

EI-531

KIRSCHEN, SIGMUND

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- **PUDZANOW, POLAND & VIENNA, AUSTRIA**
- **THE US: NEW YORK CITY (LOWER EAST SIDE)**

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine from the National Park Service and I'm here today at the home of Mr. Sigmund Kirschen in New York City. Mr. Kirschen came from Poland in 1927 when he was 16 years of age.

KIRSCHEN: That's right.

LEVINE: So, that means you are today 84, you just turned 84 yesterday.

KIRSCHEN: Right. Right.

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LEVINE: Okay. I'd like to begin by asking you to say your birth date and the town in Poland where you were born.

KIRSCHEN: I was born in a village called P-U-D-Z-A-N-O-W

LEVINE: Could you spell it please?

KIRSCHEN: Pudzanow.

LEVINE: And what date?

KIRSCHEN: August 1, 1910.

LEVINE: And did you live in Pudzanow until you...

KIRSCHEN: No. No. No. Ah, we went to Vienna in 1914 when World War I broke out, and we stayed in Vienna until we came here.

LEVINE: I see. So do you remember anything of those first four years when you were in Pudzanow? Those aren't any memories that you have?

KIRSCHEN: No. No.

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LEVINE: Do you remember anything that your parents said about leaving there?
Going to Vienna?

KIRSCHEN: No. We were war refugees in 1914. That's how we came to Vienna.

LEVINE: I see. So when you were in Vienna, you were four years old. Do you remember the house you lived in, for example?

KIRSCHEN: Well, we lived in an apartment. In the same building where my grandparents lived.

LEVINE: I see. Whose parents were they? Your mother's?

KIRSCHEN: My mother's. Yes.

LEVINE: And what were their names?

KIRSCHEN: Hamer. H-A-M-E-R. Golda and ah, (thinking) I can't remember off-hand my grandfather's name.

LEVINE: Well, you probably called him Grandpa.

KIRSCHEN: (laughs) I probably did.

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LEVINE: So—your grandparent-- that was probably the reason you went to Vienna, because they were there.

KIRSCHEN: Yes. Right.

LEVINE: Now, do you remember your grandmother and grandfather?

KIRSCHEN: Ah, my grandmother. Because she lived much longer than he did.

LEVINE: And did they come to this country too? Or were they...?

KIRSCHEN: No. They were in Poland. And they came to Vienna for the same reason we did.

LEVINE: Oh. So they came about the same time?

KIRSCHEN: Right.

LEVINE: I see. What experiences do you remember as a boy with your grandmother? What kind of a person was she? What kinds of things did you do in relation to her? What memories do you have?

KIRSCHEN: Well, I was, I was the oldest grandson. And I ah, played the role of the oldest grandson.

LEVINE: Tell me what that role was?

KIRSCHEN: Well, the role was to carry valises when I went with my grandmother. And I was sort of the errand boy.

LEVINE: Were there any privileges attached to being the oldest grandson?

KIRSCHEN: I'm sure there were. I'm sure there were. But it's really too long ago for me to remember (chuckling) what the privileges were. I know my grandfather would supply me with sweets.

LEVINE: Do you remember what kind?

KIRSCHEN: Oh, they were hard candies, which he always had with him.

LEVINE: And what about your grandmother? Did she ever tell you stories? Did she read to you? Did you help her do things?

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KIRSCHEN: Ah, she told stories. None of which I remember. But she also had another daughter and ah, four sons. The sons were in the Austrian army. And two of the sons were physicians.

LEVINE: Now, did your aunts and uncles also come to Vienna at that time?

KIRSCHEN: Yes. Yes.

LEVINE: So after your uncles came to Vienna, they were conscribed to the Austrian army?

KIRSCHEN: Yes.

LEVINE: Was that something that the family had strong feelings about? The fact that they were in the Austrian army?

KIRSCHEN: No. I don't think they had strong feelings. But ah, ah, they were stationed in Northern Italy. So it wasn't too far from Vienna.

