

**EI-388**

**MORRIS SOKOL**

**BIRTH DATE: APRIL 23, 1918**

**INTERVIEW DATE: SEPTEMBER 15, 1993**

**RUNNING TIME: 44:35**

**INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.**

**RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME**

**INTERVIEW LOCATION: ELLIS ISLAND RECORDING STUDIO**

**TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 5/1998**

**TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: IRV SILBERG**

**PALESTINE, 1920**

**AGE 2**

**SHIP: "THE GOTTHELF"**

**PORT: CHERBOURG**

**RESIDENCES:**

- **PALESTINE: SHÁARE CHESED**
- **US: CHICAGO, IL; DES PLAINES, IL**

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Wednesday, September 15, 1993, and I'm at the Ellis Island Recording Studio using the digital machine with Morris Sokol. Mr. Sokol came from Palestine in 1920. He was just shy of three years old when he came. Anyway, good morning.

SOKOL: Good morning.

SIGRIST: Can we begin, Mr. Sokol, by you giving me your full name?

SOKOL: Morris Sokol, full name.

SIGRIST: No middle names or anything.

SOKOL: None whatsoever.

SIGRIST: And your birth date, please?

SOKOL: April 23, 1918.

SIGRIST: And can you tell me where you were born?

SOKOL: In Jerusalem.

SIGRIST: And can you tell me why your family was in Jerusalem?

SOKOL: Yes. We were born there. My parents were born there. Grandparents were born in Palestine. And we go back about six generations on one side and seven on the other. So go back quite a long ways.

SIGRIST: Where, ultimately, had your family been from?

SOKOL: Uh, prior to coming to Palestine, I have no idea. That goes back a couple of hundred years, and I really couldn't trace it back that far.

SIGRIST: I see. Were you born right in the city of Jerusalem?

SOKOL: Right.

SIGRIST: What was your Mother's name?

SOKOL: Jenny, her maiden name was Wortisky.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

SOKOL: W-O-R-T-I-S-K-Y.

SIGRIST: And can you tell me a little bit about your Mother's background, what was her family background?

SOKOL: Uh, her father was a stonecutter and, as a matter of fact, he was killed. There was a bomb that was thrown, and he was killed in the course of his work begi--- prior to World War One.

SIGRIST: And what about her mother's family?

SOKOL: I really don't know much about them.

SIGRIST: So your Grandparents, your Mother's parents, you never knew.

SOKOL: No.

SIGRIST: And what was your Mom's personality like?

SOKOL: Very outgoing, very giving, very interesting person, very energetic.

SIGRIST: When you think back to being a child --- and think back to America, being a child; is there a story about your mother that sticks out in some way?

SOKOL: Well, there are many stories. I mean, she, as I said, when we were in Ellis Island we came--- first came here ---- I had one little outfit that I was wearing, and she would launder it every night. She'd rinse it out, and the story ----- I don't remember it happening --- that portion of it. I remember other things about Ellis Island, but that she recounted over the years that every night she would launder this outfit so that I would have something clean to wear in the morning. And that was quite an interesting thing.

SIGRIST: Did she ever tell you any information about your birth?

SOKOL: Well, I was born in a house. And -- as a matter of fact --- in 1967, I visited Israel and we found the house where I was born, where my parents had been living. And there were people living there at the time that had been living there at the time that my parents were there. So they remembered us very well.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what they told you?

SOKOL: Oh, that my parents were good people, and that they were nice to live next to. But that goes back --- as I say --- I recall my Mother telling me that when I was born ----'course there was no electricity in the house. And I was born on a Friday night by the light of a little kerosene lamp in the house, and that was a little bit difficult at the time. But, obviously, we made it.

SIGRIST: Are you the only child that was born in Palestine?

SOKOL: Yes.

SIGRIST: Um, what was your Dad's name?

SOKOL: My Dad's name was Samuel Harri ---- Harry Sokol.

SIGRIST: Samuel Harry Sokol.

SOKOL: Harry Sokol, right.

SIGRIST: And let me ask you the same question, what was your Father's background?

SOKOL: My Father was born in *Tsfat*, Safad, Palestine. And he grew up in the Pal---Safad area. And he left Palestine as a young lad in--- twelve or thirteen years old. And for, some parental problems, his --- my grandmother had left him there. And she had come to the United States in about 1898, I guess. And he was six years old at the time. And he was raised by a grandfather who was a bit of a tyrant. And he left at the age of about fourteen and wandered through Europe for a few years, came back. Then he wi--- was in Egypt for a few years and came back --- wound up in Jerusalem, where he met my Mother.

SIGRIST: Can you be more specific about why your grandmother went to America?

SOKOL: Yes. My Grandfather was not able to get along with his father-in-law, who was my Great-grandfather. They were pretty tyrannical, as I said. And wanted to come to this country. And my Great-grandfather said, "You can go," but he

won't let my Grandmother go. And he was powerful enough over here -- influential enough --- so that she remained with my Father and with two daughters. About sev--- a number of years later --- about five years later, he sent her a divorce from New -- Manha--- New York --- Brooklyn, as a matter of fact. And there was some question about the divorce ---- the validity of it and so on ---- and she decided that she was going to come to this country. So she emigrated to this country with the two daughters. But, again, her father exerted influence, and he would not let her take my Father. My Father had to remain there, so that's how he grew up with a great-grandfather.

