

EI-660

FREDERICK WILLIAM KUNZ

BIRTHDATE: JULY 17, 1926

INTERVIEW DATE: AUGUST 28, 1995

RUNNING TIME: 1:00:29

INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME

INTERVIEW LOCATION: TROY, NEW YORK

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: JOHN MURIELLO, NOVEMBER, 1995

TRANSCRIPT NOT REVIEWED

PARAGUAY (BORN OF GERMAN PARENTS), 1927

AGE NINE MONTHS

PASSAGE ON EITHER "THE VOLTAIRE" OR "THE VARIBAN"

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Monday, August 28th, 1995. I'm in the town of Brunswick, which is outside of Troy, New York, and I'm here with Fred Kunz. Mr. Kunz was born in Paraguay, born of German parents, and came to the United States in 1927 when he was nine months old. And he's going to relay to us his history of his parents and why they came here, and they remembered very vividly coming through Ellis Island also in 1927. Mr. Kunz, can we begin by you giving me your birth date, please?

KUNZ: Oh, my birthday is July 17th, 1926.

SIGRIST: And what is your full name, please? Could you say it for us on tape?

KUNZ: Fred William Kunz. K-U-N-Z.

SIGRIST: And, Fred, Fredrick? Is it...

KUNZ: It's Fred, Fredrick. Fredrick William.

SIGRIST: And can you spell Fredrick, please?

KUNZ: F-R-E-D-R-I-C-K.

SIGRIST: Okay. Where in Paraguay were you born?

KUNZ: I was born in Villa Rica.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

KUNZ: V-I-L-L-A, R-I-C-A.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about Villa Rica.

KUNZ: Well, Villa Rica according to my parents was a very small town not too far away from Asuncion. But since my dad had a, had the position of being the

overseer of a mahogany plantation we were out in the woods primarily, out in the forest. And that's one of the reasons why my mother couldn't take the climate. And one of the basic reasons that we came to this country was to get back to the temperate zone.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about where Paraguay lies in the continent?

KUNZ: Yes. Paraguay is, is in, is sandwiched in between Argentina and Brazil. And Uruguay is on the coast of South America, and Paraguay is interior, and there's one large river that goes through the, the, I've forgotten the name of it, now. La Plata, I think. I think it's the La Plata River that runs through there.

SIGRIST: You said that it was near Asuncion?

KUNZ: Asuncion, yes.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

KUNZ: A-S-U-N-C-I-O-N.

SIGRIST: I guess the best way to start this interview would be to talk about your

parents in Germany, and why they went to Paraguay.

KUNZ: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

KUNZ: My father's name was Leopold.

SIGRIST: And tell me a little bit about his family background in Germany, that sort of thing.

KUNZ: He, he, they were, he was born in Karlsruhe which is a fairly large city in Germany. And...

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, too, please?

KUNZ: K-A-R-L-S-R-U-H-E. Karlsruhe. And my father went to, went to the schools, and he became a tool and dye maker, or a machinist. And just as he was about to, to go to a university, he decided he wanted to go to the university, World War One broke out. And he was in World War One for four years. The entire, in the German army, of course. And after the war he, he married during the war my mother, who's name was Frieda Klingler,

her maiden name. Klingler.

SIGRIST: Can you spell Frieda and Klingler, please?

KUNZ: F-R-I-E-D-A, K-L-I-N-G-L-E-R. Klingler. And they married during the war. And one of my, my brothers was born and he passed away during the war. And then my, my parents had George and, and my sister Mary. She was called Maria in German, and George, Hor, his name really was Horst. H-O-R-S-T. But because when he was a small child they, they used to call him "horse," he changed it to George. But anyway, they, my dad didn't like the political climate over there. Plus the fact that after the World War One things were really economically bad for the Germans. So there was an opportunity to go, to go to South America to act as an overseer of a plantation where the rare woods would be sent back to Germany and they would use them for veneers on, on furniture and so on. So he, he took that position, and he left, as I recall seeing in, in some of the papers somewhere about 1925, '24, '25. They went to Paraguay. And while they were down there they had, they, pretty, took care of overseeing the mahogany plantation, and sending, sending the wood back to Germany for furniture manufacture.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me anything about your father's service during World War

One? Did he ever speak about that experience?

KUNZ: Oh, yes. Yes. He was, he was in Belgium and in France during the war. And he was wounded once from shrapnel. He was in the artillery.

SIGRIST: Are there stories that he used to tell about that that you could relay to us on tape?

KUNZ: Yes. He mentioned several times in, in the, during the course of the war, that the, in the artillery they, towards the end of the war things were getting pretty bad, and, and the shells weren't firing the way they should have fired. And also the, there was hardly any food for them. They were almost starving. And it was quite a rough time on him. He was gassed twice, too. He was, in the trench warfare they used gas at that time.

SIGRIST: Do you know what would happen at that time if you were gassed, what was the outcome?

KUNZ: Well, the outcome is that you're pretty much paralyzed. And so they, he had, he was sent to the hospital where he recuperated, and then he had, he was sent back in again. And he had quite a few friends were, were killed in that war. My mother worked as a, she, she was back at the home front. She was manufac, making shells. So she, she learned the trade of turning

shells to their proper size.

KUNZ: That was done in, in Karl, in Karlsruhe. In Germany.

SIGRIST: But is that, is it a factory job...

KUNZ: Oh, yes. It was a factory. In a factory. Yes.

SIGRIST: You mentioned that your parents married during the war.

