EI-321
FREDA (ELLIS) FAKTOROVICZ (FAKTOROW) KOVSKY
BIRTH DATE: MARCH 7, 1923
INTERVIEW DATE: 5/20/1993
RUNNING TIME: 37:32
INTERVIEWER: ELYSA MATSEN
RECORDING ENGINEER: PETER HOM
INTERVIEW LOCATION: ELLIS ISLAND RECORDING STUDIO
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 8/1994
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: CHARLES MITCHELL, 4/2009

RUSSIA, 1923
BORN ON ELLIS ISLAND

PORT OF EMBARKATION: HAMBURG
RESIDENCES: RUSSIA: CHERNIGOV
US: PHILADELPHIA, PA

MATSEN: Good morning, or good afternoon, actually. This is Elysa Matsen for the National Park Service. And today is Thursday, May 20, 1993. And I'm here at Ellis Island with Freda Kovsky. Is that how you pronounce your name correctly? Freda Kovsky was actually born on Ellis Island. Let's start with some of the formalities here. Freda, what is your maiden name?

KOVSKY: Do you want it spelled out, or pronounced?

MATSEN: Pronounce it and then, I guess, spell it for me, if you can.

KOVSKY: Well, it became Faktoro. It originally was Faktorowitz.

MATSEN: Okay.

KOVSKY: And part of the family spelled it with a C-Z, but my father spelled it with a T-Z at the end. F-A-K-T-O-R-O-T-Z, uh, W-I-T-Z.

MATSEN: Okay. And you were born on Ellis Island. That is a very interesting part of your story. And I'm going to ask you a couple of questions, I guess, about what your parents have told you about life in the old country in Russia before they came, and maybe some of the reasons why. Tell me.

KOVSKY: They both grew up in a small town called Chernigov.

MATSEN: Can you spell that? Do you know the spelling of that, or?

KOVSKY: C-H-E-R-N-I-G-O-V is probably as close as I can come to it. It's one of those towns that was practically annihilated during World War Two. But they both grew up and were married in that little town, and their families were there. And my father's, I believe, two older brothers came to the United States earlier. In 1923, quite a great many of the family members, my grandmother and an uncle and my mother's sister and

brother-in-law and a child, and quite a group came. And they left without the proper papers. It was the time of the pogroms.

MATSEN: Okay. The whole group left without the papers, or was it just your mother and father?

KOVSKY: Well, that's never been too clear, because the rest of them were allowed to remain here and my mother was not. She was very pregnant when they left and, of course, they grew up on the Fiddler on the Roof story, how they stole across borders and bribed the border guards and all that sort of thing. And they eventually sailed, it must have been a German ship, from Hamburg.

MATSEN: Do you know the name of the ship?

KOVSKY: No, I don't. In 1923. And they got here and, as I said, she was very pregnant, and they detained them until after I was born.

MATSEN: Now, they traveled from Russia to Germany and then to the . . .

KOVSKY: All through lots of small countries, whatever was there then. And finally sailed from Hamburg to the

United States.

MATSEN: And your mother was the only person who was detained, and your father stayed with her, or . . .

KOVSKY: Well, yeah. They were very young. She was eighteen, he was twenty. And I'm not sure of the entire story. She had had, I believe they called it typhus as a child and had lost a great deal of her hair, whether there was a medical problem, or whether they were deported because of the improper papers or what, I'm never quite positive on that. But they were here for six weeks and then they were shipped out. They could not go back to Russia, and Germany accepted them. And we were there for seven-and-a-half years until we came here under the quota system.

MATSEN: Now, do you remember the date that they came through? What the date, I know it's 23, but what month?

KOVSKY: I was born March the 7th.

MATSEN: You were born on March 7th.

KOVSKY: So how long? So it must have been either the end of February, or the very beginning of March of '23.

MATSEN: Okay. And you said that there was a whole group of people that came over in '23. Could you list for me the people who came with your parents?