LEVINE: Did you know them? Your uncles and aunt?

KIRSCHEN: Yes. Yes.

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LEVINE: Are there any memories you have of them, in particular, when you think back to your early years?

KIRSCHEN: Well, yes. They always took me to the soccer games in Vienna. The professional soccer games. So I got to know soccer and the names of the players. Ah, that's all I remember, really.

LEVINE: What was your mother's name?

KIRSCHEN: Her maiden name?

LEVINE: Her maiden name was Hamer.

KIRSCHEN: Hamer.

LEVINE: Her first name?

KIRSCHEN: Rose.

LEVINE: And your father's name?

KIRSCHEN: Philip.

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LEVINE: And so --did you have sisters and brothers when you still lived in Vienna?

KIRSCHEN: I have a sis-, a brother.

LEVINE: He was born in Vienna?

KIRSCHEN: He was born in Vienna.

LEVINE: And what's his name?

KIRSCHEN: What's his name, is Morris.

LEVINE: Morris.

KIRSCHEN: And he lives in California.

LEVINE: Oh. And—let's see. do you remember the living conditions? Were you comfortable in the apartment you were in?

KIRSCHEN: Yes. Yes. The apartments were very substantial. We lived on one floor and my grandparents lived on a floor below. So we had really identical apartments.

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LEVINE: Now, at that time, were there other people coming to Vienna for the same reasons?

KIRSCHEN: Yes. Many, many, a lot of people from Poland came to Vienna for the same reasons that we came.

LEVINE: And did they live near you? In other words, was there a community of people?

KIRSCHEN: There was a community which was right near our home.

LEVINE: Was there a section of Vienna that you would say that was?

KIRSCHEN: Yes. It was, there were 21 divisions. They were called bezirk, which is a German word for area. And we lived in the 20th, which was a workers' area.

LEVINE: Did you go to school there?

KIRSCHEN: Yes, I went to school until I came to New York.

LEVINE: Can you describe anything about your school experience in Vienna?

KIRSCHEN: Well, I had at first, language problems.

LEVINE: Well, when you came there you were speaking Polish.

KIRSCHEN: Polish.

LEVINE: Did the family speak Yiddish at all?

KIRSCHEN: Yes.

LEVINE: In the home?

KIRSCHEN: In the home. And I learned it from them. Ah, but I went to what is called gymnasium, which is, I would say, junior college. I started, I think I was fourteen or fifteen, something like that.

LEVINE: So that was actually a higher degree of education.

KIRSCHEN: Well, it was the next level which I was eligible for. So I went there. It was a public school.

LEVINE: And what was your father doing for work while you were in Vienna.

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KIRSCHEN: He was in the Austrian army.

LEVINE: Oh, so he was in the Army too. So did you see him much?

KIRSCHEN: Yes. We did see him. He came home quite often.

LEVINE: And your mother? Did she work at all? Or was she strictly a housewife?

KIRSCHEN: No. No. She was a seller of butter and eggs, out of the home.

LEVINE: I see. So now, where would she get the butter and eggs?

KIRSCHEN: From farmers in the vicinity of Vienna.

LEVINE: I see. Would she travel out?

KIRSCHEN: No. They would deliver it.

LEVINE: And then she would take the butter and eggs?

KIRSCHEN: No. People came to the house and bought it.

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LEVINE: Did you ever help her with that at all?

KIRSCHEN: Ah, I imagine I did. It's a long time ago.

LEVINE: Do you have any fond memories of Vienna when you think back to your years there?

KIRSCHEN: Fond memories? No. Not really. Because we were refugees.

LEVINE: Were you treated differently?

KIRSCHEN: Oh, I imagine I was. By the native population. But I would go to the ah, milk store to buy milk and bread, which was just across the street from where we lived.

LEVINE: So you had to learn German.

KIRSCHEN: I learned German.

LEVINE: Did you learn it in school? Did they teach you speak German in school?

KIRSCHEN: Well, the language in the schools was German, so I learned it there.