KUNZ: Yes.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me how they met and how that all came about?

KUNZ: Well, they, they were school children, and my dad was on the stocky side. So they, they used to say, "Run. Here comes the fat guy." Because they were, when they were friends, the girls would, he would chase them. And then eventually he got to know my mother. And then their friendship blossomed into love, and then they were married during the war in 1917.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about your father's personality?

KUNZ: He was strict. He was a very person, but he, he was a loveable guy. And he took good care of his family. (he cries) He took very good care of his family. He always worked hard. And he was a very good father to me, and to my brother and sister, too, of course. And he used the rod occasionally, but only when we really needed it.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things did your father like to do for recreation?

KUNZ: He was a great reader. He read a lot. And he was always working at the house.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things did he do?

KUNZ: He, he could do anything. He could be a plumber, he was a part electrician, he could, he could, he was a carpenter, and he could do almost anything that was associated with household.

SIGRIST: Just a handy kind of man.

KUNZ: Everything. And he was a very good machinist. And he was a very excellent mechanic, too. When it came to fixing water pumps and things like that, because that's, that was one of his occupations when he was

working for the Niagara Mohawk. And...

SIGRIST: Once, once they got here?

KUNZ: Once they were here, yes.

SIGRIST: Let me ask you the same question about your mom. Can you describe her personality for me?

KUNZ: Oh, she was a very loving mother. Very religious. And we were brought to go to church every Sunday. And also we were all sent to Cath, to parochial schools, Catholic parochials [sic] schools.

SIGRIST: And the family was Catholic? That was their religion?

KUNZ: The family was Catholic. Roman Catholic, yes.

SIGRIST: You said that your mother was relig, religious. Is there a story that reflects how religious she was?

KUNZ: Well, she would, she would, she would take us and bring us to mass in the morning, in fact. And that was one of her, one of her reasons for moving to

where I live today, well, we live down here, a few blocks away, was to be in walking distance of a Catholics [sic] church, so that she could go to mass during the day.

SIGRIST: Did she teach you any prayers as a child?

KUNZ: Oh, yes. We, we were taught all the "Our Father," and "Hail Mary," and so on.

SIGRIST: Can you say a prayer for us on tape in German? Do you remember any...

KUNZ: Well, we used to say the prayer before meals, we always said that. "O, Gott, von dem wir Alles haben, wir preisen Dich für deine Gaben. Du speisest uns, weil Du uns liebst, und segne auch was Du uns gibst. Amen."

SIGRIST: Thank you.

KUNZ: You're welcome.

SIGRIST: What, what did you, what's the translation roughly?

KUNZ: Oh, it's, it's, "Oh, God, thank you for the meal we're about to eat. And, and we praise you for, forever."

SIGRIST: Talk about the kinds of recreational things your mother like to do at...

KUNZ: Well, Mom was a great seamstress. She, in fact, at, at one time she used to make our clothing. And she, she used to like to knit and crochet. And she, she was a cook. She was a great cook.

SIGRIST: Tell me some of the things she cooked.

KUNZ: Some of the things primarily were doughnuts. She had a special, "Berliner" they call, they called them, which are doughnuts which are filled with jelly on the inside. So she'd make a big pot of soup, and then we have that Berliner, the Berliners and other doughnuts to eat.

SIGRIST: Can you spell Berliner, please?

KUNZ: B-E-R-L-I-N-E-R.

SIGRIST: Like the city? Like...

KUNZ: Like the city, yeah.

SIGRIST: ...comes from Berlin.

KUNZ: Well, that's where, that's where they were originally made, I guess.

SIGRIST: I see.

KUNZ: And she used to make these huge cakes. Onion cakes and, and plum cakes. And again that was always a big pot of soup and, and the cake. Now what was it? But she could cook many other things.

SIGRIST: Now, you said earlier that you believe your parents went to Paraguay in '26.
1926? (a telephone rings)

KUNZ: No, that's when I was born.

SIGRIST: '25?

KUNZ: Some, no, somewhere around the '24, '25 time span.

SIGRIST: I'm curious what your father relayed to you about that experience of going

to Paraguay as opposed to what your mother may have relayed to you about going to Paraguay.

KUNZ: He, he was, he was anxious to, to get there, because it was an adventure to him. But Mom was a little reluctant, because she, she so used, she wasn't used to the jungle facilities, you know.

SIGRIST: Do you know how much she knew about that before she got there?

KUNZ: I don't believe she knew too much, she had much of a feeling for that. I think she was, she was somewhat surprised when she got there. Again, this was back in the '20's, and, and you didn't have the television, and the only thing you, you could tell was from books and brochures.

SIGRIST: Did either of them ever relay anything about the ocean crossing to Paraguay?

KUNZ: They just mentioned it was a normal crossing. No, no particular...

SIGRIST: Nothing specific?

KUNZ: Nothing, no specific problems.

SIGRIST: Was there a German population in Paraguay?

KUNZ: Yes, there was. I think they, I think it was somewhere in the Asuncion region.

SIGRIST: And what sorts of things, if you know were the Germans involved in doing in that part of the world?

KUNZ: I think primarily they were in agriculture, for one thing. And also trying to, to get involved in governmental positions, such that they could build these, these countries up. You might say they were the fourth world countries in those days.

SIGRIST: Do you know if your father had any kind of experience when he was in Germany, experience like what he would be doing once he get to Paraguay? How did he get that job, I guess is what I'm asking.