KOVSKY: My mother's sister and her husband, and a very young child. And my, one of my father's brothers, and my father's mother.

MATSEN: Okay. What was her name? Do you know her name?

KOVSKY: Her name was Sarah Drossin, D-R-O-S-S-I-N. That was her maiden name. She was, Faktoro or Faktor, whatever they were using then.

MATSEN: Okay. And then your, the other people that came with your mother . . .

KOVSKY: And my mother's sister, her husband's name here was Hanken, and I'm not sure that that was the original name when they left Russia, because so many things were changed when they got to Ellis Island. But in the United States they were always Hanken. And my mother's maiden name was, we always spelled it W-E-S-O-L-A-Y-A, Wesolaya, or something to that effect. Which, since they were both girls their names, obviously, changed.

MATSEN: Right. Now, what were your parents' first names?

KOVSKY: My mother's name was Lena, L-E-N-A. And my father was Sol, S-O-L.

MATSEN: Do you remember anything that they told you about exactly why they were leaving? I know the pogroms, and it was a very violent period, but the story of that?

KOVSKY: That, and I believe two older brothers had already come to the United States, my father's family. And I guess everyone wanted to get to the Golden Land at that time. That was . . .

MATSEN: And there was no specific thing that made them rush without the papers, or . . .

KOVSKY: I really don't know. That sort of gets, uh . . .

MATSEN: Okay. Uh, what did they tell you? Any general story that you could tell me about life in Russia at that time?

KOVSKY: Well, my mother evidently came from a fairly well-to-do family. Her father made shoes, not repaired shoes, but manufactured shoes. And she had, I believe, three

sisters and a brother. The sister who came in '23 was the only one who got here. The rest were later annihilated. And my father's father, I believe was some sort of paint salesman or something to do with selling, who died quite young. My father was nine when his father died. But that grandmother came to the United States with them.

MATSEN: So until this violence, and everything started to disintegrate politically there, they were pretty wealthy people.

KOVSKY: To the best of my knowledge, they certainly were able to get along.

MATSEN: Do you remember anything about the food that they talked of that they ate there, or anything specific about their cooking, or what type of house they lived in?

KOVSKY: Not really, not really.

MATSEN: Just their professions.

KOVSKY: I've been kind of checking around to see what I could find out. They evidently were not at a poverty level or so. I don't, you know, they got along.

MATSEN: But their house or the area that they lived in, did they ever describe that to you, or . . .

KOVSKY: Not really other than that they lived fairly well.

MATSEN: Okay. Well, let's move on, then, I guess. What did they tell you about their voyage? Did they tell you anything about the voyage over? I know your mom was very pregnant at the time.

KOVSKY: She was very pregnant, and I suppose it was what they called steerage, and everybody was seasick, and it was not a pleasant, happy, journey. But they were very happy to get here.

MATSEN: They were happy just to be out of where they were.

KOVSKY: Oh, yes.

MATSEN: Do you have any stories about them seeing the Statue of Liberty the first time that they came?

KOVSKY: Not the first time, no.

MATSEN: Okay. But the voyage was just rough and a difficult experience.

KOVSKY: It was rough, and it was crowded, and not too

pleasant.

MATSEN: And how about when they reached Ellis Island?

KOVSKY: Well, they were very young, and I don't think they quite understood what was happening to them or why. And . . .

MATSEN: Did they have any knowledge of English whatsoever?

KOVSKY: None at all, none at all. Yiddish, it's a Jewish family. And . . .

MATSEN: What about their religion? Is there anything that you know about their religion in Russia, or what they were practicing?

KOVSKY: Judaism, which was not always happy, but I guess they came through. My kids were thrilled about the Fiddler on the Roof stories because this is what their grandparents told them about.

MATSEN: Some of it maybe was in secret when they practiced?

KOVSKY: Possibly. But I would not say that they were overly or zealously religious people, but practicing Jews.