SIGRIST: Under the rule of your great-grandfather.

SOKOL: [Superposed] Yes, under the thumb.

SIGRIST: Are there stories that your father used to tell about that situation, and living with your Great-grandfather?

SOKOL: Yes, they were very difficult, because my Grandmother ----- when she came to this country and settled in Chicago ---- went to work. And was sending money for his support to my great-grandfather. And the money was being diverted and wasn't being used for my father. And he was not very happy --- hungry, and not very well treated in that respect ---- so he just decided to go.

SIGRIST: Was he the only child living with your great-grandfather?

SOKOL: Yes.

SIGRIST: The daughters are with ----

SOKOL: Well, they came to the United States with my grandmother.

SIGRIST: Did your grandmother have any contact with her husband when she got to America?

SOKOL: Oh, yes. She found them here in New York City, and by that time he had remarried. And she tried to take legal action, but really they --- nothing could be resolved. Because in the long run the divorce had been legal and --- although she created some problems for him ---. In fact, I think he was picked up by the police one time because of that. But there were no charges that could be held against him that could be substantiated.

SIGRIST: That's very interesting.

SOKOL: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about what your grandmother did in Chicago.

SOKOL: When she came to Chicago, she got a job working in a mattress factory sewing ticking for mattresses ---- which was heav-- very heavy work for a woman. And she was very energetic and very bright --- a very smart lady --- and very determined.

SIGRIST: Why did she go to Chicago?

SOKOL: We had the people from Palestine, from her hometown, who had been here. So that she gravitated to Chicago.

SIGRIST: How did she pay for her passage, do you know?

SOKOL: Uh, from Palestine to? I really don't know how that – that came about. I think that friends there helped her out.

SIGRIST: I see. Um, and talk a little bit about what your father might have told you about his journeys around Europe and that sort of thing.

SOKOL: Well, he traveled all through Europe as a young lad. As I said, it was very difficult for him because he really didn't belong anywhere. Wherever you were, you were an outsider.

SIGRIST: Do you know where in Europe sp----?

SOKOL: [Superposed] He was in Poland, in Russia, in Austria. And ultimately worked his way back when he went to --- to Palestine. And then he was going to be conscripted into the Turkish army, and that's when he left for Egypt. He didn't want to serve the Turkish army, because they were in control at the time. That's when he went to Egypt for a couple of years --- a few years.

SIGRIST: What year would that be?

SOKOL: Oh, I would say that would be about 1912.

SIGRIST: Just prior to World War One.

SOKOL: 1910, he would have been, --- probably 1910 or 1908. 'Cause he would have

been about sixteen years old at the time --- when he got, when he came back. And he went through Alexandria and Cairo, Luxor. He told me stories about his days in Egypt.

SIGRIST: What, do you remember any of the stories?

SOKOL: Well, yeah. Well, just the fact that he found them so fascinating. And historically, since the Jews had left Egypt many, many centuries before. And he just found it interesting to be there reliving history, and he found it very fascinating. Particularly he did like the Egyptian people. He was -- he got along very well with them.

SIGRIST: Would you say your father was a bit of an adventurer?

SOKOL: Oh, yes. Uh, he also was a, much of a, quite a linguist. He would pick up languages. He spoke about twelve languages. And I'll tell you an interesting story about that a little further down the line. But he was willing to do anything.

SIGRIST: What was his personality like?

SOKOL: Very outgoing, great sense of humor, very giving individual.

SIGRIST: And can you describe what he looked like in words?

SOKOL: Oh, he was about five foot five, I guess. A little bit on the chubby side, at -- at the time that I was growing up. When we came here he was rather slim. But coming here from a place where you were hungry half the time, why, he took advantage of the abundance and availability of food in this country and put on

weight. And he was a very learned man in Judaic studies and his work here was as a ritual slaughterer of poultry.

SIGRIST: A *shochet*?

SOKOL: A *shochet*, right.

SIGRIST: But he wasn't doing that ---

SOKOL: No.

SIGRIST: in Europe?

SOKOL: There he served with the British army for a little while, and he attained the degree of corporal --- equivalent to corporal. And then he worked in a hospital in Jerusalem --- Wallachs Hospital --- as a male nurse and general work.

SIGRIST: Would that have been during World War One?

SOKOL: Yes.

SIGRIST: At that time. Before we get too far ahead, I did want to ask you more about your Great-grandfather. What did he do for a living?

SOKOL: He was the city *shochet* for cattle in the city of Safad.

SIGRIST: And was it, did he teach your father how to do that?

SOKOL: No, he learned it here.

SIGRIST: He learned it here.

SOKOL: In this country.

SIGRIST: Is there a story that your father used to tell about, about maybe how tyrannical your great-grandfather was, or something that sticks out in your mind?

SOKOL: Well nothing specific, but just in general it was a very untenable situation. Because he exerted his will and his desires upon everybody, and they knuckled under pretty well, except for my dad, he just rebelled.

SIGRIST: Yeah, just left.

SOKOL: Right.

SIGRIST: Do you know how your parents met?

