EI-346
SARA SCHWARTZMAN KAUFMAN
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DENMARK (BORN OF RUSSIAN PARENTS), 1916
AGE 2
PASSAGE ON "THE OSCAR II"
PORT OF EMBARKATION: COPENHAGEN
RESIDENCES: COPENHAGEN, DENMARK
BRONX, NY (180) STRUMMER:.

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Tuesday, July 6, 1993. I'm on Stonehenge Lane in Albany, New York with Sarah Kaufman.

KAUFMAN: Correct.

SIGRIST: Mrs. Kaufman was born in Denmark and came to this country in 1916. She was just shy of being three years old. And we're going to talk about your parents, and why they came, all of that sort of thing. So anyway, I want to thank you very much for letting me come over.

KAUFMAN: I'm happy to have you.

SIGRIST: Mrs. Kaufman, let's begin, because I know you just had a birthday recently.

KAUFMAN: Yesterday.

SIGRIST: You're eightieth birthday was yesterday. Tell us what your birth date is.

KAUFMAN: My birth date is July 5, 1913.

SIGRIST: Right. And you were born in Copenhagen.

KAUFMAN: Copenhagen, Denmark.

SIGRIST: Now, your parents were not from there.

KAUFMAN: No, they weren't. They had traveled from Russia, they had left Russia, exactly when I'm not sure, after the 1905 pogroms, probably 1906 or '07. My sister was born in 1910 there, and I was born in 1913 in Copenhagen, Denmark.

SIGRIST: Let's talk a little bit about your parents.

KAUFMAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: What part of Russia were they from?

KAUFMAN: Oh, I should have taken that, uh, I have a little

blurb about exactly where they were born and I always forget. Ecoturnus Dar, or near Odessa. I'm not sure.

SIGRIST: Somewhere near Odessa.

KAUFMAN: I'm not sure, yes. They were working people. They were not people who came from a farm. They were, my mother was always a seamstress, an excellent one. And my father made women's shoes. Whether he made women's shoes there in Russia, I'm not sure, but I think he did.

SIGRIST: Later on.

KAUFMAN: Later on in this country he did.

SIGRIST: What was your Dad's name?

KAUFMAN: Louie, Llova. Actually it was Llova. That’s Russian.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

KAUFMAN: I think it would be L-L-O-V-A, Llova. But it became Louie, L-O-U-I-S, in this country.

SIGRIST: Do you know anything about your father's background, any family history on him at all?

KAUFMAN: He, my father had a number of sisters and brothers, but he was the only one to my knowledge and his knowledge who came to the United States.

SIGRIST: What about his parents? Do you know anything about them?

KAUFMAN: Um, yes. I have a picture of his parents, and his, they were more religious than he ever was. Exactly what they were, I don't know. I have a feeling, I don't know if it was my mother's father who was a rabbi of sorts, but I'm not sure.

SIGRIST: What was your mom's name?

KAUFMAN: Her name was Manya, M-A-N-Y-A.

SIGRIST: And her maiden name?

KAUFMAN: Her maiden name was Meltzer, M-E-L-T-Z-E-R.

SIGRIST: And do you know anything about her family?

KAUFMAN: Yes. She had, she did have a brother who came to the United States, so that was our closest relative in this country. She had no other relatives as far as I know or she knew who came to this country.

SIGRIST: What about her background in Russia? Do you know anything about where she came from or how she met your dad?

KAUFMAN: I have, I really don't know, except that they were both active radicals, and they may have met that way. That's all I can say.

SIGRIST: In their later years, did they ever talk about Russia?

KAUFMAN: Not too much, except that my father returned to Russia somewhere, some time in the fifties or sixties, to see if he could help them make good shoes. And he did go there for a period of time, a few months. I don't know whether he found it difficult to be with the Russians then. Maybe they weren't interested in the kind of shoes he wanted to teach them how to make or what. He didn't stay very long. And at that time, if it was in the fifties I was married a short time and had two children and I, living up in Albany. He was in New York. So I really didn't get or remember too much of the information about his visit to Russia.

SIGRIST: Did they ever talk about the pogroms and what that experience was?

KAUFMAN: Oh, yes. My father and mother disliked tremendously czarism, and I do, too. And that's the gist of it.

SIGRIST: You said they were radicals, right?

KAUFMAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: What kind of . . .

KAUFMAN: They were working class people, working class people who tried to get people involved in fighting such things as czarism. They wanted people to have jobs and a good life, and they didn't find it there, and that's why they left.

SIGRIST: I see. Well, tell me a little bit, do you know, you're not sure exactly when they went. Did they go directly to Copenhagen?

KAUFMAN: Oh, yes. Yes, they did.

SIGRIST: Why Copenhagen, of all places?