MATSEN: Okay. So then they were on Ellis Island for about six

weeks. Had they told you any stories, maybe, about when they were on Ellis Island those six weeks, or what that was like, or . . .

KOVSKY: Well, I, it seems to me that the relatives were able to visit them while they were here, and I recall Mother talking about a hospital and being well cared for during confinement, so I guess . . .

MATSEN: So some of the relatives that got through Ellis Island came back after to visit them after they were detained there?

KOVSKY: That is possible. I don't, you know, don't know who's who any more. I'm seventy years old. (they laugh)

MATSEN: When they were detained on the island, is there any story that they give you about your birth, being born on the island? Did they tell you . . .

KOVSKY: Evidently there were no complications. I was a very large baby, about nine pounds.

MATSEN: Wow.

KOVSKY: And I, my mother loved to tell that I didn't like

water, and I pulled the nurse's glasses off in the first bath. (Ms. Matsen laughs) That became a family story. I don't know. (she laughs)

MATSEN: So the first bath you weren't enjoying yourself in the water. (they laugh)

KOVSKY: This is true.

MATSEN: The Ellis Island water. But you were in the hospital. Did she tell you anything about the hospital here?

KOVSKY: No, not really, other than that the care was good. I've never heard any complaints about that. I mean, the fact that they were sent back, of course, was a very big trauma.

MATSEN: Now, how about that, their deportation, going back. What do they tell you about that?

KOVSKY: Well, I'm not too sure. Evidently, because they left Russia without the proper papers, they had to find somewhere that would accept them. And, strangely enough, at that point Germany was evidently accepting everybody, and they had no trouble getting to Germany. So they were of the understanding that they would be coming back within a matter of weeks or a month or so.

And of course . . .

MATSEN: That didn't happen as quickly.

KOVSKY: Seven-and-a-half years before my father and I came back. My mother didn't come until four months after that.

MATSEN: But when it comes to the actual deportation, did they tell you about their journey back to Germany? Any . . .

KOVSKY: No. I always assumed it was the same type of trip that they had coming here.

MATSEN: Here, the same rough, steerage.

KOVSKY: It wasn't first class. (she laughs)

MATSEN: Right. Okay. So they traveled back to Germany. One thing I wanted to ask you about their papers. You said that they didn't have the proper papers, but the rest of the relatives that came over were sent . . .

KOVSKY: Evidently. I mean, things get a little vague at that point. I really don't know.

MATSEN: Okay.

KOVSKY: Not too many left any more.

MATSEN: Okay. What can you tell me about Berlin? You were there for seven-and-a-half years, so some of that, I imagine, you can remember. Where did you live?

KOVSKY: We lived in Berlin itself, and I remember a very nice apartment. My father was a barber.

MATSEN: So he got a job there.

KOVSKY: Since the time he was nine years old. So he got a job. He worked at Ladies Hair. There's some pictures around somewhere, where he . . .

MATSEN: So you lived right in the city.

KOVSKY: In the city of Berlin, and I went to school for the first year and part of the second, before we came back here. So that was basically my mother tongue. And we lived well there, too. The relatives here were working very hard to try and get us back over here, and I suppose it was financial help. But . . .

MATSEN: Did they sent your family or your parents money to set them up in Germany, or?

KOVSKY: To help them to get along. I don't know whether to

set them up would be anything, because my father did work.

MATSEN: Right.

KOVSKY: But it was all to . . .

MATSEN: Just for the very beginning.

KOVSKY: Get back here, exactly.

MATSEN: So he worked as a barber in Berlin. What about your mother? What can you tell me about what . . .

KOVSKY: She had, she did not work for a living, but she had a friend who owned a laundry, and she, strangely enough, and I did not inherit this, loved ironing shirts. (they laugh) So she would help out occasionally there, but she didn't have to, she didn't work at a job.

MATSEN: And how about the language, learning German for them. Did they have any knowledge of German when they came to Germany?