SOKOL: Uh, well, my dad came back, he came back to Jerusalem, and they just met in Jerusalem. I don't know about the formal introduction of any kind, but they just gravitated to one another.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little more specifically about what your father was doing during World War One?

SOKOL: Well, during World War One, as I said, for a while he served with the British army as a corporal. And then he went in to work at the hospital, at this

Wallachs Hospital. Uh, I was born in 1918, and -- just prior to the end of the war. I was born in April, the war ended in November of '18. And at the time that I was born, he was working in the hospital.

SIGRIST: Did he ever tell stories about that experience, or serving in the British army?

SOKOL: Oh, yes. The--- only experiences, they weren't really militarily active experiences, because they were either stationed there. But he would tell stories about the various people in the army that he had met. And, as a matter of fact, even after I was born ---- even though the war was over -- they were still stationed there 'cause of the mandate. And he was telling me about the various officers that I had met as a baby which -- of course -- I don't recall. But they were very interesting, they were very good people that he ran into.

SIGRIST: And when were your parents married?

SOKOL: Uh, they were married in -I would say ---- about 1914.

SIGRIST: I see. So they were married during ---- during the war, during all of this experience.

SOKOL: Right.

SIGRIST: Did your mother work?

SOKOL: Uh, my mother worked here after raising a family.

SIGRIST: But not, but not ---

SOKOL: Not during the form--- no, no, not there.

SIGRIST: Do you remember them explaining what your house looked like over there, or?

SOKOL: Well, no. They di----they --- I didn't hear them explain it, but when I saw it -- of course -- I knew exactly what it looks like.

SIGRIST: Can you describe it a little bit?

SOKOL: Yeah. We lived on the second floor of a --- it was a two-story building. And had dirt floors, packed dirt floors at the time. And -- of course --- there was no electricity, as I said. But it was very, very neat, and very clean, and made do.

SIGRIST: Do you have any conscious memories of Jerusalem?

SOKOL: Uh, not of Jerusalem per se, no. I have conscious memories of the trip here on the ship, but not of Jerusalem per se. I also remember being in France, in Paris, at the time before --- prior to coming here.

SIGRIST: Oh, good. Well, we'll, um well, why don't we begin talking about that, then. Who wanted to come here first?

SOKOL: Well, as I said, my grandmother came here first. And then she wanted to bring us. My dad was the only child that was not here, so she sent for us. She sent us the tickets, and we came here. And en route to coming here we went to France, and at the time my dad was detained in France for se -- seven weeks

because he had trachoma and till it cleared up. And -- of course -- he, as I said before, he was a linguist. He picked up the language and spoke French the rest of his life. But we went on ahead and he was detained there. So we came to Ellis Island, my dad wasn't with us.

SIGRIST: I see. Can you kind of map out the route that you took, to get to France first?

SOKOL: No. I ca-- we went to --- in Marseilles, and Cherbourg, I know that.

SIGRIST: Did you take a boat across the Mediterranean?

SOKOL: Oh, yes, oh, yes. But specifically, I couldn't give you specifics on it, but it was by boat.

SIGRIST: How did your parents feel about leaving Palestine?

SOKOL: Well, it was kind of an ambiguous thing. Uh, love be the land, of course. But same token, his mother was here, my grandmother was here, and they wanted to be reunited with family. So they were kind of anxious for that.

SIGRIST: Did your mother, now, let's see, her father has died.

SOKOL: And her mother has died also.

SIGRIST: And her mother, too.

SOKOL: Right.

SIGRIST: Did she have other family left in Chicago?

SOKOL: Oh, yes. Uh, a number of sisters and a brother.

SIGRIST: Did she have any family in America?

SOKOL: Uh, no. Just my grandmother.

SIGRIST: I see.

SOKOL: No blood relatives.

SIGRIST: So when you get to France, your father is kept there because of the trachoma.

SOKOL: Right.

SIGRIST: You all continue on.

SOKOL: Yes, my mother, myself, and three cousins. We were all traveling together.

SIGRIST: Do you know how long your father was in France, how long they kept him?

SOKOL: Seven weeks.

SIGRIST: Seven weeks.

SOKOL: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And by then -- of course -- you were here.

SOKOL: Yes. We were in Ellis Island, and back in Chicago by the time he arrived here.

SIGRIST: Did he ever talk about what that experience was like, being held in France?

SOKOL: Well, it wasn't the most unpleasant thing. He liked the French people. He, as I say, he picked the language up very easily and was able to converse and get along in France very nicely. He didn't have any serious problems.

SIGRIST: Did he ever tell about how the trachoma was treated?

SOKOL: No. I know how he got the trachoma. That's caused by the sand situation in Palestine, which was the cause of the trachoma condition. But I don't know what they did for him there. But it did clear up --- whether by itself or treatment, I don't know.

SIGRIST: You said he was in Cherbourg?

SOKOL: Yes.

SIGRIST: Kept in Cherbourg?

SOKOL: Yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what the name of the boat was that you took from France to America?

SOKOL: Yes, the Gotthelf.

SIGRIST: And what do you remember about the boat ride, if anything?

SOKOL: Yes, I remember on the boat again, we had the similar situation with my clothing, that my mother would repeat. She did the same thing on the boat. And that took us ---- the boat was close to three weeks, I guess, by the time we got here. And the boat had ---- they had concerts on the boat, and entertaining people. We were in steerage, of course. WE bought the cheapest way. And, um, it was a --- not the most unpleasant situation. I mean --- it was a pleasant trip as far as I recalled.