KAUFMAN: I think that they had friends who went there, who lived there prior to their going. That's the only reason, I think. In fact, we have a family picture showing a few other people there, and I can show it to you later if you want to see it. I believe they were

from the Soviet Union, I should say Russia, at the time. And, but . . .

KAUFMAN: Was there a large Jewish population in Copenhagen?

SIGRIST: I don't think it was very large at all. No, I don't. Because my father were always running, my parents were running away from war situations. 1914, the first World War, well, that's why they left, in 1916, before the end of the war. June was not, that was the middle of the war. My father disliked becoming a soldier or having anything to do with wars, and therefore he left that country, although I think he liked Denmark. They weren't involved, as far as I remember, in the second World War. It was the United States against Germany, wasn't it mostly?

SIGRIST: First World War.

KAUFMAN: First World War, excuse me.

SIGRIST: Well, did they ever talk about life in Copenhagen?

KAUFMAN: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: You said your dad liked it. What did he like about it?

KAUFMAN: Well, I even visited Copenhagen a couple of times myself in recent years, and I saw the building where we used to live, and it was still there when I visited in the sixties and in the seventies. I went twice. I didn't actually go into the building, but I saw the street. It happened to be called Norabrigada, which means North Broadway. And it was a very well-kept street with big high-rises, sturdy buildings and stores. Almost reminding me of what Madison Avenue in New York City looks like. That's what it reminded me of in Copenhagen.

SIGRIST: Of course, Copenhagen is an important city.

KAUFMAN: A lovely city, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember anything specifically that your parents ever talked about in later years?

KAUFMAN: No, I really don't.

SIGRIST: Did they ever talk about where they lived?

KAUFMAN: My sister knew a little more about it, because she was three years older. And my sister used to love going around town and getting lost, and she was well-known by the police department, and they knew where she

lived, so they constantly were taking her home. That's one of the things I remember. I'm going to tell you everything I remember, which isn't much. And that's one of the things I remember.

SIGRIST: What's your sister's name?

KAUFMAN: Clara, C-L-A-R-A.

SIGRIST: And did Clara ever tell you anything about when you were born?

KAUFMAN: I don't recall ever asking her that. She was only three. People, at eighty-three, my sister is eighty-three, don't really remember. (she laughs) I know the stories about her always getting lost, because she loved walking around and finding new streets and investigating the area, but that's what I remember.

SIGRIST: So your parents lived in Copenhagen for roughly six years or so?

KAUFMAN: More than that. Yes, because my sister was six when we left, and they lived there possibly two or three years before she was born.

SIGRIST: Now, were there just the two kids?

KAUFMAN: Yes, just the two of us.

SIGRIST: And as far as you know, they had no family in Copenhagen, or friends.

KAUFMAN: No, they didn't, definitely not.

SIGRIST: You said that your father wanted to come to America because of the rumblings of war that had broken out at that time.

KAUFMAN: Right, right.

SIGRIST: Do you . . .

KAUFMAN: He was never taken into service. In fact, we're talking about war. I know that he had one bad ear because he injured himself purposely to avoid going into the Russian service.

SIGRIST: So he was that dead set against any kind of service.

KAUFMAN: Oh, yes. Yes. Especially under czarism. He might, if he had lived under the Soviet society, I'm not sure what he would do, but I think he would have preferred it.

SIGRIST: That would have been more his philosophy.

KAUFMAN: Yes, yes. He was a more progressive person.

SIGRIST: Why America? Why did they want to come to America?

KAUFMAN: They did have a few friends who had left Denmark, I believe, and moved to The Bronx, New York, and that's where they moved. They lived in Upper Bronx. They didn't live in the ghetto area in Manhattan, as most immigrants did. They came right up to The Bronx. We lived on 180th Street.

SIGRIST: But again, they had no family as such.

KAUFMAN: No, no. They never, my mother had a brother.

SIGRIST: She did.

KAUFMAN: But he lived in Ohio.

SIGRIST: What was he doing here, do you know?

KAUFMAN: My mother's brother was a tailor, you see? And my mother was a seamstress, he was a tailor. It ran in the family, I guess.

SIGRIST: What was his name?

KAUFMAN: His name was B-O-R-I-S, Meltzer.

SIGRIST: And why Ohio? How did he get to Ohio?

KAUFMAN: I don't know. I really don't know. I don't know how he got there, I really don't.

SIGRIST: So she at least had that connection.

KAUFMAN: She had that connection. In fact, when I was six years, going on six, my parents thought they would move to Ohio. We went to Dayton, and I started the first grade. I remember having crayons and little books that I took with me to the school, and then suddenly my parents changed their minds and we went back to The Bronx. We still had the apartment. It was a test, and they decided not to stay there.