KUNZ: I think, I think he just, just applied for it. He saw an ad in the newspaper, and he went and applied for it. And because of the conditions back in Germany at that time. And he didn't like the political ramifications that were starting. So he, he just wanted to leave.

SIGRIST: What were the economic problems going on in Germany...

KUNZ: Well, basically it had a very, very high inflation rate. In order, in order for you to, to buy your groceries, the wives would go to the factory. They were paid every, every, twice a day because of the inflation rate. The wives would, would go to the factories, the husbands would give them the money and then the wives would go to the store and buy hard goods, and, and food. Because the following afternoon the prices would go up. So that's how bad it was, and in fact, eventually the postage stamps cost a billion marks because of the inflation rate. And that was, and all their savings were completely wiped out.

SIGRIST: And what, what, what was the political climate? What didn't he like about the political climate?

KUNZ: Well, the political climate was there was, there was no, no direction, no leadership. The Weimar Republic as it was in those days was floundering. And again the people had very little to eat, and, and the inflation was so high, and, and that was it primarily.

SIGRIST: I should say for the sake of the tape that Weimar is spelled V-E-I-M...

KUNZ: W-. W-.

SIGRIST: W-. Excuse me.

KUNZ: W-.

SIGRIST: W-E-I-M-A-R. Thank you. All right. So your parents got to Paraguay.

KUNZ: Right.

SIGRIST: And there's a brother and a sister.

KUNZ: My brother and sister were born in Germany and came, came along, right.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you know of their life in Paraguay.

KUNZ: It was pretty strange to them, because they, they, the climate was hot. And there was very little civilization in the section where they were living because it was in the, it was in the jungle, in the forest.

SIGRIST: Do you know any details about the actual structure that they were living in?

KUNZ: Yes. Yes. I, I had some pictures. I, we misplaced them somewhere, but we had some pictures where it looked just like a thatched roof made from, from, from straw, and a few sides, and, and that was it. It was a very, very primeval, if you want to call it, call it that. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Well, and sure, coming from an industrial country like Germany...

KUNZ: Yeah, where the, where the streets were, all had cobblestones. And then going there where everything was horseback. Everything was, of course, in those days everything was horseback and wagon, horse and wagon. And, in the, in the big ruts. And especially the torrential rains, they used to tell, tell us stories about that. They'd have to put umbrellas because it rained through the roofs. And then they also had ants. The army ants would come through every once in a while, and eat anything in sight practically.

SIGRIST: Are there any stories from your family about encounters with wild animals or reptiles or...

KUNZ: Primarily my brother. He was fooling around with a frog one time, and, with a stick. And he poked the frog, and the frog spit. And it spit out some solution and it hit him right in the eye. And it formed a coating right over his

eye. And my parents took it and washed it out, so he didn't lose his sight, but he could have lost. And, lost it. And one time my mother was bathing with, with us, and she felt a, a sting in her foot. This was in a stream close by. And she took her foot out and she noticed blood, and there was a native woman, an Indian. And she said, "Get out quick, get out quick," in Spanish, or in Guarani, which is a, is their local language there. And it turned out that she was, she was bitten by a piranha. So it was a good time to get out of the water.

SIGRIST: Can you spell the name of the local language, please?

KUNZ: Guarani? I think it's G-U-A-R-A-N-I. Guarani. It's a, it's a combination between Spanish and Eng, and the indian language. Guarani.

SIGRIST: So your, your family is contending with piranhas and poisonous frogs and all these kinds of things they don't have in Germany.

KUNZ: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about, for instance, schooling. Did your brothers and sisters, or did your brother and sister go to school, or...

KUNZ: Well, they were pretty young at that time. It was mostly home taught. They were mostly home taught until we came to this country.

SIGRIST: Were there any stories that your family has related to you about your birth and the circumstances that surrounded...

KUNZ: Oh, yes. Yes. It, it turned out that in this part of the country there were mostly, mostly natives, so that, and people that had lived there for a long time. And, and consequently when I was born, I, I had, they had an indian midwife to help my mother out. My father was probably boiling hot water as they show in the movies, usually. And the, when I was born, I was blonde. White, almost white blonde. And this created a big furor, because they had never seen anyone like that before. So they made a big issue, big thing out of that. They had people coming from, from various parts of the, of the forest coming in to look to see this child that was white with white hair. (he laughs) But that's, that's the story they told me. I, I can't verify that, of course. I don't have the hair anymore, either. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: Can you tell me something, and maybe you can't, but if you know anything about the relationship between the German population and the native indian population there?

KUNZ: They, they thought quite highly of, of the Germans down there at that time. Because they always tried to teach them the right, what they thought was the right way to do things, you know. To, to grow more crops and to build up the country. So they, they had a very good reputation there.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little bit about what you know about your father's work on the plantation and exactly what that entailed?

KUNZ: Well, my, my dad's primary job was to go out into the forest and identify those trees to be cut, and, and shipped back, of course. And he, he also had to identify the type of tree. And he was a for, he learned some forestry just before he left. They taught him of what types to send, and so on and so forth. And the lengths and, and the better, the best lengths to send, and so on. So there...

SIGRIST: Did he, did he ever tell you what to look for in a mahogany tree? I mean, what sorts of things...

KUNZ: Oh, yeah. The only, he never told me about in the tree itself, but one time we had the, the job of, of locally picking out a casket for someone that had died. And he went up to the casket, and the person at the store, at the place, the display room said, "Oh, that's solid mahogany." So my dad went

up and just, and he just blew on it a little bit and let his, his, the moisture from his breath get on it. And then he just wiped it off, and he said, "No." He said, "That's veneer." (he laughs) So he, he had, he had that kind of a feeling for the woods.