LEVINE: Did you get particular help with that from your teacher? Or you just had to...?

KIRSCHEN: I imagine I did.

LEVINE: Okay. How about religion? Was your family a religious family?

KIRSCHEN: My grandparents were religious. I, yes, I went to a temple. And in contrast to a small religious school which was on the same block as the temple was.

LEVINE: So you went to a public school, but you went to temple.

KIRSCHEN: I went to public schools all the time.

LEVINE: And were there any, were there any religious observances that stand out that your family ...?

KIRSCHEN: Well, all the, all the Jewish religious holidays were observed in our home.

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LEVINE: And how about your mother? What kind of person was she, temperamentally and personality wise?

KIRSCHEN: Well, she was a very wise and hardworking woman.

LEVINE: Can you remember any attitudes she had, or things that she wanted to instill in you?

KIRSCHEN: Well, the importance of school was always emphasized. And her brothers and sister were all university graduates. Students and graduates.

LEVINE: And how about your father? What was he like as a person?

KIRSCHEN: He was a merchant, but he was in the army. He was ah, (pauses for a while), I don't know how I can describe him. He was a father.

LEVINE: And how did he feel about being in the army?

KIRSCHEN: Oh, being in the Austrian army was not a very pleasant occupation. But he was there because age-wise he belonged there.

LEVINE: Did he ever talk to you about any of his army experiences?

KIRSCHEN: No. There weren't any really.

LEVINE: Where was he when he was in the army?

KIRSCHEN: In another area of the city.

LEVINE: Oh, I see. He was in the city.

KIRSCHEN: We used to go to see him.

LEVINE: Let's see. How about food? Do you remember any food, either Polish or...?

KIRSCHEN: Well, it was all Polish food.

LEVINE: Are there any kinds of dishes, food, that you remember from your childhood in Europe that your mother made, or your grandmother made.

KIRSCHEN: Well, there were what we call schnitzels. It was a kosher home. But that's all I remember about it.

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LEVINE: Do you remember when the decision was made that you and your family would come to America?

KIRSCHEN: Well, my father came here first.

LEVINE: When did he come to this country?

KIRSCHEN: 1922, '23, something like that. And when he became a citizen, we were able to come here.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you knew about America before you came? What you expected?

KIRSCHEN: I knew, I knew very little about America. Very little.

LEVINE: Your father came to this country after the first World War then. Do you remember what his motivation was for coming here?

KIRSCHEN: Well, they didn't want to go back to Poland. And they didn't want to remain in Vienna. And we had some relatives here who helped us come.

LEVINE: So when your father was here, what was he doing in this country?

KIRSCHEN: He was a cashier and a counterman in a bakery on Essex and Delancey Streets. (laughing silently)

LEVINE: So was he able to send money for you and your mother and your brother?

KIRSCHEN: Yes. Well, that's how my mother was able to live. That my father did support us.

LEVINE: And during the war years, no. In the war years, he was in the army. Right. It was after the war.

KIRSCHEN: He was in the army until he went to the United States. That was '22, '23, I imagine.

LEVINE: And did he come to this country alone?

KIRSCHEN: Yes.

LEVINE: And he had relatives?

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KIRSCHEN: No. My mother had relatives and they helped him come. They gave him an affidavit and whatever else it took.

LEVINE: So then he must have had to learn English?

KIRSCHEN: Yes. In a way he did.

LEVINE: And then he became a citizen and the plan was he would become a citizen and you would come over.

KIRSCHEN: Right.

LEVINE: So, do you remember packing up to leave to come to this country?

KIRSCHEN: We took everything.

LEVINE: You did? You mean furnishings, and...?

KIRSCHEN: Whatever we had.

LEVINE: Did you carry it with you? Or you shipped things?

KIRSCHEN: It was shipped.

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LEVINE: Uh-huh. And, do you remember goodbyes? Do you remember leaving Vienna?

KIRSCHEN: (pauses) I, I have memories of it, yes. But to me it was a another major move. Actually, the first major move that I was aware of, because I was almost seventeen when we came here. We came here April 1st, 1927. (laughing a bit).