SIGRIST: Let me ask you some specific questions about your mother and father. Your father's first name was what, again?

KAUFMAN: Louie, Llova or Louie, in the United States, L-O-U-I-S, Louie.

SIGRIST: And then your maiden name would be . . .

KAUFMAN: Schwartzman, S-C-H-W-A-R-T-Z-M-A-N. It was always Schwartzman.

SIGRIST: Let's start off by . . .

KAUFMAN: Which means Schvartz Man or Black Man. My parents were dark-complexioned. (she laughs) But that name is from previous generations, I guess, although I didn't know any of them.

SIGRIST: You sort of just answered the question I was going to ask you. Can you describe for me in words what your dad looked like?

KAUFMAN: Oh, he was a very good-looking man. Tall and thin, dark. He had not too thick hair, but he wasn't bald ever, really. He'd never wore glasses. He was a little hard of hearing in one ear, but I don't think he ever had to, ever knew that he was a little deaf.

SIGRIST: Tell me about what his personality was like as you remember him.

KAUFMAN: Oh, my father was a gad about. He was a very gay type of person, meaning open and outgoing, which my mother wasn't. And it so happens unfortunately that the two of them were not really that happy together, and my father, when he couldn't find work he would even go as far as Chicago to see if he could find work in the

shoe trade. And eventually after I was married he stayed, he didn't leave my mother until after I was married, and he went to California to live.

SIGRIST: To start a whole new life.

KAUFMAN: A new life. My father was married twice after that, yes.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about your mother's personality. She was more reticent.

KAUFMAN: My mother, much more reticent, a very wonderful person, very kind and helping and always worked. My sister and I kept the house. I cleaned, my sister cooked. Therefore I'm a better cleaner, well, she's a good cleaner, but I used to clean and my sister is a much better cook and baker than I. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: What did your mother look like?

KAUFMAN: My mother was pretty, very pretty. I'll show you a picture. She was very pretty, but she was not a terribly outgoing person, as my father was. He was much more friendly and he would like to dance with any stranger. If we went anywhere he would take a hold of another woman and dance with her. My mother didn't do

that.

SIGRIST: Nor did she like that much.

KAUFMAN: Uh, well, she never, I never heard her, I never saw her angry or yelling. She accepted things. And when he divorced her, she never fought it, but she accepted it.

SIGRIST: So they had friends here in the U.S. What, it was June, you said that they left Copenhagen. Do you know what ship they came on?

KAUFMAN: Yes, of course. The Oscar II. King Oscar II.

SIGRIST: Do you have any personal recollections of either the end of Copenhagen or being on the ship?

KAUFMAN: Oh, yes, but not a real recollection. I wrote it in my little blurb on the . . .

SIGRIST: About the underpants?

KAUFMAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Tell us.

KAUFMAN: Oh, yes. I tell that to everybody.

SIGRIST: This is on the Oscar II?

KAUFMAN: Oh, absolutely. I don't remember it, because I wasn't three, and maybe some children or grownups remember what happened to them at three, but this is the story and a true story that my parents always told me, and I think my sister remembered it because I was, she was six. I was running around the deck. I don't remember exactly what spot of the ocean it was, whether were close to the United States, or whether we were in the middle of the ocean, but I was running around the deck and I fell overboard, and a very nice sailor reached out for me. Whether he had to climb over the deck or what, but he reached out for me, and I, my pants were caught on a nail on the side of the ship, and I wasn't injured. And I say I love sailors, I love the sea, and I've never been seasick in my life. And I've made many ship trips around the world.

SIGRIST: Saved by your underpants and a sailor.

KAUFMAN: Right, right. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Did your parents or your sister ever talk about any other details about the ship?

KAUFMAN: I don't recall that at all, no. I don't. They may have. I haven't asked my sister. I asked her recently if she remembers anything. When my father went back to the Soviet Union she couldn't pinpoint a date. Neither could I either. Some time in the fifties or sixties, and she'd, I really don't know anything other than what I'm telling you. Maybe we have poor memories or what, but this is what I remember.

SIGRIST: Now, did they, did they talk at all about Ellis Island or any of that?

KAUFMAN: I, no. Because they didn't have trouble coming through at all. Not to my knowledge at all. And when I visited Ellis Island a couple of, when it first opened a year or two ago, I saw all these pictures of people, incoming from all the countries of the world, I guess, but I didn't see any reference to my parents at all, although I may not have looked carefully enough, but I don't think they were.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit, then, about setting up life in New York, in The Bronx.

KAUFMAN: I see. They went to The Bronx. We had a one-bedroom

apartment one floor up in a tenement building, East 180th Street between Prospect and Clinton Avenues. And . . .

SIGRIST: Did you live in that (?).