SIGRIST: And he brought his knowledge with him to Troy, obviously. (he laughs)

KUNZ: He brought it, brought his knowledge with him. Yes.

SIGRIST: Is there anything else that, that your parents relayed to you about their, their existence in Paraguay that we haven't touched upon?

KUNZ: Yes. I think primarily it, it, there were some uprising, too. Sometimes the natives would, would start getting dissatisfied with their condition perhaps, or for one reason or another. And they, they would kill people. And one of their, one of my dad's friends was killed down there. And they would also identify how, how they always drink mat, matte. M-A-T-T-E. They, they would have a gourd which is dried out and it's hollowed on the, on the inside, and they would put the matte in there, and then pour hot water in it, and then drink it from a, with a metal straw. In fact I have one in, in my drawer in there. I, I was brought up with matte. They, they always gave me a little bit of that. And it's delicious tea.

SIGRIST: What is it made out of? What...

KUNZ: It's a tea. It's made from a, from a plant. And they just dry it in the sun, and then break it up into small pieces like a tea leaf. Okay? And it's, it's very good.

SIGRIST: I'm curious, in retrospect, looking back on, on your growing up with your parents here in Troy. Did their experience in Paraguay have any profound effect on their later life in America?

KUNZ: I, I think it just rounded, rounded out their, their education, if you will, because, and they always were able to, my, my dad could speak Spanish pretty well. And as a result he, he made quite a few contacts with people from South America that he would meet in Troy, or, or at picnics and things. And it, it was good as, as a social tool to be able to speak with people from Spain, or South America I should say.

SIGRIST: Tell me why they left Paraguay?

KUNZ: Well, they left primarily because of the temperature, the climate, which my mother couldn't stand. And then, too, the, the lack of civilization. She

wanted to get back to civilized, civilized area, and she...

SIGRIST: She probably wanted to get away from the piranhas.

KUNZ: She had enough of the, she had enough of the jungle life. (they laugh)
And, and of course, this is back in the '20's. Things were, things were
pretty rough down there. I, I, just looking at some of the photographs. It
was a...

SIGRIST: They're still pretty rough down there.

KUNZ: They're still...

SIGRIST: You can only imagine how rough...

KUNZ: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me what you know about their leaving Paraguay, about the
process and what they had to go through to get out.

KUNZ: Okay. As I understand it, they wrote to my cousin here in, in this area.
And, not my cousin, but my father's cousin. Who, and then requested some

funds be sent to them. And then they, my, my, Mr. Bodemer, I'll call him Mr. Bodemer, because that's his, that was my father's cousin's name.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, too, please?

KUNZ: B-O-D-E-M-E-R. He took care of, of handling the, the paper work that had to be done from this part, from this area. And as you saw I have from Mr., Mr. Oswald Heck, he was the travel bureau man locally in Schenectady. In fact, it turned out that his son eventually became the Speaker of the House in the New York State Assembly many years ago.

SIGRIST: What was his last name? Heck?

KUNZ: Heck. Heck. H-E-C-K.

SIGRIST: Thank you. He...

KUNZ: Ozzi...

SIGRIST: He was the travel agent?

KUNZ: Right. His father was the travel agent that took care of all the

correspondence and, and so on and so forth. So at, at that point, my parents moved, since they knew that they were, they were come to the States, they moved to Villa Rica, which is, is a larger city. A slightly larger city. Well, obviously, from where they were. And so they stayed at the Hotel Schlesing, and, until all the funds arrived. And they took, they went to U.S. Consulate in, in Asuncion, and took care of the paper work there through him. So this way they could come in through a quota system.

SIGRIST: Could you spell Schlesing, the name of the hotel...

KUNZ: S-C-H-L-E-S-I-N-G.

SIGRIST: Thank you. Obviously a German hotel...

KUNZ: It's a German hotel.

SIGRIST: ...catering to German...

KUNZ: Right. Right.

SIGRIST: I should say for the sake of the tape that you have a fantastic collection of paper archives...

KUNZ: Right. Right.

SIGRIST: ...of your parent's experience, and we may be referring to them as we go on.

KUNZ: Right.

SIGRIST: Everything including the receipt for the ship...

KUNZ: Right.

SIGRIST: ...and we'll be talking about that. What do you know about their getting ready to go in terms of paper and that sort of thing?

KUNZ: Just, just that they had to, they had to go, to go, to come to the States, they also had to go through Buenos Aires, because that's where the boat, the ship I should say, was, was docked, so that they, they had to come down through, through the La Plata River to Buenos Aires, where they disembarked. They, they pretty much had, had these large steam ship covers. Not, that's call them in German, you call them covers. But suitcases. Great, huge ones. And they had several of those as you can

imagine with three children, there's always something that they had to bring along.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: What did you parents take with them from Paraguay? You mention the straw that you...

KUNZ: Yes.

SIGRIST: ...drank the matte...

KUNZ: They also brought, we, we had a rattlesnake skin mounted. It was dried rattlesnake skin, which was about, oh, gosh, it was about five feet high. And we brought, they brought that in. And they also brought a stuff parrot. A beautiful stuffed parrot. But it wasn't allowed to come in. So they, they, they took that at, at Ellis Island. You know, there's only certain things you can bring into the country...