SIGRIST: You don't know what boat you took on the Mediterranean to get to Cherbourg?

SOKOL: No, no.

SIGRIST: Um, did you, had your mother ever been on a big boat before?

SOKOL: No.

SIGRIST: Did she ever talk about what she felt about that experience?

SOKOL: Well, it was kind of overwhelming, but she enjoyed it. And the anticipation of coming to this country just kind of outweighed everything else.

SIGRIST: Were you an easy child for her to deal with?

SOKOL: Yes, rather.

SIGRIST: What about the cousins? Were they older?

SOKOL: Oh, yes. My --- cousin were --- wed --- was my dad's age, and he and his sister roughly about the same age ---- the year or two apart. And then she had a daughter who was about, --- oh, probably about four years older than I.

SIGRIST: So they kind of looked out for you also?

SOKOL: Oh, yes. We all came together, and they all had an eye on me.

SIGRIST: Were there any other stories that your mother ever told about being on the boat, or something that struck her as ---?

SOKOL: Well, she got seasick a couple of times. And said I would run and bring her stuff to make her feel better ---- which I didn't recall doing, but that mean she had recounted that.

SIGRIST: What time of the year is this?

SOKOL: We arrived here in December.

SIGRIST: Ah, so it was winter.

SOKOL: Yeah.

SIGRIST: You said the boat trip was about three weeks before -----

SOKOL: [Superposed] Roughly three weeks before we landed.

SIGRIST: Before you landed.

SOKOL: Right.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me what happened when you did land.

SOKOL: Well, we landed -- of course -- to the best of my recollection; we were very well accepted here. And I remember being in a big hall.

SIGRIST: You're talking about Ellis Island now.

SOKOL: Ellis Island, yes. Be in a big hall. And we had to wait for people to meet us here, and that took a couple of weeks --- two-and-a-half weeks or so.

SIGRIST: Who was supposed to meet you?

SOKOL: Uh, relatives.

SIGRIST: Were they coming from Chicago?

SOKOL: Yes.

SIGRIST: Oh. And, um, did they just simply not know when the boat was going to land?

SOKOL: I don't recall the reason for the --- the delay in meeting us. But there was a reason for that -- of course -- that caused us to have to stay for the period of

time that we did.

SIGRIST: Well, what do you know about your stay at Ellis Island, either what you remember or what your mother told you?

SOKOL: Well, what I do remember, I remember being served food. And the fact that we kept kosher presented a couple of problems. I remember basically she was eating eggs, as I --- as was -- I was, of course.

SIGRIST: Was that a problem on the boat, too, that you know of?

SOKOL: Not a serious problem, because we were able to get around it very easily. And they had taken along some food on the boat --- along with them, for provisions, as well. But I remember in Ellis Island per se, I recall one night ----- this went on a number of times ---- but they would have entertainment and have concerts for the people to kind of keep them occupied and --- while they were awaiting people to pick them up and so on.

SIGRIST: Uh, what did your mother ever recount to you about this experience?

SOKOL: Uh, just about the same as I've been telling you. I mean, we'd just go --- when we would discuss it. We had similar memories and nothing really too far departed from what I was saying.

SIGRIST: Do, um, do you know what your parents took with them when they left, what kind of luggage, or what kind of possessions?

SOKOL: Very little. They took clothing, is all they took with them. Because my

grandmother being here, they didn't require bedding and pots and pans and whatever else might have been normally taken by people that were immigrating. Because that was all here for us. We didn't have to concern ourselves.

SIGRIST: And your intention was to go on to Chicago.

SOKOL: Yes.

SIGRIST: Uh, was it ever intended that you would see your grandfather in New York before going on to Chicago?

SOKOL: Um, I guess my dad would have liked that, but my mother had never met him -- of course -- didn't know him. So, no, that wasn't our intent.

SIGRIST: So how long were you detained here?

SOKOL: About two-and-a-half weeks, roughly.

SIGRIST: Two-and-a-half weeks.

SOKOL: Right.

SIGRIST: And, um, let's see, it's December, um, and you came from a rather warm climate. Did that pose any problems?

SOKOL: Well, we were forewarned, so the clothes that we had were warm enough.

SIGRIST: I see. Um, you don't know where you slept, or anything like that, probably?

SOKOL: No. No, I can't tell you that.

SIGRIST: Well, um, who finally came? What relatives?

SOKOL: Uh, some cousins came from Chicago --- distant cousins came from Chicago. See, at the time the way immigration was set up then, you had to have somebody vouch for you with affidavits and so on ---- that you would not become a ward of the state. And until that was established and proven, you had to wait. And if it wasn't proven they just sent you back.

SIGRIST: And, um, I assume your mother probably tried to explain to them that her husband was held in Paris.

SOKOL: Oh, yes, of course.

SIGRIST: Um, had your mother ever met these relatives before?

SOKOL: No.

SIGRIST: And did they take you directly to Chicago, or did you go into New York first?

SOKOL: Well, we went into New York, but went directly to Chicago. We didn't spend any time in New York.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about going to Chicago, if anything?