KAUFMAN: We lived there for about thirteen years.

SIGRIST: Describe the apartment for me.

KAUFMAN: Wait, we lived there ten years, I should say. I was about thirteen when we left.

SIGRIST: Okay. Walk me through that apartment.

KAUFMAN: So, yes. The apartment, I can remember it very clearly. You walk through a narrow dark hallway, and on the left side was the bathroom, and you kept going into a main room, which we always had as a dining room, not a living room. The important thing was to be able to eat, so we had a round dining room table and chairs. I don't think we had a couch in that room. Maybe we had a sideboard or something to put dishes on or dishes in. To the left of that, as you walk through that room, was the kitchen. It had a window, it was a nice kitchen. Workable. We did have a table near the window. I could always look out and

see the back of other houses that were around the corner on Clinton Avenue, and we used to make friends and even yell through the kitchen window to other people, other friends who lived around the corner on Clinton Avenue and faced that courtyard. Then when you walk through the dining room, to the left was the kitchen. You kept walking. There was the bedroom. The bedroom, oh, there were two bedrooms, I should say. One bigger bedroom faced the front of the apartment, which was East 180th Street. The dining room had no window except the lightness that came through the bedroom window and the kitchen window. To the right of the main bedroom, which my parents had, was a very small room in which my sister and I slept, and that faced the fire escape, that also had a window and a fire escape. So actually we had two front windows and a courtyard window to the kitchen, and a little window for the bathroom.

SIGRIST: How was the apartment lit? Did you have electricity or gas light?

KAUFMAN: Oh, I, mostly electricity, I think. Maybe at the very beginning. I don't remember gas, but it might have been. But I know we had electricity, yeah. And that

would have been when we moved in 1916, up to 1929.

SIGRIST: So you looked into that apartment for a long time.

KAUFMAN: Well, it was ten years, just about ten years. Then we moved to a more modern place on Prospect Avenue and 175th Street. It was a brand-new house, building. And it wasn't far from a park. Oh, Prospect? What park was it called again? I forgot what it was called. Anyway, it was about 175th Street and Prospect Avenue.

SIGRIST: Let's talk about the first apartment.

KAUFMAN: Yeah, the first apartment.

SIGRIST: Describe the neighborhood for me.

KAUFMAN: The neighborhood, oh. There were stores, and there was a, there were car tracks. When we first moved there was a horse and buggy station across the street from us, because they had horses and buggies. And then they had the cars, car tracks, with, I guess they worked on electricity.

SIGRIST: A trolley.

KAUFMAN: A trolley car. First I think a horse-drawn trolley

car, I think, when we first moved there, because I know there were horses in the neighborhood. And then it was electrical. It was a trolley car. And there were stores, there was a kind of grocery store in the next house. There were two buildings very much similar. 734 East 180th Street and 738. Our house had an ice cream parlor under it, and the other house, 738, had this grocery store, so that was convenient. And there was also a little stationary store where you could get newspapers and candies and things of that sort.

SIGRIST: Was this a Jewish neighborhood?

KAUFMAN: Not necessarily. A mixed. We had non-Jewish friends in that apartment building. It was four, three floors or four floors and we lived one floor up. There were Jewish people and Christian people, and the same next door. I know I did have Jewish friends who lived in the next house, and I remember something wonderful she did for me, when I was in maybe the second or third grade, when I was about eight. She made a special birthday party for me and invited some other children, which I always remember. And if you asked me to look through my trunk, I could find the little card in

which she said, "Happy Birthday" to me, because I always have saved very important papers.
(she laughs)

SIGRIST: What, tell me a little bit about the job your father got. You said he was . . .

KAUFMAN: He used to work and make shoes. You would know if you lived in New York. I. Delman Shoes? I. Miller and Delman, D-E-L-M-A-N. Delman Shoes are still in existence.

SIGRIST: So he worked for a larger corporation?

KAUFMAN: Yes, yes. They made hand-made good shoes for very wealthy women. I. Miller shoes are still sold down on Fifth Avenue. Well, my father was so conscious of shoes that my sister and I always wore very good shoes. No matter how poor we were, we never starved. My mother always worked also. She worked as a seamstress. She did all handwork, even, including the seams of women's dresses and the hems and everything. She made dresses for Wasserman. I remember this, because it was very important in our lives. Wasserman existed for many, many years, this company, and they made beautiful clothes for women who went to Florida

for the winter. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Could she, now, did she do that at home?

KAUFMAN: No, no. She went out to work.

SIGRIST: She went out to work.

KAUFMAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever talk about that experience?

KAUFMAN: Oh, yes. My mother loved sewing, and she made all our clothing. My sister happens to have gotten the love of sewing from my mother. I didn't make shoes for my father. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Is there a dress that your mother made for you that sticks out in your mind that you remember vividly?