SIGRIST: That's probably why they brought you to Ellis Island, because of the rattlesnake and the stuffed parrot. (they laugh) I've another question for you. What did they take from Germany when they went to Paraguay?

KUNZ: Well, Dad took his, his army uniform. In fact, Mom later on in this country made, made a coat for me out of that, his old army coat. And I think he brought his, his knife with him. He had a, a large, a rather large knife which he could use in the jungle. And pretty much riding, riding equipment. I know that. He had a pair of chaps which were leather chaps he could put on. And, and riding britches. And Mom just brought as I recall, I mean, based on her conversation, just normal clothing. But they were amazed at how hot it was. It was, sometimes it would get into the hundreds.

SIGRIST: In Paraguay.

KUNZ: In Paraguay.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Well, it's funny, because they're going through a double immigration experience. It's always interesting what people choose to bring with them.

KUNZ: Right. Right.

SIGRIST: Well, here, they're not only bringing stuff from Germany, but now they're bringing stuff from Paraguay...

KUNZ: Right.

SIGRIST: ...and of course they end up with all of it once they get to Troy.

KUNZ: Right. And, and then, too, the seasons were completely reversed, because it's summer in, in the winter, when it's winter in Germany. So, so that was quite a change for them, too.

SIGRIST: How long did they have, had, did they have to wait in Buenos Aires before they got on the ship?

KUNZ: I think it was, I think it was only a few days, several days.

SIGRIST: Do you know anything about the, the examination process or anything like that, if there even was one?

KUNZ: No, there was, there was no examination process. They just had to go through the consulate, and they just stamped it. Since it was officially stamped by the American in, in Asuncion. So that that was like, hey, you know, they're just going through this country. So it's just a transit, like a transit visa, almost. They just stamped that you've been here, and that's it.

SIGRIST: Since we've gotten to the point about the boat, we should explain that the name of the line that they took was the, the Lamport Holt Line.

KUNZ: Right.

SIGRIST: L-A-M-P-O-R-T, and Holt, H-O-L-T. And there's a little discrepancy between some of the written paper work and the printed paper work...

KUNZ: Right.

SIGRIST: ...it mentions that they took The Voltaire. The, the handwritten paper work looks like it says Variban...

KUNZ: Vari...

SIGRIST: V-A-R-I-B-A-N.

KUNZ: B-A-N.

SIGRIST: So we're not quite sure what ship they took.

KUNZ: Right.

SIGRIST: It may have been The Voltaire, or Variban may be Voltaire in Spanish, or in the native language, or something.

KUNZ: Right. Right.

SIGRIST: But anyway, I do want to say also that we do have the receipts for the ship passage...

KUNZ: Right.

SIGRIST: And it cost in American dollars...

KUNZ: Right.

SIGRIST: ...five hundred and seventy-eight dollars and sixty-two cents. And that would be for?

KUNZ: All of them.

SIGRIST: Mom, Dad...

KUNZ: For Mom, Dad, George, Mary and myself.

SIGRIST: I see.

KUNZ: Five.

SIGRIST: We can assume that you probably went for half fare or something. (he laughs)

KUNZ: I, I can't verify that. But it was third class, too, by the way.

SIGRIST: What did, what if anything did they relate to you about the passage to New York?

KUNZ: It apparently was uneventful because they were probably so busy taking

care of three children that they, they didn't have too much time to relate to other people on board.

SIGRIST: Do you know anything about where the ship might have stopped prior to going to New York?

KUNZ: It stopped, it just went to New York. It was a direct, direct from, from Buenos Aires to, to New York.

SIGRIST: And what time of the year is this?

KUNZ: March. They landed in March.

SIGRIST: March.

KUNZ: March the 23rd of 1927.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you know about what happens to them once the ship approaches New York.

KUNZ: Now, you have to remember this. They were coming, it was summer in South America, okay? And they're coming up here, so, they, it was, well,

it was just in the latter part of the, of the winter here, so that they were quite cold. But they, they did mention that they had seen the Statue of Liberty. And they were quite impressed by it when they came through. And...

SIGRIST: And you mentioned that they had recollections of having to go to Ellis Island.

KUNZ: Oh, they went to Ellis Island. Yes

SIGRIST: What, what were those recollections?

KUNZ: That they, they were physically examined there, or all of us were. And, and then I think they stayed there overnight. And then the following day they took the train from New York City to Cohoes.

SIGRIST: And they probably took your parrot away at Ellis Island.

KUNZ: They took it, they took it at immigration, wherever that was, it was probably in Ellis Island. (they laugh) The stuffed parrot, not a real one.

SIGRIST: Right. Right

KUNZ: A live one.

SIGRIST: And you think your, you think the family was held overnight at Ellis Island?

KUNZ: I think it was just an overnight stay.

SIGRIST: I see. Anything else that you were told about the ship arriving in New York and the processing or anything else?

KUNZ: No, just that it, it went along apparently satisfactorily to them. They had no bad stories to tell. And in fact they were glad to, to set foot in the United States at that point.

SIGRIST: Did anyone come to New York to meet them?

KUNZ: No, they, they had, they had their train, as I read in Heck's travel bureau paper there, they had, they had the tickets all ready for the train from New York City to, to Albany I think it was, which, and that's where Mr. Bodemer and his family picked our family up.

SIGRIST: Did your mother or father ever, ever tell you maybe things that they saw

here in America that they had never seen before? Things that were new to them?