SOKOL: Well, the train ride. I mean, I recall being on the train about a day-and-a-half. But nothing untoward.

SIGRIST: Um, if your mother hadn't ever met your grandfather before then, had she not met your grandmother before?

SOKOL: No, she had not met my grandmother. Because ---

SIGRIST: She had not.

SOKOL: My grandmother came here in about 1898, I guess, and my mother would not have met her.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me a little bit about how your mother got along with your grandmother.

SOKOL: They got along fairly well. It was a little bit of a problem because my grandmother's name was Esther, and my mother's name was Jenny Esther, and there was a conflict. Some people have some notions about the sim ---- identical names not being very good if a daughter-in-law and a mother-in-law have the same names. And my grandmother took exception to that. But not to the extent that created any real serious problems long-range, but there was a problem there.

SIGRIST: Did you live with your grandmother when you . . .

SOKOL: Yes.

SIGRIST: ---- got to Chicago.

SOKOL: My grandmother had purchased a building in the west side of Chicago and we stayed with her.

SIGRIST: Do you remember that building, what it looked like?

SOKOL: Oh, very much.

SIGRIST: Can you describe that for me, please?

SOKOL: Oh, sure. It's a three-story building with grocery store on the main floor and two apartments upstairs, and we occupied one with my grandmother and my aunt. And -- 'cause one of the aunts had died in the interim. When was she --- during the World War One she died of tuberculosis. So the remaining aunt, my grandmother, and the three of us, were living in the apartment.

SIGRIST: Can you walk me through the apartment?

SOKOL: Yeah. We had two bedrooms, and a living room, and a kitchen, and one bathroom as you walk up. And it was in a neighborhood that was mixed. There were Jewish people, Italians and Irish, primarily, and they got along very well.

SIGRIST: They did get along very well.

SOKOL: Oh, yes, extremely well.

SIGRIST: How long were you in Chicago before your dad arrived?

SOKOL: Oh, about seven weeks. Well, about eight weeks, I would say, because he -- we got there about a week after he landed here.

SIGRIST: Um, tell me a little bit about your father seeing his mother.

SOKOL: Well, he hadn't seen her. Of course, I don't know the exact reactions, the things that went through his mind, but the fact that he had not seen her from nine -- eight -- for, well--- if -- twenty-two years, was quite a ---

SIGRIST: Oh, a long time.

SOKOL: Quite a traumatic meeting, I'm sure.

SIGRIST: Tell me about the job, the first job your father got.

SOKOL: Oh, the first job he got was he studied to become a *shokhet* and got a job as a *shokhet* immediately.

SIGRIST: He decided to do that right off the bat.

SOKOL: Oh, yes. And within a couple of months, he was taught properly, and he had the background -- the learning background -- so there was no problem.

SIGRIST: Do you know anything about the learning process? Did he ever talk about whom he learned from, and where he had to go -- ?

SOKOL: Yeah, he learned from an established *shokhet* in this country.

SIGRIST: In the neighborhood, or ---?

SOKOL: Yeah --- who taught him --- for a fee. And the, actually the mechanics of it was all he had to be taught. The -- as I said before --- the laws and the rules or regulations or religious background, he already had. So that that did not present any problem.

SIGRIST: Um, is it possible that you can explain to us techniques and that sort of thing?

SOKOL: Well.

SIGRIST: Do you know enough about it?

SOKOL: Oh, yeah. Well I do. Uh, number one, the knife that is used --- which is called a *khalef* ---- has to be perfectly sharp. There cannot be the slightest flaw. So that when --- the ---in either case -- whether it be cattle or whether it be poultry are slaughtered, there's no pain. If there's any pain, then the blood congeals. And the -- the poultry or the cattle is not kosher.

SIGRIST: Can you spell the name of the knife, please?

SOKOL: C-H-A-L-E-F. Chalef.

SIGRIST: And is that the only specific, uh -- ?

SOKOL: Well, he would sharpen those. There were water-stones and oilstones that he

would have to sharpen those. And then you would have to check with a fingernail ---- run them up and down the edge of the blade to make sure there was no flaw. And they were razor sharp. I mean --- they --- those were the g—they -- surgical steel.

SIGRIST: Children were not allowed to play with the knife.

SOKOL: Oh, no, no. Very definitely not.

SIGRIST: Did, um, did he practice this at the house that you were living with, or did he have another place where he went and did this?

SOKOL: Well, no. As far as the work was concerned? No, he worked in the--- in various butcher shops. Where, at that time, the practice was to slaughter the poultry on the premises.

SIGRIST: And he would be brought in to do the kosher ----

SOKOL: Well, he would be there all day. I mean --- that would be his work.

SIGRIST: I see. Was this a big Jewish neighborhood?

SOKOL: Uh, yes. The area that we lived in virtually all the time was considered -- called the Lawndale district ---- and there were ---

SIGRIST: Lawndale.

SOKOL: Lawndale. And there were about three hundred thousand Jewish people living

in the Lawndale district.

SIGRIST: Wow. Do you remember the address?

SOKOL: Well, I'll give you --- the first address was 820 South California Avenue.

SIGRIST: And then how long did you stay at that address?