KAUFMAN: Well, my, I remember a dress that I was married in that she may have had a hand in.

SIGRIST: Maybe something when you were younger.

KAUFMAN: Oh, when I was younger.

SIGRIST: When you were younger.

KAUFMAN: Oh, she used to make little skirts and dresses, but I

can't actually picture. She always made clothes for us, too. I don't know why she would want to do that when she worked so hard sewing all day long, but she always sewed for us, too.

SIGRIST: Did your parents speak Yiddish or Russian or . . .

KAUFMAN: They spoke Russian and Yiddish, and not too much English. My father learned English better. For some reason or other he was more capable at it.

SIGRIST: Did you know how your parents did that. Do you know how they went about learning English?

KAUFMAN: I think just by listening to people. I don't think they ever went to school. I'm sure they didn't.

SIGRIST: Did they ever learn any Danish?

KAUFMAN: I know one Danish word, and I'm not linguistic. I guess I took after my parents. I think they knew more Danish, because they did live there about ten years, eight or ten or something like that. So I remember the one word that I used constantly is the thick part of the milk. If you boil milk it gets that creamy thick part that's called fleude. Now, I hope a Dane doesn't read about that and say I've remembered the

wrong word, but I'm sure that's it. Fleude.

SIGRIST: Funny that you would remember that.

KAUFMAN: I don't know why. Maybe my mother always heated milk for us, and maybe I either liked or disliked that thick part. I know I always take it off if I ever warm up milk. I don't like it. But that was called fleude. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: When you were growing up, from your vantage point now, when you were growing up did you feel you were American? Russian?

KAUFMAN: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: I mean, what did you feel your heritage was?

KAUFMAN: No, we didn't learn Russian. I . . .

SIGRIST: Not language, but who you were.

KAUFMAN: Uh, well, I always felt that I was very Americanized, but I always kept an interest in the fact that my parents were Yiddish and we were, my sister and I were born in Denmark, and they were born in Russia. I never hid any of those facts, but they weren't terribly Americanized as regard learning the language.

I think they wanted to, but they weren't very capable.

SIGRIST: What about their outward appearance?

KAUFMAN: Oh, they looked wonderful.

SIGRIST: Did they Americanize as soon as . . .

KAUFMAN: My mother made beautiful clothing. My father loved to dress with beautiful suits. I'll show you a picture of them. I have it hanging on the wall inside.

SIGRIST: So that was important to them?

KAUFMAN: Yes. They, oh, clothing and looking well was important, although they weren't spendthrifts, and they didn't have that much money. My mother could make clothing cheaply. If she went out to buy it in Wasserman she couldn't afford it, or even in the good store. You asked me about a dress, well, it was a dress that I got married in. It was not a white dress, and it was a dress that she got from Wasserman over which she probably had some fingers. I don't know if she made the whole thing, but I think I still have part of that dress. It was a dark grey dress, a pale grey, almost blue in color, and it was very

dressy and lovely, but it wasn't a real wedding dress. But I wore it, because I didn't have a very big wedding for myself.

SIGRIST: Tell me some of the Russian customs, if any, that your parents maintained in the house. Maybe cooking or music, or something along that line.

KAUFMAN: Oh, yes, they did. My parents loved good music. Always, we always listened to, what is it, why am I forgetting the word. Not jazz, not popular music, but concert classical music, and I still love it. And they loved Russian music, which I do, too.

SIGRIST: Could either of them play an instrument?

KAUFMAN: No, but my sister started to learn violin, and I had piano lessons as a young child, and we had a piano in the house. I had a piano until after I was married. My children, my daughter started to play piano. None of us was very, very good. We felt it didn't pay to spend time on something we weren't really great at.

SIGRIST: What about, is there a Russian song or a lullaby or something that they might have taught you that you might remember?

KAUFMAN: Yes. (she sings in Russian) I'm sure I'm singing it incorrectly, but you can see, you can hear that it's Russian. Now, I haven't even thought of that for years. But I'm not very good at remembering things.

SIGRIST: Do you . . .

KAUFMAN: About the Russian. (Russian) I think it has to do with a little child. I don't know. (she laughs) I'm not sure I know what it is. About children and about learning and being good and that sort of thing.

SIGRIST: Is that something that your mother taught you as a kid?

KAUFMAN: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. (she laughs) Ooh! (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about, when you were a girl, now, let's keep it fairly young, what did you guys do for fun?

KAUFMAN: I had the most gorgeous baby carriage that my parents brought back from Copenhagen. It was this high, grey in color, and it had the most beautiful doll, a doll that was bigger than a child. And everybody in that street, whenever they saw it, just marveled about that

baby carriage, and I wonder what we did with it. We finally gave it away or did something, I don't know why I ever, we ever did that, because I think of that carriage.