LEVINE: Did your grandparent remain?

KIRSCHEN: They lived here.

LEVINE: Oh, they were already here?

KIRSCHEN: They were here before.

LEVINE: Oh, I see. So your grandparents were here, your father was here and you had...?

KIRSCHEN: .. had my uncles and aunt were here.

LEVINE: Were these the same uncles that had been in the Austrian army?

KIRSCHEN: Yes. Yes. Well they, ah, two of them went to medical school in Vienna. So in effect, they lived in Vienna before we came. And before their parents came.

LEVINE: I see. I see. So, you left Vienna. And where did you travel, and how did you travel to get the ship to come to this country?

KIRSCHEN: We went by train to Paris. And we took a ship at a port which was very close to Paris.

LEVINE: Oh. Uh-huh. Le Havre is where you--?

KIRSCHEN: Le Havre. That's right!

LEVINE: So do you remember anything about Paris that struck you?

KIRSCHEN: No. No. I was too young for that?

LEVINE: And were you examined, do you remember any examinations prior?

KIRSCHEN: Not prior. But upon arrival.

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LEVINE: Oh. Okay. Well we'll get to that part. So what was the name of the ship?

KIRSCHEN: Ah, Il de France or something like that.

LEVINE: Here, you mentioned Majestic. Does that clear it up?

KIRSCHEN: That's right. The Majestic. Off the French line.

LEVINE: Okay, and so-- you boarded The Majestic. What was the voyage like for you and your family?

KIRSCHEN: My brother and I, and my mother, were the family at the time. And ah, the voyage was a routine one.

LEVINE: Were you traveling steerage?

KIRSCHEN: Ah, Third Class. Which was the cheapest tickets we could get.

LEVINE: Was that, did you have a cabin, or were you in a kind of dormitory?

KIRSCHEN: No. No. No. We had a room.

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LEVINE: Uh-huh. And do you remember the meals?

KIRSCHEN: The meals were pretty good.

LEVINE: Were there a lot of people traveling on The Majestic who were coming to this country?

KIRSCHEN: Yes.

LEVINE: Were a lot of them from Austria, Poland?

KIRSCHEN: Right. Right. That's when the Jewish immigration to the United States became the motive for coming.

LEVINE: Do you remember when the ship came into the New York Harbor?

KIRSCHEN: Yes, I do.

LEVINE: What do you remember about that?

KIRSCHEN: I remember because my younger brother was examined very thoroughly by the physicians.

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LEVINE: Why was that?

KIRSCHEN: Well, he was little. He was about ten years younger than I am. And my mother knew all the information so she was helpful. She was a bright woman.

LEVINE: Was your brother suspected of having some kind of medical condition?

KIRSCHEN: No. No. No. No. Not, not suspected. He was smaller than I am, and he was six or seven years old when he came here. So his development was kind of slow.

LEVINE: Do you remember how you or your mother felt about being examined at Ellis Island?

KIRSCHEN: Well, I don't remember anything. My mother was (long pause) a source of information for the American officers who took care of us and brought us to the apartment that my dad had rented for us on Ludlow and Delancy Streets. I still remember the apartment.

LEVINE: Really?

KIRSCHEN: Yes.

LEVINE: Do you want to describe it?

KIRSCHEN: Well, it was ah, an apartment on a first floor of ah, a, of a tenement building and it was across the street from the public school to which my brother went. I went to evening high school at the time. It was, it's now known as Seward Park High School. But I worked during the day and went to school at night.

LEVINE: Why was it that the American officers – they brought you from Ellis Island to your father's apartment?

KIRSCHEN: No. No. No. My father took a taxicab from South Ferry to the East Side, which wasn't far. But I do remember that we went under the Third Avenue Elevated, all the way to Delancey Street. (chuckles softly)

LEVINE: How did that strike you? An elevated train?

KIRSCHEN: Ah, I have no memories of it. I used it later on.