KOVSKY: Not at all. Their main and only, well, I shouldn't say only, because they did speak Yiddish. But they, Russian was the mother tongue, and they learned

German. They could read and write, and it was my first language.

KOVSKY: Okay. So this would be your first language, but for them it's second. But they did learn to read and write, oh.

KOVSKY: Absolutely.

MATSEN: That's wonderful.

KOVSKY: And they did that here, too.

MATSEN: They were knowledgeable of three languages.

KOVSKY: Yes.

MATSEN: What do you remember about your life? You said that you went to school in Germany for your first years. What was school like in Germany?

KOVSKY: Uh, I still have some report cards which now my grandchildren are taking in for Show And Tell. I guess, basically, like all schools, but I, you learn things like the alphabet and multiplication tables, so I could, I did quite well by the time I got back here, even though there was a big of a language barrier.

MATSEN: But you were advanced, maybe, in those other areas.

KOVSKY: Probably. Interestingly, they had a religion class at that time. This is in 1929, and early '30, where the Jewish children and the Protestant and Catholic children were separated and had instruction in their own religion in the public schools. And you . . . (there is a disturbance in the microphone) Whoops! In view of what happened in Germany afterwards . . .

MATSEN: That's very interesting they did that.

KOVSKY: Very interesting, I thought, yes.

MATSEN: So you were separated at that point, and then . . .

KOVSKY: Just for, like an hour class, I suppose. Just go to Catechism today or something like that.

MATSEN: Do you remember any of the lessons? Do you remember any of the specifics of that?

KOVSKY: Well, the report card was very good, so I guess I did okay. I don't recall too much about it.

MATSEN: Okay. You were talking to me a little bit about your house there. Can you tell me any details? What does it look like?

KOVSKY: An apartment. I remember indoor plumbing. I remember, you know, cooking, Mother cooking, and things like that.

MATSEN: What did your mom cook when you were in Germany? Do you remember some of the foods? What was your favorite dinner that she would make?

KOVSKY: Gee, unfortunately I'm sure a good eater, I don't know. (she laughs)

MATSEN: What about your birthday? Do you remember a birthday there, or?

KOVSKY: Well, there were parties, as there are here, you know, with cake and songs and presents. The first day of school I do remember because youngsters were given a large paper comb that was filled with candies and sweets and things like that, to make your school years from there on sweet, and there's a picture around somewhere of that.

MATSEN: Do you remember friends that you had? Do you remember any specific best friends?

KOVSKY: I had one friend, a little girl about my age, and like

all youngsters today you played together and you . . .

MATSEN: Any games? Do you remember a game that you would play, or . . .

KOVSKY: Nothing specific at this point in time.

MATSEN: Okay. (she pauses) Sorry for the pause here. Do you remember if your parents got any letters from relatives that were in America? Do you remember them talking about those?

KOVSKY: They got mail from America and from, she had left family in Russia, and there was mail up until about 1939.

MATSEN: And what were the stories from Russia? Do you remember what was going on?

KOVSKY: No. Just, you know, family letters, things about what was going on. Everybody seemed all right at that point until the Hitler era, and then . . .

MATSEN: The mail was shut off at that point, or no?

KOVSKY: Nothing further. Her family evidently was wiped out. There was no, nothing . . .

MATSEN: No contact at all.

KOVSKY: No contact after that, no.

MATSEN: But how about from America? Now, that was a process, right? You were trying to get back to America.

KOVSKY: Exactly. My father's brothers and sister were very busy, mail back and forth. We got mail that was in Yiddish. Otherwise there would be no common . . .

MATSEN: Language.

KOVSKY: Language. And, yes, we heard from them right along until we finally got our papers through the quota system. And then my mother couldn't come because my father had to have a job before she could come.

MATSEN: But that's interesting that he could bring you.

KOVSKY: I was considered an American citizen.

MATSEN: Oh, that's right, I forgot. You were born here, so you would be the American citizen accompanying him.

KOVSKY: Yes. I could have remained, in fact, an aunt would have liked that. But . . .