SIGRIST: So they brought back . . .

KAUFMAN: Oh, yeah, from, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you know of anything else that they brought with them to Copenhagen?

KAUFMAN: Oh, I'm sure they did. I recently, oh, you would have seen it. I had it right, where that chair was, up until a year or two ago I have a table that we brought, it was a dark mahogany with engravings and little designs on it with three legs, and with a little base where you could put something between the three legs. And we always, I always thought that that table was made in Copenhagen. My sister told me not too long ago that my parents made a mistake. They thought it was made there, but it was really imported from the United States. They bought it there in Copenhagen, brought it back to the United States, and I had it until last year. It started to wobble and break down. It was pretty old. It was about . . .

SIGRIST: As your precious Danish table . . .

KAUFMAN: That was, it didn't look American. I'd never seen any table like that. So maybe my sister is wrong. Maybe it really was Danish. I don't know. But . . .

SIGRIST: That's a good story.

KAUFMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Anything else that you can remember that you brought?

KAUFMAN: Well, they brought a lot of pictures. I have a few pictures that they brought from the other country, from Russia, and from Copenhagen, Denmark. And . . .

SIGRIST: Your parents were very international, in a way, weren't they?

KAUFMAN: Well, even though they didn't, they learned the English language, but they didn't write it well. They didn't really converse it well. I mean, they weren't like Americans.

SIGRIST: Could they read and write Russian?

KAUFMAN: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, both of them. Oh, yes, definitely. They were good readers. And they read, my mother

always read a Jewish newspaper. I don't think my father read a Jewish newspaper.

SIGRIST: Which would have been in Yiddish.

KAUFMAN: In Yiddish, and it was called The Forward. And there was another, there was a competing Jewish, the Jewish Something-or-other. I've forgotten. But The Forward or another paper that she read.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: When you were growing up, or maybe when you were in high school, was it ever, were you ever embarrassed by having immigrant parents?

KAUFMAN: No. I don't remember anything like that. Because many people have immigrant parents. I don't remember talking about it, but I knew many Americanized people who didn't have immigrant parents. But it never bothered me. I loved my parents. They were very good to us. They didn't always make, my mother made a good living. My father was very often out of work. Because my mother's company became part of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, ILGWU.

But the men could never get the companies to unionize, and my father worked very hard to get the shoe industry unionized. I don't think to this day it is. I'm not sure, but I know he often lost his job because of his trying to get the workers to strike.

SIGRIST: In that kind of a situation, did you or maybe your sister have to go to work and contribute money to the household?

KAUFMAN: My sister went to work after high school, and even during high school she was a, at sixteen she started to work as a saleswoman at some nice shops, women's shops. However, I don't know how it was that I became pampered. I went to college. It was, the city, it was a city college in New York City. It was called The Teacher Training College, and then it became, then it was closed. It was during the '30s, and it was the Depression, so that City College was closed. It was a college for teaching, to become teachers. So I went there two-and-a-half years. I transferred to Hunter College in New York, and I graduated with a Bachelor of Science and Education.

SIGRIST: Was that important to your parents that you . . .

KAUFMAN: I think they loved that idea, and I liked it, too, but I was glad when I finished. But when I finished, it was 19, January '35. There were no teaching jobs. There were ten thousand people on a waiting list called the license number one. And no license number one was going to be given for I don't know how many years. So I had taken commercial courses, and I became a secretary, and I worked as a secretary for three years between '35 and '38, and then I was married in September of '38.

SIGRIST: What did your first job pay?

KAUFMAN: My first job paid nine hundred, uh, seven hundred dollars a year. What would that be? Fourteen dollars a week, or less? I can't think that out.

SIGRIST: Well, it's less than a hundred dollars a month.

KAUFMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you have to contribute that money to your household?

KAUFMAN: Oh, part of it. Because in those days it didn't seem like so little. You could buy more for that money than you can here if you're earning forty thousand a

year. That's how it is.

SIGRIST: We started talking about cooking, and then we got sidetracked. Tell me about what kinds of foods you ate. Were they Russian? Were they Danish? Were they traditional Jewish foods?

KAUFMAN: A lot of it, my mother, they were not religious Jews. They didn't go to temple. My sister did go for a very short period of time to learn Yiddish or Hebrew, but I think it was probably less than one semester, and I never went.

SIGRIST: So what kinds of foods did your mom make?

KAUFMAN: My mother did a lot of Jewish cooking. She, my mother was a great cook.

SIGRIST: What was your favorite when you were a kid?