LEVINE: How do you mean? Oh, you used the elevated train.

KIRSCHEN: I used it because I worked for my uncle who was actually my mother's cousin's husband. And I got a job there.

LEVINE: What kind of work was he doing? And what did you do?

KIRSCHEN: Stationery store. A wholesale stationery store. And I was stock clerk.

LEVINE: And that was your first job?

KIRSCHEN: That was my first job, yes.

LEVINE: And then you were going to night school.

KIRSCHEN: And while I worked there I went to night school. And ah, ah, I went to evening high school and learned English there.

LEVINE: Was the high school specifically to teach English or it was teaching other subjects?

KIRSCHEN: No. No. It was teaching other subjects. I was best in German.
(laughing)

LEVINE: How was it for you to learn yet again another language?

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KIRSCHEN: Well, I don't remember learning German originally, but it was no problem because that's the language that we spoke at home.

LEVINE: German?

KIRSCHEN: German.

LEVINE: Oh, you did?

KIRSCHEN: German and Yiddish.

LEVINE: Oh, I see. And you were also very young when you moved to Vienna, so you learned it probably very easily. But then coming here as a young man, or a teenager, what...?

KIRSCHEN: Well, the store that I worked in, the language was English but most of it was Yiddish. And I sort of learned more of it while I was there. It was good experience.

END SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

LEVINE: So how long did you stay in high school and what did you do for your next job after you worked for your uncle?

KIRSCHEN: Ah, that was the only job I had. Because from there I went to City College, days. And ah, I learned German a little better. (they laugh)

LEVINE: At City College?

KIRSCHEN: Of course. Yes. And ah, ah, I graduated from City College and I did not want to go back to work in the stationery store. Excuse me.
(pause) Can I help you with anything? Piece of fruit?

LEVINE: We're pausing here for a second. Okay. We're resuming now. Let's see. We were talking about, you went to City College, and you didn't want to go back to work in your uncle's stationery store.

KIRSCHEN: Right. Upon graduation, I took some courses at The New School in economics and ah, I, we had a friend who was in the professional section of the US Employment Service, and she referred me to King's Point, where I became a teacher. And I was there for 35 years.

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LEVINE: Ah, so that was your life work, you might as well say. Teaching economics at King's Point?

KIRSCHEN: Economics, marine insurance... I learned the shipping business there too.

LEVINE: And just to go back a little bit, when you first came to this country, were there things that struck you as very different that you recall?

KIRSCHEN: Well, I learned everything here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. You mean what you did for your career?

KIRSCHEN: That's right. But I ah, what I learned about business, I learned there. It wasn't a very (pauses) well, ah, it wasn't a formal education, you see, because this was a wholesale stationery and toy store that supplied candy stores at the time.

LEVINE: So you learned that through actually doing it.

KIRSCHEN: I learned that on the job. Yes.

LEVINE: And then your formal education...

KIRSCHEN: My formal education helped.

LEVINE: Can you describe anything about the Lower East Side when you and your family first came to live here?

KIRSCHEN: Well, it was really very different than it is today.

LEVINE: How so?

KIRSCHEN: Well, at the time that we came here, I only knew Jewish people. Jewish families. It's different, entirely different now. Your immigration of Puerto Ricans and Italians and various other groups came in and mixed with our, with our group. And ah, I never learned any Spanish (laughing). I wish I did.

LEVINE: When you were there, it was mostly Jewish.

KIRSCHEN: Yes.

LEVINE: Were there social clubs that you and your family were members of?

KIRSCHEN: I did. I came to one named Hakoach.

LEVINE: Can you spell it?

KIRSCHEN: Hakoach. It's ah, it's really a Hebrew word for the soccer team that was Jewish in Vienna. There was one Jewish team. And my uncles used to take me to that because that was, that was the team that we supported. And they supported, and therefore I supported it. But it was very interesting.

LEVINE: Yes.

KIRSCHEN: They ah, my uncles moved to Israel in 1921, '22 something like that.

LEVINE: From Vienna?

