm surprised I didn't break my head or my hips. I was lucky, yet. I ended up in two hospitals, and two ambulances. And I had to pay for all that.

LEVINE: Well, when you look back on your life, what do you feel best about, or feel proud of or feel thankful for?

KUPINSKY: Well, being I was married, I have my partner, I have the children in the house before they were married. Then when they were getting married I enjoyed shopping their trousseau, helping them. See, my older daughter married a medical student, and she worked and he was going to school, Bellevue, NYU. So I used to shop, meat, I'd kosher it, I'd grind the meat for her, and I'd bring it to her house where she lived in the Bronx.

LEVINE: Do you have grandchildren now?

KUPINSKY: I have ten grandchildren, four are married. And I have two great-grandchildren in Israel, and one here. I'll show them all to you.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, is there anything else you'd like to say before we close?

KUPINSKY: Ay, if I start talking I'm good till tomorrow. I talk too much. I love to write stories, but, you know, I started writing my life story and I haven't finished it. And my daughter keeps, "Why don't you finish it so I can type it up?" I says, "I don't feel like writing."

I'm making afghans. I made so many of them for sick children, from here. They have AIDS and they're in the hospital. They don't even last for five years, and their mothers have died way before. So I made so many for here, and I made one for myself there. I made one for my daughter-in-law in Israel and their daughter, the older child, is a nurse, and she works in a hospital in Jerusalem. And she teaches the nurses, the student nurses. She was here a few years ago working in New York.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I think maybe we'll stop here.

KUPINSKY: Yeah. I think so. I'm good for another year. (they laugh)

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I think you have a nice story and a lot to say, and I'm glad to have been able to talk with you. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service on March 4, 1993. I've been talking with Anna Kupinsky.

KUPINSKY: Yeah, Kupinsky.

LEVINE: And we're here in Clifton, New Jersey, and I'm signing off.
EI-260/KUPINSKY