KAUFMAN: Ooh, I remember her doing a lot of wonderful things right on the oven, or in the oven. She made the most marvelous meat, meat loaves. I don't like meatloaves today, but what she made was a lot of wonderful dough, rolled dough into very fancy shapes. I forgot what you, kugels, I think they call it, or I've forgotten now what you call it. But they were delicious. And I

think that was either Jewish or Russian. I'm not sure they were Danish in origin.

SIGRIST: Was there any kind of a trace of the Danish culture in your parents at all?

KAUFMAN: I don't, I wouldn't say so. Maybe we liked Danish pastries. (she laughs) Things like that.

SIGRIST: But they were solidly Russian.

KAUFMAN: I think, I think so, during the ten year, the eight or ten years that they were there. Maybe it was, my sister was six when she got there, and she was, she was six when she came here. She was born there. So I think it was approximately ten years that they lived in Denmark.

SIGRIST: Do you remember an instance when you were a child or your sister was a child that you did something wrong, you got into trouble?

KAUFMAN: Well, my sister always was getting lost, but as for me I don't really remember.

SIGRIST: What I was driving at was your parents' conceptions of discipline with the children.

KAUFMAN: I don't think they were harsh at all, no. I don't recall anything like that.

SIGRIST: Was there something about America that they really didn't like?

KAUFMAN: Oh, well, I guess maybe the job situation, the fact that my father couldn't really work constantly. Uh, what didn't they like?

SIGRIST: Did they ever want to return to Denmark?

KAUFMAN: No, oh, never. No, never, never. I know we, my father loved to swim, and we used to go to City Island when we were children. If you're interested in that, City Island was in The Bronx on the bays, and I remember that quite well. That I remember, because I think it was between the age of three and thirteen when we lived in The Bronx. And we always lived in The Bronx, but we lived in the part of The Bronx where you got to, uh, that area more easily on trolley cars.

SIGRIST: Would that have been sort of a common entertainment for people to do . . .

KAUFMAN: Oh, yes, City . . .

SIGRIST: Like Coney Island, sort of?

KAUFMAN: Yeah. That, City Island was for Bronxites. Yeah. And my father was an excellent swimmer. I don't know that my mother was a swimmer at all. So that was what happened in those early years. I really don't, my father, of course, always tried to find new work, so he was in Chicago looking for jobs.

SIGRIST: So he was often away from the family, then.

KAUFMAN: Yes, he was. And he didn't often succeed. He was one (she laughs) the thing that he didn't like, of course, was when he was trying to organize a union he was arrested. And he was put in jail for a day. I mean, I don't know if my tears, when I visited the jail, made them send him home, but they really had nothing on him. And so that wasn't a terrific experience, but I remember something about that. But that was when I think I was beginning college, training college, not Hunter. So what year was that? That was in the late, that was early thirties, and that's when they had trouble with unions and trying to get work. It was the Depression,

SIGRIST: It was a very tough time.

KAUFMAN: My father, oh, I'll tell you, he tried very hard to work. My father was not a businessman, but he opened up a little fruit store in the East Bronx, not, farther East Bronx, where we didn't live. We had to go by trolley car to that area, and he was not a good businessman. He would let the children select candies and fruit and go out without paying. He was so kindhearted. He had to close down. He didn't make anything. He lost whatever he wanted to put into it.

SIGRIST: Well, and this, you smile when you're telling this story, but this must have been a very frustrating situation.

KAUFMAN: I suppose so, but I guess he knew he was not a businessman. He worked, he was a creative individual making beautiful shoes for women. But he never owned a shoe place, you see. He wasn't an owner. He was the worker.

SIGRIST: Was he very politically oriented?

KAUFMAN: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Tell me some of his causes.

KAUFMAN: Well, trying to organize unions. That's all. I don't think he, there were any parties that they belonged to, although we were called all sorts of things in our neighborhood when people knew how radical we were.

SIGRIST: What would they call you?

KAUFMAN: Communists, or Socialists. I didn't mind Socialists or even Communists. Communist wasn't used that much in those years. I think they would say radicals. That's what they would say.

SIGRIST: Would you say that this was the sort of prejudice that you experienced more often maybe than some sort of anti-Semitic kind of . . .

KAUFMAN: I don't recall any anti-Semitism. I don't.

SIGRIST: Just the fact that your father had this reputation.

KAUFMAN: Oh, yeah, of wanting to organize workers to have jobs. My mother didn't have that trouble because her union organized very well. My mother walked with President Roosevelt's wife, Eleanor Roosevelt, in one of the May Day parades. She was next to, not that my mother was her friend, she just, I remember her saying, "I walked

with Eleanor Roosevelt in the May Day parade." Yeah.

SIGRIST: It was probably a great honor for her.