KIRSCHEN: From Vienna. And two of them became physicians, and a third one was an engineer, and he became a farmer.

LEVINE: So this social club in the Lower East Side had the same name as the soccer team you had supported.

KIRSCHEN: It was named for the soccer team.

LEVINE: It was named for it. So did your interest in soccer carry over? Because this country is not so soccer oriented?

KIRSCHEN: Well, I played. I played. I played on the City College team which was kind of difficult for me, cause I hadn't played in a long time. Ah, (pauses) I am trying to think of interesting things.

LEVINE: You're doing wonderfully. So whatever. But maybe something about that social club. What was that like, when you first came?

KIRSCHEN: It was mostly refugees. Or immigrants. Jewish. And on Sunday night we had, on the stoop sort of, a place where we met. We talked about Vienna, and about New York. Things of that sort.

LEVINE: Were there any differences as you can recall about being a refugee in Vienna, and being an immigrant in New York?

KIRSCHEN: Well, I was much younger in Vienna. And here I was an adult. I was a college graduate. One of the few at the club. (pauses) What else can I tell you that was different? Well, Hakoach to me, it's actually on – I pass by there frequently on a bus and I always look what's doing. And in the basement at the street level there was a Jewish restaurant, and ah, it was interesting.

LEVINE: I imagine there were a lot of Jewish restaurants and synagogues in the Lower East Side that are no longer there.

KIRSCHEN: On the Lower East Side, oh yes. Yes. Because the Lower East Side, where I lived – I lived on the corner of Orchard and Rivington Streets. And most of the people who live there now are recent immigrants. Can I help you with anything?

LEVINE: Let's stop for a moment.

Okay. We're resuming now. We were talking about the Lower East Side and the changes that happened.

KIRSCHEN: The changes are drastic. Excuse me. Most of the people in that area are Latin American immigrants and their English is not good. We used to have pushcarts on Orchard Street. They're not there anymore.

LEVINE: Did you, when you came to this country and settled in the Lower East Side, how did you compare it in your mind to where you were in Vienna?

KIRSCHEN: Well, in Vienna, I was a student. And here I worked and was a student, you see. So it was much different.

LEVINE: Did you prefer one to the other for any reason?

KIRSCHEN: I preferred being in the United States because the opportunities looked good. And it was, that was the only preference I'm aware of during that period of time.

LEVINE: So did you marry at all?

KIRSCHEN: Yes. I lost my wife, four, five years ago.

LEVINE: What was her name?

KIRSCHEN: Her name was ah, let me show you a picture. Hold on, let me show you a picture. Oh, I see. No. I will not go far. (pauses while he moves across the room) This is my family.

LEVINE: Okay. We're going to pause here a minute.

Okay. We're continuing now, after looking at some pictures of your lovely family. I was asking you your wife's name.

KIRSCHEN: (long pause) It's embarrassing. (they laugh).

LEVINE: That's okay. We're resuming now. You were saying your wife's maiden name was...?

KIRSCHEN: Nidenberg.

LEVINE: Could you spell it?

KIRSCHEN: N-I-D-E-N-B-E-R-G.

LEVINE: And her first name?

KIRSCHEN: Admit it. Let me look at the pictures.

LEVINE: You say it was Fiegel?

KIRSCHEN: Feigala was the Yiddish name.

LEVINE: Well, that's good enough. You want to give me the real name?

KIRSCHEN: I want to give you the English name.

LEVINE: Okay, we're going to stop for a moment. Now, so Feigala was the Yiddish name. And her English name?

KIRSCHEN: Florence.

LEVINE: Florence. And your children's names?

KIRSCHEN: Michael is an attorney and my daughter is Nina.

LEVINE: Nina?

KIRSCHEN:

She's a social worker in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

LEVINE: I see. And you have grandchildren.

KIRSCHEN: I have two and two.

LEVINE: Wonderful

KIRSCHEN: And they're good kids.

LEVINE: Looking back on your life, what makes you feel very proud?