MATSEN: Why did they decide to bring you? Why did you, did

you want to do that, or . . .

KOVSKY: Well, I was six weeks old, and my parents were very young, and I guess they felt they would be coming back here very shortly, so why leave the baby.

MATSEN: I meant when you came at seven-and-a-half, yes.

KOVSKY: Well, I think in the back of their minds was the fact that they had had a problem in 1923, and should something occur that my mother couldn't get in, maybe his job wasn't good enough or something was wrong, then at least I would be here and be with family where, my mother was left in Germany with just lots of good friends but no family. But fortunately it all turned out. My mother just died two years ago, so they had a nice life here.

MATSEN: That's wonderful. Can you remember leaving your mom? Do you remember leaving her? Do you remember that?

KOVSKY: I, there's a picture somewhere in a train station. We took a train from Berlin to, to Paris, and then we sailed from Cherbourg. So everybody came to the train station, and flowers and things, friends, and everybody crying.

MATSEN: What do you remember feeling? Do you remember your feeling?

KOVSKY: Well, at seven-and-a-half I didn't feel too much. I was very close to my father and my mother both, and I just thought they were taking me to family, and mom would be here on the next boat.

MATSEN: So you were secure about that?

KOVSKY: Yes. I had no insecurities on that point. And we came in October of '30, and Mom came in January of '31, so it really wasn't . . .

MATSEN: An extremely long period of time away. So explain, you went to Paris, and you took a train from Paris to Berlin.

KOVSKY: From Berlin to Paris, and then a train from Paris to Cherbourg and the boat sailed from there.

MATSEN: Do you remember the name of the ship that you took?

KOVSKY: The Majestic. It was a Cunard White Star Line. I remember the boat. I have, even the children's menu somewhere. It was a much nicer trip, I understand from my father, than the original trip.

MATSEN: What can you tell me about the trip? What do you remember? Where did you stay?

KOVSKY: There was a cabin, and there were things going on all the time. It was much like a very large boat, I think, at that point, one of the large of its kind.

MATSEN: So it wasn't a trip on steerage like they had originally taken. It was, were you first class or second class?

KOVSKY: No, it was tourist class. But, you know, my dad was thrilled because it was so much better than the third. I mean, two of us in the room rather than loaded in like cattle. And we did see the Statue of Liberty coming back in, and my father pointed that out to me. And then pointed out his brothers and his sister standing on the pier. I will never forget that. I told that to my husband coming in today. After seven-and-a-half years he recognized everyone, and breathed a big sigh of relief when we passed Ellis Island. I think that's here, kind of stayed with him all the, then later when Mom came it was the same thing, right into New York Harbor.

MATSEN: So neither of them had to go through the experience of

staying on Ellis Island. They just kind of passed it.

KOVSKY: Right by it.

MATSEN: What do you remember about the trip, though? Were the seas rough when you were on the boat, or . . .

KOVSKY: No, it was early October, late September, just about five-and-a-half days, and I don't recall any great trauma.

MATSEN: What kind of food did they have on the boat? Do you remember that?

KOVSKY: I believe it was a British registry, so I suppose it was pretty much, (she laughs) whatever one served in England. I don't know.

MATSEN: You said you had a children's menu?

KOVSKY: A children's menu when it was fancy cakes and so. There was a party for the youngsters.

MATSEN: There were things to do for you as children on this boat.

KOVSKY: Yes.

MATSEN: Parties? What else can you tell me about that?

KOVSKY: That's about it, I guess.

MATSEN: Did you meet anyone on the boat? Were you friends with anyone?

KOVSKY: Not that I can recall at this stage. A lot has happened in my life since then. (they laugh)

MATSEN: So your parents got to not go through Ellis Island. And your father was looking and saw, and recognized you?

KOVSKY: He recognized, they were right on the pier and they were three brothers and his sister standing there, and it was emotional. But, and seeing that Statue of Liberty, we just passed it today. I said, "That's a very impressive thing."