KAUFMAN: Yeah. So that's, my mother had much less trouble in her work life than my father.

SIGRIST: What is inherently Russian about you? (Mrs. Kaufman laughs) Here you are, Sarah Kaufman, eighty years old in Albany, New York in 1993.

KAUFMAN: I'll tell you what.

SIGRIST: What is inherently Russian?

KAUFMAN: Inherently was that I wanted to see that country. And I traveled a great deal and never got there until 1988. That's only five years ago. And how did I get there? I read The New York Times, and on one Sunday in The New York Times there was a wonderful story about The Orient Express train taking a nineteen-day trip from Paris to Hong Kong going through the Soviet Union. I said, "That's for me." Well, I happened to have enough money to pay $20,000 for the nineteen day trip, but it turned out to be an around the world trip. I had to get to Paris, and after Hong Kong I went to visit what I call my Japanese daughter who

lives in Osaka, Japan. And I visited with her a few days, and then I went up north to the other Sapporo in Hokkaido County, Hokkaido place, which is the northern part of Japan. And from there I went to Hawaii for a vacation for a week, and I took a ship trip. I never get seasick, so I love ships. I took a ship trip around the island of Hawaii, the Hawaiian islands. Don't ask me to name the islands. I can't recall them all. But I had a lovely time, and then I flew back to Chicago where my daughter happened to be living then. And then I flew back to Albany and it was an around the world trip in sixty days instead of nineteen. But when I was in the Soviet Union it was most of that Orient Express trip.

SIGRIST: Tell me about how you felt about being in Russia.

KAUFMAN: Well, I didn't see the bad features as people see it. Well, '88, Gorbachev had just opened up the country, I think. And to me it looked like a perfectly great country. It didn't seem as if it was poverty stricken. It didn't seem as if people were starving. There weren't any street people. But everybody seemed to be living in homes.

SIGRIST: Did you feel any kind of emotional attraction to it all?

KAUFMAN: Well, I didn't meet anybody that I knew, and I didn't, I can't talk Russian, but during the segment of going through the Soviet Union from Moscow to, through the Lake Baikal, which I loved, and then down into Beijing, China through that few days. Maybe it was ten days of the nineteen-day trip, I think. Something like that. That segment, there were two people, Russians, who were our guides, who spoke English very well. Now, the man who was our guide I heard eventually came to the United States to live. I didn't hear anything about the woman. But they were helpful, and they talked, they were very friendly with us. And maybe I'm not, maybe I don't delve into people's natures, but the Soviet Union seemed like a pretty good place to me in 1988.

SIGRIST: How do you think your parents would have felt . . .

KAUFMAN: If they went there then?

SIGRIST: Or if they knew you had gone to Russia.

KAUFMAN: Oh, I don't think they would have been angry at all.

Oh, no. It was the Soviet Union, not Russia, then. (she laughs) Now it's back to Russia. Now, frankly, I'm not so sure I love it as well now as I loved what I saw in 1988, only five years ago. I happened to admire Gorbachev and his wife. I thought they were trying to open up the place and getting a little more rapport with other countries, and it just didn't work out with him, I think.

SIGRIST: Are you glad that your parents came to America?

KAUFMAN: Oh, yes. Of course.

SIGRIST: If you had stayed in Denmark . . .

KAUFMAN: Except that I really, I always used to say there are times when I wasn't that fond of this country and what it was doing, and I would say, "I wish I knew the Danish language. I can't go back to a country and not know the language." Although most of the people there know English. Foreigners know English better than the Americans know foreign languages. And I can understand why. We were so huge, and we're not next door as England is to France to know French and English, as they do, most of them.

SIGRIST: But in your mind you've actually considered going back to Denmark.

KAUFMAN: I would have loved going back to Denmark. I like the smallness of the country, the friendliness, and I really do. I really do like that. But I have to know the language, and I never thought I could learn it properly. But I really love this country, and I love being here. My children were born here. And I visited almost every nook and cranny of this country. I've gone across the country by train twice, and over by plane once or twice. And I certainly wouldn't leave it. So, but I do like the idea that I was born in Copenhagen, Denmark.

SIGRIST: Well, this is a good place for us to end.

KAUFMAN: It was fun.

SIGRIST: Mrs. Kaufman, I want to thank you very much.

KAUFMAN: You're welcome.

SIGRIST: You remembered a lot.

KAUFMAN: I imagine so. Maybe you would have liked to hear more about some things, but I couldn't remember certain

things.

SIGRIST: Tonight is when everything will start coming to you.

KAUFMAN: (she laughs) That I've forgotten. I'll say, "Oh, I didn't tell him that!"

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Sarah Kaufman in Albany, New York on July 6, 1993. Thank you.

KAUFMAN: Thank you very much.