KUNZ: No, just the, just the abundance of, of food, that they, they had not experienced in the past. They had really, and the number of automobiles that that, even in the '20's were, were more automobiles that they had in, in, in Europe. Of course, there were hardly any in South America at that time.

SIGRIST: Right.

KUNZ: In Paraguay.

SIGRIST: Where did they go to live when they first arrived?

KUNZ: They, they lived in Cohoes. They, first they lived a week with the Bodemers, or we did, lived a week with the Bodemers. And then Dad had a, just temporary job as a, as a farmer at Mr. Herbs', H-E-R-B-S, farm in Cohoes. And...

SIGRIST: Doing what kind of work?

KUNZ: Just farming, more or less, working in the field. And...

SIGRIST: What were they...

KUNZ: Planting.

SIGRIST: ...what kind of vegetables...

KUNZ: I think primarily they were planting potatoes and, and corn and things like that. Then, of course, his, his background was as a tool and dye maker in Germany, or a mechanic. So he, he took a job with, it was Niagara Hudson in those days. It's NYMO today, but in those days there was a, a garage down in, in south Troy. So he and my, his, his cousin's husband, Bodemers, they both worked in the same place. So he was fixing the, the trucks primarily at that time. And then after that he worked there a couple of years, and then there was an opportunity for him to go back into the tool and dye making profession if you want to call it that, in General Electric.

SIGRIST: I should also say for the sake of the tape that NYMO are the initials for Niagara Mohawk...

KUNZ: Niagara Mohawk.

SIGRIST: Which is the local utility company here in upstate New York.

KUNZ: Right. Right. Right.

SIGRIST: Where does your memory kick in? What's the earliest memory that you...

KUNZ: My earliest memory is in Cohoes when I first saw snow. I must have been three years old because, and, and I said snow in German. Of course, German was my first language, because my parents were obviously from Germany. And I, I can still remember looking out the front window and seeing this white stuff come floating down. (he laughs) It's the first time I had seen it, of course. And saying, saying "Schnee," I guess, so I must have been at least three. Saying, saying "Schnee" in German, which is snow.

SIGRIST: How is Schnee spelled?

KUNZ: S-C-H-N-E-E.

SIGRIST: Talk to me about the house in Cohoes and what you remember about where you lived.

KUNZ: It was a two story family. We lived, we lived downstairs, and there was another family who lived upstairs. Their name was Johnson. And there was some friction there, because, you know, immigrants at some times were looked down upon, and, and, so there was a little bit of discrimination, if you put it very mildly. It wasn't, it wasn't that bad according to Dad and my mother. But, it was...

SIGRIST: Well, what would they do to, to express their displeasure?

KUNZ: Well, they would just, they would just do things to the children, you know. And their kid, their children would, would come down and plague my brother and sister to some extent. But nothing, nothing seriously. But it was just a little bit of discrimination. And especially since we, we couldn't speak, or my parents couldn't speak English that well at that point in time. And, of course, my brother and sister, too, the same thing. So, they, there was no, there was a lack of communication, which is always difficult when, when you can't speak the same language, if you will.

SIGRIST: How did, what, what old world German ways did your parents hold on to here in the United States?

KUNZ: Primarily discipline. They, they were, they always made sure, certain things you had to do. You had to work, you had to do certain jobs.

SIGRIST: Do you remember some of the rules that, of the house that you had to follow?

KUNZ: Well, there were certain, well, as we got older, of course. But as we were younger you, you had to, to do your chores before you could leave the house. And Mom was there to check to see if they were done. And...

SIGRIST: What was your chore?

KUNZ: My chore, well, we used, we used to dust, we used to have to dust the house. And Mom was a very, very sticklish [sic] about cleanliness. And the other thing was, too, you had to take care of your clothing, because you didn't get your clothing dirty. (he laughs) That was a no-no. But there were, there were good clothes and, and play clothes, you know, you could change. And then we, when I was younger we used to have aprons, too. Mom made aprons for us so that you wouldn't get the clothes dirty.

SIGRIST: Did your mother get a job here in the United States?

KUNZ: Yes, during the Depression. You see, right after Dad took the job in Schenectady, then we moved to Schenectady from Cohoes...

SIGRIST: This is the General Electric job?

KUNZ: The General Electric job. And while we were there, Mom, we, we had a, a large flat. So what she did is she took in some boarders. She took in immigrant guys, single guys. Couple of single guys came over. And she, they, they would, they would stay in the rooms, and Mom would cook for them and also do their wash.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about those boarders specifically?

KUNZ: They were nice, nice fellows. Clean cut type, you know. And they were, they were working, when they were working, and then they'd come home, and, they were, were just like part of the family, because, of course, they were, they were also from Germany, too, at that point. So that there was, there was a good, good relationship between them. They were almost like cousins, if you wanted to call them that, you know.

SIGRIST: Now, did you speak exclusively German in the house?

KUNZ: We spoke exclusively German in the house. And, except, once we started going to school, my parents asked us to speak English to them, but they would respond in German. Okay? So, we, we learned to speak the English in school plus our playmates outside. And, and that's the way we learned the language.

SIGRIST: Do you remember your own experience just beginning to learn English, and, and how that effected you?

KUNZ: I had no, no problems with it. It just seemed, it just seemed to flow pretty easily, because, see, in those days they didn't have kindergarten, the schools I went to. So you went in the first grade. So by the time you got, you, you went into the first grade, you pretty much had a good, a reasonably intell, you could speak English pretty well. Now my brother had a problem.

SIGRIST: How old was he when they arrived?