KIRSCHEN: Well, I became a professor. And I was a professor of economics and related subjects at the Merchant Marine Academy for 35 years.

LEVINE: And do you think having started your life in Europe, first in Poland and then in Austria, do you think that affected, or how do you think that affected the rest of your life, being here in America.

KIRSCHEN: Well, I always have memories of my life in Vienna.

LEVINE: Do you think that colored your life here in any way? The fact that you did start out in Vienna?

KIRSCHEN: No. No. America offered me opportunities which I was smart enough to take advantage of. That's all.

LEVINE: How about your mother and father? How did they feel about coming here, after they'd been here a while?

KIRSCHEN: Oh, they were delighted to come here. My father was an expert on clover seeds. Clover seeds. Which he was able to tell if he had if he had some in his hand.

LEVINE: Are you saying clover seeds?

KIRSCHEN: Clover.

LEVINE: Because he became a farmer?

KIRSCHEN: No. No, no. No. My father became a counterman in...

LEVINE: Oh, he continued working in a bakery.

KIRSCHEN: He continued in a bakery. He was a counterman. My mother went to evening high school with me. And she did better than I did.

LEVINE: Can you think of any dreams that you had as a young man that you realized or didn't realize any dreams of your own in your life?

KIRSCHEN: No. I have achieved what I hoped for in the United States. And it was good to me. I retired from the Merchant Marine Academy where I wore a uniform with saluting and everything, ah, for 35 years. And I have a pension, on which I live now.

LEVINE: How is this period of your life for you?

KIRSCHEN: This period?

LEVINE: Of being retired?

KIRSCHEN: Well. It's kind of dull cause I miss my wife. But she passed away as a result of some surgery which she had. My children were here. We let her go. Because we didn't want her to be disabled. And anything that they would have been able to do, would have left her partially disabled which we couldn't see.

LEVINE: Do you think you had any heroes in your life? Either public figures or private?

KIRSCHEN: My heroes are my uncles who went to Israel and helped to build Israel as it is today.

LEVINE: Is there anything else that you'd like to say before we close, about coming to this country or living your life in this country?

KIRSCHEN: Well, coming to this county was an experience which I didn't anticipate, but it was all good. And ah, with my mother's help I was able to achieve, to go to college, and to university later on. The New School.

And I, I stayed on my job for 35 years. Boy, I had a very good reputations. And I think you ought to be aware that I am teaching English to Russian immigrants now for NYANA, and at Workman's Circle. I am a Workman's Circle man. My father-in-law was one of the founders of Workman's Circle. And I'm active in it. I'm involved in it.

LEVINE: What is your motivation for doing that work?

KIRSCHEN: Well, it's a labor-oriented organization which is what my interests are. I have been, I have been ah, teaching labor and a preference for labor for a long time. As an economist at the Merchant Marine Academy. It was a very interesting experience in my life.

LEVINE: So now your, your hands on experience, kind of like--

KIRSCHEN: I am a volunteer, yes.

LEVINE: Kind of like when you worked for your uncle in the stationery store and learned about business firsthand.

KIRSCHEN: Well, my students now are recently arrived Russians, who are learning English with my help.

LEVINE: Wonderful.

KIRSCHEN: And I've been doing this full time.

LEVINE: Well, I think maybe that's a beautiful place to stop. I want to thank you, Mr. Kirschen, for a lovely interview.

KIRSCHEN: Look. There is a tape of mine in Ellis Island, which I made some years ago. Ah, which you may run across.

LEVINE: I'll certainly look for that.

KIRSCHEN: Sure.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, thank you very much.

KIRSCHEN: You're welcome. It was a good experience.

LEVINE: Great. Great. I'm glad you enjoyed it. I've been speaking with Sigmund Kirschen, who came in 1927 from first – he was in Poland, but came from Vienna, Austria when he was 16 years old. I want to thank you very much. And this is Janet Levine signing off.

EI-531/KIRSCHEN

KIRSCHEN: Thank you. It was a good experience.

END INTERVIEW