SOKOL: Um, about, oh, about three, four years. And then we moved, my grandmother sold the building, and we moved a block away to 14--- to 1132 South Mozart.  
And then my grandmother bought another building at 1447 South Trumbull and we moved there.

SIGRIST: Your grandmother must have been doing all right for herself if she's buying buildings like this.

SOKOL: Well, she worked hard, and she saved her money. And she was, as I said before, she was a pretty astute lady.

SIGRIST: She started doing the ticking.

SOKOL: Yes.

SIGRIST: Did she continue doing that, or --- ?

SOKOL: Oh, no, not afterwards --- she --- she would

SIGRIST: You wouldn't make that kind of money.

SOKOL: No, but she invested her money. She saved and invested her money.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me what it was like being around your grandmother? What was she like and what was your interaction with her?

SOKOL: Well, she was a very strong lady and she also liked to exercise her will. But not to the point where it was untenable. But she d-- had very definite opinions and didn't mind stating them. But she was a very smart lady, very gifted. She was psychic, in a way. She had powers that were just beyond the natural --- as far as I'm concerned --- as far as most people were. She also was very talented in some of the physical arts. Like if somebody would have a dislocated elbow or a shoulder, she was able to put them back in place --- set broken limbs. This was all done --- things that she had learned as a girl.

SIGRIST: You mentioned that you felt that she had psychic powers. Is there a story or a specific example you can think of?

SOKOL: Oh, a lot of things that she had done. But one comes to mind. I must have been about eleven years old --- and coming home from school, about twelve years old, perhaps. Coming home from school --- which was in Junior High School at the time, I was grabbed and put into some guy's car. And it was mistaken identity -- obviously -- because we were not wealthy people, and they couldn't get any money from my parents. And I was finally let out. And we called the police -- of course -- and we made a report. But my grandmother --- she was a little bit superstitious, and did something with molten wax in hot water. And poured the wax in hot water, held it over me. And, by God, there was the ----- it came out with the mold of an automobile ---on the wax. You can

--- you can very definitely see it. And I couldn't understand the powers that she had, but she did.

SIGRIST: When you say she held it over you, you were talking about a photograph?

SOKOL: No, no. She held the pan over my head.

SIGRIST: Oh, oh.

SOKOL: And poured this wax into the --- molten wax --- into the hot water. And it formed a surface, hardened on the water. And actually came out with a --- almost a photograph of an automobile.

SIGRIST: Oh, that's interesting.

SOKOL: It was.

SIGRIST: Do you have any more stories like that? That's, or other instances you can remember, where she --

SOKOL: Not specifics, but -- as I say --- she was very well versed in the art of healing -- a lot of folk medicine.

SIGRIST: Do you remember some of, you know, maybe some of the concoctions that she would use for different maladies?

SOKOL: Well, see, my kids used to laugh about this. But -- for example --- with --- und I remember was --- I would have somebody having an infected toe. And she

had had a tomato paste put on the toe, and it drew it out and healed it. And my kids would tease me for years about a tomato on your toe. But she actually did this. Uh --- as I say -- growing up in a rather primitive time, she learned a lot, and retained it.

END SIDE ONE

BEGIN SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: That's interesting. What did she look like?

SOKOL: Oh, I just brought a picture of her to my son yesterday. Uh, she was oh, I'd say about five feet tall --- stocky, strong looking face. A nice looking lady ---not a beauty, but a nice looking lady ---- but very strong looking, very strong features.

SIGRIST: Just a strong personality always.

SOKOL: Oh, yes. Very much so.

SIGRIST: Would you say that when you lived with your grandmother, it was definitely under her jurisdiction living there? I mean, did you answer to your grandmother more than to your mother and father?

SOKOL: Uh, not really, although she made her presence known. And ki-- kind of walked the fine line. So that not ignoring my parents -- but I certainly acceded to her wishes.

SIGRIST: Did your mother go to work?

SOKOL: Uh, not until she had grown children.

SIGRIST: Much later.

SOKOL: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Um, tell me a little bit about what it was like growing up, because you were so young when you came that you really sort of grew up more as an American rather than as an immigrant. Tell me what it was like growing up with a truly immigrant family.

SOKOL: Well --- of course -- I started school when I was about five years old, and got into kindergarten. And they immediately said --- well, at the school --- that I shouldn't really be in kindergarten. I should be in first grade, which was fine -- put me in the first grade. And I would come home and -- of course -- I couldn't get help from my parents with homework. I mean --- they were not conversant with English language at the time. And they -- they spoke Yiddish. And they spoke Arabic. When they didn't want me to understand, they spoke Arabic ---- and ultimately picked up English.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Tell me how they did that.

SOKOL: Um, well, my father -- of course -- through being in --- working in the butcher shop ---- would meet people. And he ---as I said before --- he had a ve—very procliv – proclivity for picking up languages. And he had a very good ear, and he picked up language rather easily. And my mother went to school. She took classes -- night school classes, for a while, to learn ---

SIGRIST: Oh, tell me a little bit about that.

SOKOL: To learn --- and he did, too, as a matter of fact ---- to learn English. There were classes that catered primarily to immigrants, and to teach them rudimentary English, and so on. And then the study for citizenship papers and so on -- later on, they --- also through a night school.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how often she went to night school?