KUNZ: Let's see. He was born in, he was about six. Five or six, in that range. And he had to go to school in Schenectady he started school. And he, he was held back a year because he couldn't speak English. But he managed okay after, after that. But he had a problem. My sister not

because she was younger. So in, in, in conversing with the local neighbors, it was Eng, we could speak English before we got into the school. But not my brother, of course.

SIGRIST: Did, did you parents make a, a concerted effort to learn English, or did they...

KUNZ: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: I mean how did they approach that?

KUNZ: Well, they went to night school.

SIGRIST: What do you know about their experience in night school?

KUNZ: I, my dad went to night school, but Mom went during the days when Dad was working. Okay? So she, she used to take me along. And this was in Schenectady. And, and they always gave me a coloring book or something, and sat, and had me sit in the corner while these ladies were all saying the, following the teacher in pronunciation of English. I always remember one, one thing. And I knew the difference already then. The, the teacher would say, "The man eats the bread." And then the class

would all respond, "Dee man eats dee brett." [PH] (he laughs) And I knew that was wrong even that. But those were the kinds of things I remember at that stage. And, but that's what Mom did. She, she wanted to learn English, and of course, Dad had to, because he, he had to work with people, you know. So he went to night school.

SIGRIST: Did your mother in her learning of the language, how did she approach using English out in public?

KUNZ: It was, it was difficult for Mom, because she, she was at home most of the time, so she didn't have the, the luxury of working with people that much. So it was more difficult for her. But she, she would, with her broken English she still go to the store and buy, buy things, and, and whatever. And she would try to speak as best she could, and, even it wasn't correct English at that point. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: So we're in Schenectady during the 1930's, right?

KUNZ: Right.

SIGRIST: That's...

KUNZ: Right. Right.

SIGRIST: ...the time period we're talking about. Is there, is there a strong German community...

KUNZ: Oh, yes. Yes, there is. There was a Turner, Turner Hall in Schenectady.

SIGRIST: Turner Hall?

KUNZ: Turner Hall in Schenectady. And there was what they called a Turn Verein, which is a, which is a society for, for lifting weights and gymnastics primarily.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

KUNZ: What?

SIGRIST: Turner Verein?

KUNZ: Oh, Verein? V-E-R-E-I-N. Turner is T-U-R...

SIGRIST: So there was a Turner Hall, which is a social hall probably...

KUNZ: Right.

SIGRIST: ...and then there was the Verein...

KUNZ: The Verein which is part of the hall.

SIGRIST: Like an athletic club.

KUNZ: Yeah, it's an athletic club. And they had all the weights and the dumbbells and things like that. Which was brought over. That part of the culture, the German culture is, is gymnastics. And singing. And they also had a singing society there, too.

SIGRIST: How, in what ways did your parents socialize at that time.

KUNZ: At that time they would, they would, if, if the hall had an affair, we would go as a family to the hall and, and part, participate in the, mostly the German foods and the beer. And, and of course, I wouldn't, not at that stage. But, but my dad would, would have a few with, with the folks. And, and then they'd have the, the activities, whichever was the, they'd put on an exhibit, you know, the, lifting the weights, and the, and the gymnastics. And then

the singing society, both men and women, they would sing songs,
German, German songs.

SIGRIST: You said you were Catholic early on.

KUNZ: Yes.

SIGRIST: Talk about your religious life at this point.

KUNZ: Okay. Okay. I, I started going to school at St. Joseph's Academy in, in
Schenectady. It's right in the heart of Schenectady.

SIGRIST: This is a Catholic school?

KUNZ: This is a Catholic parochial school. And my brother and sister did, too.
After, the first year my brother went to the public school. But then they
decided it was better for him to go to the Catholic school. And, and St.
Joseph's at that time did, did have quite a large German population, too.
So it was part of, part of the German culture to some, to very little, limited
extent. But, so we went to that school, and, and we, we'd go to mass on
Sunday. And...

SIGRIST: Was it at St. Joseph's Church...

KUNZ: St. Jos, at St. Joseph's Church was right across the street from the school. It's, it's right off State Street. Or it was. It's closed now, of course. And so we, we went to, we went to school there. I went to the first grade there. And...

SIGRIST: Do you remember there being immigrant children in school?

KUNZ: There were some. There were some. Yes. In fact, there were Polish, Polish children there, too. And Italians. Some Italian people were there, too. And, of course, the normal English, Irish, Scotch people, too. And...

SIGRIST: Did the church, did the church play into your parent's social life at all? Did the church play a function, have a function in their...

KUNZ: Not so much at that point. Not so much at that point, because we were still, they were still doing, doing things at home most of the times. They didn't have time enough to socialize except for once in a while going to this German hall. And picnics.

SIGRIST: But that was what, that was the major socializing...

KUNZ: That's the major socializing. And, and with just the neighbors. Just the local neighbors. There was a tailor who, who lived, we, we lived in Schenect, the first, one of the houses we lived in was over a bakery. And then right next door was a tailor shop, and he happened to German. Dolzell his name was. And my, my, he was a widower, and so he had a daughter, and so my mother more or less acted as a, as a surrogate mother to her. So that's the way those things worked.

SIGRIST: Did the German, were there many German merchants in Schenectady at that time?

KUNZ: There were quite a few. Yes. Yes, quite a few. The butcher. I don't recall their names now. And there was a pharmacy, too. And that was run by Germans.

SIGRIST: So this is a visible presence in the community.