MATSEN: What did he say to you when he saw it? Did he just pick you up and point it?

KOVSKY: Oh, yes, absolutely. That, you know, this was America. Hopefully this was the beginning of a wonderful, which it was.

MATSEN: Did he seem sad to be without your mother, seeing this? Or . . .

KOVSKY: Well, I guess there were mixed emotions. He had left her behind. They had known each other since childhood, again, very young. He was, by this time, about twenty-seven. And, but he had been separated from, his mother was alive here, seeing everybody. It was very emotional. This I recall. And grown men do cry, and it's good for them.

MATSEN: Explain to me what happened when you were leaving the boat. Now, the boat docked and . . .

KOVSKY: The boat docked, and we went through, there were questions asked. He had to have so much money. I was looking at some of the papers. I think it was something like twenty-five dollars. And he had the promise of a job. My, his brother was a barber who had his own barber shop, so he went right to work.

MATSEN: So he had to have a paper saying that, or . . .

KOVSKY: Just saying, you know, guaranteeing he wasn't going to become a burden on the country. And the whole thing was over in a matter of minutes, really.

MATSEN: Was there, you just had to walk through this?

KOVSKY: Walk through. I suppose there was Customs, whatever, but I don't recall too much of that.

MATSEN: And the rest of your family was waiting for you?

KOVSKY: They were waiting there, yes.

MATSEN: And how did they, how did you travel back from there?

KOVSKY: From New York? Most of our family lived in Philadelphia, or on the Jersey side in the Philadelphia area. And we went back there, and everybody came from everywhere. (she laughs)

MATSEN: How did you get there, though?

KOVSKY: Car.

MATSEN: They had a car.

KOVSKY: Oh, yes. An automobile.

MATSEN: And where was this, outside of Philadelphia. Where did they live? Do you know the town, or . . .

KOVSKY: My grandmother and an uncle lived in Strawberry Mansion, which is part of Philadelphia. And I, my father's oldest sister lived in Riverside, New Jersey. And I stayed with her until my mother came in in

January. I started school over there. By the time mom came I was speaking English like a native.
(she laughs)

MATSEN: Now, where did your father stay?

KOVSKY: He stayed in Philadelphia with one of the brothers, I believe, because the barber shop was in downtown Philadelphia. And, of course, back and forth all the time.

MATSEN: Okay. And he was just trying to get established.

KOVSKY: Right.

MATSEN: When your mom came, where did you live then?

KOVSKY: Philadelphia.

MATSEN: Okay. And you had an apartment? Do you remember what that looked like?

KOVSKY: No, a house. It's a section called Logan. I guess it still exists, a row house. And bedrooms, bathrooms, all that sort of thing. It was, and then I went to school in Philadelphia all through high school.

MATSEN: Do you remember when your mom came? Do you remember

that experience with your father going to meet her, or . . .

KOVSKY: Well, she stepped off the boat. They expected a greenhorn. She was very smartly dressed in a very beautifully tailored suit and a fancy hat, and they were amazed that here came this greenhorn.

MATSEN: What do you mean by greenhorn? I'm not familiar with that term.

KOVSKY: That term, I mean, if someone's from the old country you sort of expect, you know, more like you see the long dresses and things like that. She was a very smartly dressed lady. And unfortunately her child had gained a lot of weight, and she looked at me and worried about that. (she laughs)

MATSEN: Do you remember the scene? Do you remember your father greeting your mom, or . . .

KOVSKY: Oh, of course. It was happiness and joy and tears.

MATSEN: Were they worried that your mom might not get through it, or did she have all the . . .

KOVSKY: I think by that time we knew everything was fine. She

had, they were coming in with proper papers, and everything was okay.

MATSEN: Okay. We're going to have to pause for a moment so that Peter can flip over the tape, and then we'll get back to maybe the establishment of them and what they did when they were in Philadelphia. Okay?