SOKOL: Uh, a couple of times a week originally.

SIGRIST: And do you remember --- I assume you're a little older at this point ----

SOKOL: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: --- if they were going to night school. Do you remember helping her with her?

SOKOL: Well, when they first started going, no. Because I was still only about six years old. But later on -- of course -- I would help. When they took the course in naturalization, I would go through it with them and help them -- of course.

SIGRIST: Was it hard for them to, to learn English and to adjust to this country?

SOKOL: Not terribly. No, they picked it up rather --- rather easily.

SIGRIST: Did either of them ever want to go back to Palestine?

SOKOL: Uh, permanently?

SIGRIST: Yeah.

SOKOL: No. My mother did go back in about '54 --- I think --- for a visit --- 'cause she hadn't seen her family since 1920. My dad never did.

SIGRIST: What about your grandmother? Could she speak English?

SOKOL: Yes.

SIGRIST: Do you know how she learned?

SOKOL: Not fluently. She, well, she also went to a night school when she came here ---- for a short period of time.

SIGRIST: Was the night school right in the neighborhood?

SOKOL: Yes.

SIGRIST: And you said immigrants of all ilk went to this.

SOKOL: Right, right.

SIGRIST: Did your family ever experience any kind of bigotry or prejudice, in those early years in this country?

SOKOL: Uh, some. Uh, the neighborhood in which I grew up, as a child, I didn't

experience any. As I say --- we grew up with Italian kids and Irish kids, and there wasn't any serious problem. But there was an underlying bigotry that you did come across occasionally. And more so the fact that my dad had a beard. And there were comments made --- occasionally --- by some of the punks, but not really serious problems.

SIGRIST: Of course, there are a lot Jewish people also, in this neighborhood, too.

SOKOL: Yes.

SIGRIST: So you're not quite the sole --

SOKOL: No, you're not isolated, right.

SIGRIST: Um, tell me about the first job you ever got.

SOKOL: The first job I ever got was when I got out of high school. I started to go to junior college and didn't have enough money for books, so I had to drop out. And I got a job with one of our people at Frince [ph] --- in the neon sop-- shop sign. A general helper 'cause I wasn't really qualified ---- I didn't have a trade, as such. And worked in the neon sign shop for, oh, about a year-and-a-half or so.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you got paid?

SOKOL: Yeah, five dollars a week.

SIGRIST: And were you expected to contribute that to the household?

SOKOL: Well, I did. I wasn't expected to, but I did.

SIGRIST: Did your parents have any other children once they got here?

SOKOL: Yes. I have a sister and a brother.

SIGRIST: What are their names?

SOKOL: My sister's name is Tilley; my brother's name is Max. Tilley is four years younger than I. Max is five years younger.

SIGRIST: Um, tell me a little bit about, um, religious life in this country. I assume since your father is a *shokhet* -- you know -- you must be a fairly religious family. Can you tell me, was there a synagogue in the neighborhood, and how often?

SOKOL: As a matter of fact, there was. Not only that the synagogue was in the neighborhood, my grandmother founded it. And it was an Orthodox synagogue. It was located in a house. It was two flat buildings that they had purchased, and it was located in Chicago's West Side at 1418 South St. Louis Avenue. And we would be there --- of course --- every Sabbath, and occasionally during the week as well ----- and every holiday, of course.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about how you practiced your religion at home?

SOKOL: We --- strictly orthodox. So that the house - of course - was a hundred percent kosher, strictly kosher. We observed all rituals --- all holidays, lighting of candles on Friday night, the chanting of the *kidish* (benediction), the Sabbath,

and the holidays -- of course --- the same.

SIGRIST: All traditional?

SOKOL: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Um, you said the synagogue --- your grandmother founded the synagogue.

SOKOL: Right.

SIGRIST: Was this an unusual thing for a woman to do?

SOKOL: Uh, she was an unusual woman. [Laughs] Yes, it wasn't the norm. But she founded it, and she was kind of the focal point for all of the Palestinian people that came to the Chicago area. They all kind of gravitated to her. And consequently she just decided to found this synagogue and she did.

SIGRIST: The, um, the Jewish community in this neighborhood, were they just Palestinians, or were they --- ?

SOKOL: No.

SIGRIST: Poles and Russians and ---?

SOKOL: There were three hundred thousand people --- as I say --- in the Lawndale district, from every country in the world.

SIGRIST: I see. So it was a real mixture ---

SOKOL: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Of nationalities.

SOKOL: Right. Primarily Russian and Polish were the main immigrants but it was quite a conglomeration.

SIGRIST: And, um, within, within the Jewish community, the Russians got along with the Poles, the Poles got along with the Palestinians?

SOKOL: Oh, yes. There wasn't an ---- there wasn't any friction on that --- not from that point of view.

SIGRIST: Now, one thing we haven't talked about at all, and I would like to bring it up, is food. Tell me, who did the cooking when you got to Chicago?

SOKOL: Well my grandmother was cooking originally -- of course -- because we just had gotten there; but my mother took over that chore.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me some traditional foods that were served in your home?

SOKOL: Well, yes. Of course, the Sabbath meal would consist of *gefilte* (stuffed) fish, chicken, meat, soup, a *tsimmes* (puree) with th --of --- carrots, and plums --- and plums --- or prunes, rather, potatoes. Uh, there would be what is called a *cholent*, which is like a stew which simmers for about twenty-four hours.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

SOKOL: C-H-O-L-E-N-T.