KUNZ: It's a, it's a visible presence. And the tailor, of course, I pointed out. Yeah.

SIGRIST: As you were growing up, say, through grade school and into high school,

how did you think of yourself? What nationality did you think of yourself...

KUNZ: I always thought myself as an American. Always. Because it was just, the German, the German part of it was just background. I always looked at it as that way.

SIGRIST: Were there any conflicts, especially as you got older, between the way you looked at the world versus the way your parents looked at the world?

KUNZ: Not really. Not really. We, we all felt that we were just, just Americans, you know, of German heritage. And, and...

SIGRIST: So your parents thought of themselves...

KUNZ: Oh, oh definitely. Definitely.

SIGRIST: Oh, well, that's interesting.

KUNZ: Definitely. My father was a strong American.

SIGRIST: Did he become a citizen?

KUNZ: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little bit about that process?

KUNZ: Yes. Dad became a citizen on, I can tell you this specifically, because it's a very magic date for me. September the 10th, 1934 he became a citizen.

SIGRIST: You're living in Schenectady at that time?

KUNZ: We're living in Schenectady at that time. And then Mom became citizen in 1936 or '37, in that time frame. She, because she, it took her a little longer because she had to learn the English. Okay?

SIGRIST: Tell me about, obviously your father's becoming a citizen means something special to you. Tell me why.

KUNZ: Oh. Oh, well. During the, during World War Two I, I wanted to get into the navy. And I was in high school at the time. So I, I wanted to get my hol, my high school finished before I went into service. And it turned out that the, I got in, on an accelerated program so that I could get out in January of 194', '44. So I took a, I took a test for electronic technician and I passed it. And so I was ready to go into the navy in January of '44. And it

turned out that I was just about ready to be sworn in and somebody called me into the office in Albany and said, "You know, you have to be a citizen for ten years to join the navy, to be in the navy." So I lacked six months, okay. He said, "I can't accept you." And here I had done all this work. Accelerating the program to get out early so that I could get into the navy and, and they wouldn't accept me. So that's why I remember. The day I was drafted was September the 10th, 1944. I was citizen ten years, and I got in the navy that.

SIGRIST: (he laughs) So that's why it means so much to you...

KUNZ: (he laughs) That's why it means so much to me.

SIGRIST: Did, did your parents ever want to go back to Germany for any reason?
Or did they go back to Germany for any reason?

KUNZ: They never went back. My dad did after, after the war. World War Two. He did go back, and it was 1958. He had been away for thirty-five years.

SIGRIST: Did he go alone?

KUNZ: He went by himself, yes.

SIGRIST: Why did he want to go back?

KUNZ: Well, my mother had passed away, see. So, he wanted to go back because he had brothers and sisters over there, and he wanted to visit them. His mother, his mother, of course, had died many years prior to that. But he wanted to go back and, and touch base with people, and he did.

SIGRIST: And what was his, what were his feelings about that experience?

KUNZ: Oh, he really enjoyed that. Well, plus the fact my brother was over there, too. George. He was working for the C.I.A. at the time. And he, he could stay with him. That was in Berlin in those days. And then he could visit my, his relatives down, of course, my relatives, too, but down in, in the Black Forest region in Germany.

SIGRIST: What about you? Have you been either to Paraguay or to Germany?

KUNZ: I have never been to Paraguay. I really don't have any need to go there. (he laughs) It would be nice I suppose sometimes. But I've been to Germany once. I went in 1990, I went to visit my aunts over there. And I,

I went with a Germania Hall tour. A group of us got together and they, they travelled in the southern part of Germany. So I, I went to visit my relatives. I stayed three days with them and then I joined a tour and travelled around. And it was good. I had never seen them. Just by photographs, of course. And they had never seen me. So it was quite a reunion. We had a nice, enjoyable time.

SIGRIST: How did you feel emotionally about the land that you probably had heard quite a bit about?

KUNZ: It was, yeah. I saw the home that, that my father lived, no. Not, he didn't live there. My father lived there with, when my parents were first married. They showed me the homestead there. And my, my, the home my dad lived in initially was bombed out during the war, so there's a gas station there today. And they took me around, and, and showed me where the, where my parents were married, a little chapel and so on. It was, it was, you know, part of history, part of your genealogy if you will. And it was something really interesting to be there, and to meet cousins that you had never met before, and to shake hands and so on.

SIGRIST: Speaking German.

KUNZ: Speaking German. And speaking English, too. There were, one of them is, is now a city planner in, in Berlin. And he and his children all speak English very well. So it was no problem. And I could still speak German reasonably well. So...

SIGRIST: What do you think is inherently German about you? What inside you makes you German?

KUNZ: Well, I think primarily, I don't know. I think it's my way of, my way of living. I try to do the right things. And that was ingrained in us as children, of course. And I, very difficult to, to put my finger on any specific thing. I, I think I'm a good, a good, religious person. But it's hard. The food. I enjoy certain foods. Now, I have to stay away from certain types of the German foods lately. (he laughs) But, the wursts and so on, I've got to be very careful of that. (they laugh) In the, the fat free days that we have today.

SIGRIST: Right. Right. The knackwurst and the dumplings and...

KUNZ: The knackwursts, oh, yes. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: Well, Mr. Kunz, I want to thank you very much. This has been really a very interesting hour that we've spent.

KUNZ: Yeah. (he laughs) Well, I enjoyed it, too.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Fred Kunz on Monday, August 28th, 1995, in Brunswick, New York, just outside of Troy. Thank you very much.