KOVSKY: Okay.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

KOVSKY: Okay. Now we're back with Freda Kovsky. And we're talking about, her parents have already come over now, and they are living in Philadelphia. And she was telling me about their life in Philadelphia, and how they began. Now, you told me your father was a barber. Can you explain that to me, maybe describe the story of how he started in this barber shop?

KOVSKY: Well, from what I gather, when he was nine years old in Russia he was apprenticed to a barber, and he just was a barber all his life. The seven years in Germany he worked at ladies hair, but when he came here Uncle had a barber shop and he was a gentleman's barber, and

he was that until he died. He never had his own barber shop, but he worked with his brother and then he worked for someone else. He was at the Ben Franklin Hotel, always downtown Philadelphia.

MATSEN: Okay. So they kind of had their own business, though.

KOVSKY: Yep.

MATSEN: The brothers were working together, it was his brother's barber shop. What kind of hours did he work? When did he go to work and when did he come home? Do you remember?

KOVSKY: Well, I imagine, I want to say nine-to-five, whatever. It's an eight hour day. It's, since it was not a neighborhood barber shop they weren't open late at night or anything like that.

MATSEN: And how was his English when he first came? Do you remember him having any problems?

KOVSKY: He was always very, now, by this time he spoke German and Russian, and he bought all the newspapers and magazines and he would read everything, and he spoke English quite well. And mother did, too.

MATSEN: So very quickly he learned.

KOVSKY: Yes.

MATSEN: Can you describe what your father looked like for me?

KOVSKY: He was a very handsome man. (she laughs) Modestly. He had very black hair, very pale skin, beautiful blue eyes, and kind of an urban gentleman, I would say. He was, of course he always worked in nice areas and I say he spoke, he read. They both became American citizens and we all spoke English at home, and what else can I tell you? (she laughs)

MATSEN: Did they ever use their German or their Russian after they came to America, or did that go . . .

KOVSKY: Mostly if they didn't want me to understand. (she laughs) I mean, Russian I speak not at all, and when a youngster comes you want to become American and you try not to speak, I didn't use the German again until high school where I needed a foreign language.

MATSEN: That must have helped you there.

KOVSKY: I spoke basically English at home.

MATSEN: Did you remember a lot of your German, did you find, when you . . .

KOVSKY: It comes back. Not because you know, but because you hear it.

MATSEN: Oh, so it was more of an audio.

KOVSKY: Exactly.

MATSEN: What about your mom? Can you describe your mom, what she looked like, or . . .

KOVSKY: Well, she was a nice looking lady. She was a little on the heavy side. Again, she was a very outgoing person also until late in life, which is another story. But she enjoyed people. She liked to go out and do things. It was nice. She took part in school activity. If they needed cookies or something, she was there.

MATSEN: What did your mom do? Did she have a job or any type of . . .

KOVSKY: No. She had a lot of friends. She enjoyed cards, and things like that.

MATSEN: So there were a lot of social activities.

KOVSKY: Social, yeah. And when I was just past sixteen she presented me with a baby sister, so. (they laugh) We are the only two siblings.

MATSEN: So you have a much younger sister than yourself.

KOVSKY: Sixteen years younger than I, yes.

MATSEN: And there's no one in between there.

KOVSKY: No one in between. Just the two of us. She was born in Philadelphia.

MATSEN: Okay. What can you tell me about school? What was school like in America? Was it different? How was it different?

KOVSKY: Well, I found it interesting. I, and no one would speak anything but English to me, so I learned very quickly. And I was an average student. I didn't set the world on fire, but I got through. I did graduate from high school. I did go to business school for a while. I did marry quite young and raise four kids.

MATSEN: Wow. When did you, well, first, what can you tell me. Are there any differences that you can think of between Germany and America that you remember that

were . . .

KOVSKY: Nothing really that I can recall. You know, a child, and if you're not growing up and being beaten or anything it was . . .

MATSEN: In the public schools there weren't religious classes in America?