SIGRIST: Thank you.

SOKOL: And it's available in a lot of Jewish restaurants, as a matter of fact. It's a mixture of meat and vegetables. And it simmers, as I say, for about a 24-hour period. And you would leave the stove on. We wouldn't turn it on or off during the Sabbath, of course. So we left it on a low flame and that would simmer for about twenty-four hours.

SIGRIST: Was there anything that you ate that was more sort of Middle Eastern because of the Palestinian background?

SOKOL: Yes. My mother --- having come from there, Palestine --- was very well versed in preparing vegetables. Had --- there having been a shortage of meat in the Palestine area. They were very adept at using vegetables. And we would eat a lot of eggplant, squash, all o-- all of the vegetables. In fact, to this day there's not a vegetable that I won't eat. But we ate an awful lot of that.

SIGRIST: Um, well, good. Let me ask you just a couple of final questions. One is when did you marry?

SOKOL: I married in 1941.

SIGRIST: And what was your wife's name?

SOKOL: Irene.

SIGRIST: And tell me your children.

SOKOL: I had a son, Ira, that I just lo--- [Tears]. Have three children. Oldest was Ira. He just died two-and-a-half years ago. I have a daughter, Anne, and a son, Phil.

SIGRIST: I see. And you're presently living in Des Plaines?

SOKOL: Des Plaines, yes.

SIGRIST: Des Plaines. And, um, tell me a little bit about going back to Palestine in 1967. Why did you want to go?

SOKOL: Well, my Silver Anniversary was in '66, and I told my wife th—when we —[Tears] ---

SIGRIST: [Quietly] I'll pause for just a minute.

SOKOL: I'm in --- I decided to go back for a trip. I hadn't been there since 1920. And decided to go for a visit --- having had the very, very large family there ---- a lot of cousins and aunts.

SIGRIST: Still a lot of relatives?

SOKOL: Oh, there still are to this day. Uh, in fact, Phil was just there two weeks ago. He just came back. And my sister just came back last week. So we visited, we were there for three weeks. In fact, we were there the week before the

six-day war. And met a family that I didn't even really know any more because I was a little b-- since I was a little boy when I left. There were dozens and dozens of cousins and aunts and uncles, and then also I wanted to see the country -- of course -- which we did. And had a very, very wonderful time.

SIGRIST: What did it feel like to be there after all those years, forty-seven years?

SOKOL: It's hard to put it in words. Just overwhelming.

SIGRIST: Yeah. And, um, you said you saw the house.

SOKOL: Yes. My cousin, one of my cousins took us to the house where I had been born. It was in the area called Sháare Chesed, and they took us over there, and my wife and I were there. And I -- fact I took movies of it, so I have 'em on tape.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that name, please?

SOKOL: S-H double-A R-E, C-H-E-S-E-D.

SIGRIST: Thank you very much.

SOKOL: Sure.

SIGRIST: How long were you there?

SOKOL: Uh, visiting when we came back?

SIGRIST: Yeah.

SOKOL: Oh, I'd say about an hour.

SIGRIST: And was that the last time you were there, or have you been back since?

SOKOL: No, I've been back. I was back in Israel last summer, but I didn't go back to the house. I didn't have an opportunity. I wanted to see other things that I hadn't seen.

SIGRIST: Of course, this is sort of an important time over there.

SOKOL: Yes, quite.

SIGRIST: Lots of things going on.

SOKOL: Quite.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you think, obviously Judaism is very important to you.

SOKOL: Yes.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you think is inherently Palestinian about you?

SOKOL: Well, when I would hear of-- of people like Arafat and other people say they're Palestinians, I always felt that I was a Palestinian long before they were. And I felt that I had my roots there and, so my family, as I said, did have for six generations on one side and seven on the other. So we were Palestinians a

long, long time -- and our roots really are there.

SIGRIST: Are you glad that your parents decided to come to this country?

SOKOL: Oh, definitely.

SIGRIST: How do you think your life would have been different if you had stayed there?

SOKOL: Well, it wouldn't have been as easy as it is here. It's been more rigorous life there, although it has its rewards. My family is very happy there. The cousins and aunts and uncles were all very happy there. Although it was not an easy life for them economically, and not having the up-to-date amenities that we have in this country.

SIGRIST: Right. It is a little farther back.

SOKOL: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Technologically.

SOKOL: But they're getting there.

SIGRIST: Of course, your father's life would have been very different –

SOKOL: [Interposed] Oh.

SIGRIST: had he stayed there.

SOKOL: Yes.

SIGRIST: Do you think he would have stayed in the military?

SOKOL: Uh, no. That was not his forte.

SIGRIST: Mr. Sokol, I want to thank you very much for coming to us and giving us the oral history for the project.

SOKOL: My pleasure.

SIGRIST: Coming a long way, actually, all the way from Illinois.

SOKOL: Very happy to do it.

SIGRIST: Thank you. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Morris Sokol on Wednesday, September 15, 1993, using the DAT machine at the Ellis Island Immigration Museum recording studio. Thank you.

SOKOL: Thank you.