KOVSKY: No. That you had to do separately.

MATSEN: Did you go to any kind of a school outside that?

KOVSKY: Hebrew school.

MATSEN: Hebrew school, you did.

KOVSKY: Sunday school. Yes.

MATSEN: So you did that, as well as your public schooling.

KOVSKY: Oh, yes, yes.

MATSEN: Did your family go to synagogue every Saturday or . . .

KOVSKY: No, no. High holidays and, you know, things like that when you had to. But not overly so.

MATSEN: Did your mom bring any of the cooking that she had

done in Germany, did she change or . . .

KOVSKY: I really don't, it seemed to me she Americanized very quickly, and I don't really recall any kind of difference in the food background.

MATSEN: Okay.

KOVSKY: These things come later in your own life.

MATSEN: So your parents, your mom really had more of a social life and your father worked and you were in school. And then when you were sixteen your mom had another baby.

KOVSKY: Uh-huh.

MATSEN: That must have been interesting. Do you remember what that was like, or . . .

KOVSKY: Well, it was more of a toy. I was married when she was three.

MATSEN: Oh, so you were married at nineteen.

KOVSKY: Yes. We were never really at home together.

MATSEN: YOu were almost like an aunt to her, or a much older sibling. What do you remember about your family that

had come over? Were you close? Did they live close to you, or . . .

KOVSKY: Yes. They were, most of the family was in Philadelphia. And it seemed to be a close family, and even today cousins are friends and so forth. So it's . . .

MATSEN: Do you hear it, did they tell any stories? Do you remember hearing any stories about the old country and what . . .

KOVSKY: No, because most of the cousins, they were born here. And, you know, they grew up here, so the background was very similar to what most kids had. But as families go, they're not bad. (they laugh)

MATSEN: Now, when you lived in Philadelphia, what type of a neighborhood did you live in? What can you tell me about that?

KOVSKY: My parents finally moved to South Philadelphia. I grew up in South Philadelphia, but I went to Philadelphia High School for Girls, which was then in Center City. And I spent all of my weekends in Riverside, New Jersey. So it was kind of, I stayed

with this aunt when I first came, and I kept going back. I had a lot of friends in Riverside, so I did a lot of things there, too.

MATSEN: How did you meet your husband?

KOVSKY: How did I meet my husband? I think his cousin was dating my girlfriend or some such exotic thing. And we kind of liked each other.

MATSEN: (she laughs) Well, that's a good way to meet.

KOVSKY: We were both nineteen when we were married. We had just celebrated a fiftieth wedding anniversary, so.

MATSEN: Oh, congratulations.

KOVSKY: Thank you.

MATSEN: And you have four children yourself.

KOVSKY: Four children, and a dozen grandchildren. (she laughs) It's been a busy time, and going too quickly.

MATSEN: Is there any other story that you can remember that maybe . . .

KOVSKY: Not really. I mean, we, you know, you grow up on

these things, and it's a part of your life, and you don't really think of them as stories, so I really don't.

MATSEN: What was it like to see Ellis Island? Was it, was it anything that . . .

KOVSKY: Today?

MATSEN: Yes, as opposed to what your parents have described to you.

KOVSKY: A very strange feeling, I guess. I said all I can see is these two very young people with a brand new baby, and then you see all pictures of all these immigrants and you think, gee, how much has happened in the last seventy years. So it's very interesting.

MATSEN: Well, I wanted to thank you for this interview, and I'm glad that you could make it all the way from Michigan, and that we were able to accommodate you and do this interview. And I think you are the first person that we've interviewed who was ever born on Ellis Island.

KOVSKY: Oh, isn't that interesting.

MATSEN: So . . .

KOVSKY: I hope Mom is up there listening. (they laugh)

MATSEN: So this is Elysa Matsen. I'm signing off with Freda Kovsky, who came here and was born here on May the 20th, 1993, for the Ellis Island Oral History Project. Thank you.