

**EI-68**

**WILLIAM KAPLAN**

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**INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE**

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**LITHUANIA, 1921**

**AGE 13**

**SHIP: LAPLAND**

**PORT: ANTWERP**

**RESIDENCES:**

- **LITHUANIA: KURENITS**
- **US: NEW YORK, NY**

LEVINE: (This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. Today is August 23rd, 1991. I'm here today) . . . in Lauderdale Lakes, Florida with William Kaplan who came from Lithuania in 1921 at the age of thirteen.

KAPLAN: That's right.

LEVINE: Okay, Mr. Kaplan, welcome and I'm happy to be talking with you and maybe you can tell me now the name of the town where you lived in

Lithuania.

KAPLAN: It's called Kurenits.

LEVINE: K-U-R-E-N-I-T-S.

KAPLAN: That's right.

LEVINE: Okay, now can you tell me a little bit about Kurenits? What kind of a town was it?

KAPLAN: Well, it was what they call a shtetl, that you heard many times. There's hundreds of them there. And it was, it was about I don't know if you, they have in Russia, not kilometers it was Viorst; it was called Vilna Gubernia.

LEVINE: The shtetl was called...?

KAPLAN: No, no, Vilna was the governor, was like, to give you, Tallahassee is the, is the...

LEVINE: Oh, the capital.

KAPLAN: The capital, Vilna was the capital, Vilnus they call it now. And we have, that Vilna Gubernia it was called, that you live in that...

LEVINE: That was like the region?

KAPLAN: Yeah, the region, yeah. Vilna region.

LEVINE: I see. And was it like a big city where you were?

KAPLAN: No, no, no, I don't believe there's more than maybe two thousand the most, maybe less.

LEVINE: And what do people do there? What would be...

KAPLAN: What did people do? Was a poor life. It was, some of them, in every shtetl there was a marketplace. Some of them had stores to sell the, it used to be a place like a --it's pretty hard for me --villages, all along, farmers used to bring their merchandise, to bring into the marketplace and they used to sell it. They used to buy it and the farmers used to buy things back from the, like their needs, like salt or they used to have, for their wagons they had to have oil to oil the things here, and there was no money, very little. There was a lot of wheat, you know, that the farmers used to bring to market, calves, wheat and that's what people made a living out of.

LEVINE: And so they were trading...?

KAPLAN: Trading, yeah, trading.

LEVINE: More than money transactions.

KAPLAN: There was very little money involved.

LEVINE: Now how about your father, was he a farmer?

KAPLAN: No, my father was a musician. He left when I was about four years old. He left for America. And, if you have seen the picture of, what you call that one with the...

LEVINE: Fiddler on the Roof?

KAPLAN: Fiddler on the Roof, the movie where there's a wedding and the musicians are going and the kids are running afterwards, well that was my father in there, playing; that was his life.

LEVINE: He played a fiddle?

KAPLAN: No, let's see, he used to play a trumpet. Yeah, a trumpet player. And he came here.

LEVINE: Trumpet, oh. Now was he, that was what he did for work, he played at...

KAPLAN: That's what he, that was his way of making a living. In the communities surrounding these here areas, which was maybe between five mile areas there was a lot of communities. They used to have weddings and things like that and that was their way of making a living.

LEVINE: When he came here, then who was left? Your mother,...

KAPLAN: My mother, my brother and my brother. I had an older brother.

LEVINE: Okay, now what was your mother's name?

KAPLAN: My mother's name was Rachel, Jewish name Rachel Pistunovitz.

LEVINE: Now that was her maiden name?

KAPLAN: Maiden name, yeah, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Can you spell that one?

KAPLAN: Let's see if I can figure that one out. (pause, he writes) Can you read that?

LEVINE: Yep. P-I-S-T-U-N-O-V-I-T-Z?

KAPLAN: Yah, Pistunovitz.

LEVINE: And your brothers' names? What were their names?

KAPLAN: My brother's name was David.

LEVINE: David. And your other brother?

LEVINE: And your other brother?

KAPLAN: No, just one brother.

LEVINE: Just one brother, and no sisters?

KAPLAN: Yeah, I have a sister, that came after my father left, then he came back.

LEVINE: Now he left in 1908?

KAPLAN: No, he left, my father left in 190, 19, 19, must have been 1908.

LEVINE: Well, let's see, you were born in 1905, in 19 . .

KAPLAN: 1906, you could say almost 6, so must have come back in 1910 I guess it was. And then he was home for about a year and my sister was born. And he went back because there was nothing, he couldn't make a living here.

LEVINE: I see, and what's your sister's name?

KAPLAN: My sister's name is Gesha, Jean, right now we call her Jean. She lives right here.

LEVINE: So, when your father was gone, then did your mother have to work?

KAPLAN: That was the tragic part. You see, 1913,'14, my father was supposed to send us a, to come back to this country. The war broke out: World War I. And we were stuck there. We were living with my grandfather. My grandfather had a farm outside of the town and we survived with him.

LEVINE: Now was that your mother's father or your...

KAPLAN: My mother's father. My mother's father. And that, I was his helper, you know, because all the men, like my uncle, they went to the army. There was nobody else. So, you, there was always, used to take care of the cows and horses that we had.

LEVINE: Now were these milk cows or they were...?

KAPLAN: Milk cows, milk cows, milk cows, yes.

LEVINE: So you, you were the oldest?

KAPLAN: No, no, my father, my brother was the oldest but my brother wasn't too handy with these things here, so I used to be the (he laughs)...

LEVINE: I see. So you were your grandfather's helper on the farm?

KAPLAN: Yes, yes always.

LEVINE: And did you go to school at all?

KAPLAN: Well, it comes to school there was a different, the War started. So every other week, you see there was a cheder. You know, you go, we, we went to cheder. And to go to the Russian schools, you end up with one year, one season maybe, then the German, we were occupied. The Germans came in, they were occupied by the Germans; then it was disbanded. And then it was back and forth. And during the war years, those were the terrible, terrible years.

LEVINE: So mainly during the war years you were working on your grandfather's farm?

KAPLAN: Yeah, but I worked with my grandfather. And my mother she was baking bread for the armies, to sell to the army, that's what they were doing. The army, they were buying all the bread you could bake, you could make.

LEVINE: Really, I see. Did your father eventually send you money to come?

KAPLAN: Well that was after, yes, yes, that was after the Revolution. The Revolution was in 1917.

LEVINE: Can you remember anything about...

KAPLAN: I know, I remember every detail about the Revolution. That I wish I could express it a little more different.

LEVINE: I hope you can, try to because you're one of the few people...

KAPLAN: We were in cheder and I came into the cheder and I tell the kids, "(Yiddish)" --well, I don't want to speak in Yiddish. I heard that they threw Kaiser, the Kaiser, you know, the czar. The rabbi gave me a, a, shw . . ., you shouldn't say anything like that, not supposed to because rumors, that was everyth . . . you shouldn't spread no rumors because you get killed if the Russian, if they hear something like that. Anyway the Revolution came. And those were the, if I, there was that book that what's his name wrote (pause) that Russian writer, the Revolution, the one about the Revolution. Not "War and Peace", they had a movie, that big movie that they made, what is that movie? And I started reading that book because people didn't want it and it was, the starting of the book, the Revolution was just around our area that it was, and he described that, read that thing, and when he started describing the details and I said, "He's not exaggerating; it was worse than he wrote it."

LEVINE: What did you see of the Revolution itself? I mean, did you see violence?

KAPLAN: The most violent things you ever want to see. What happens --there's a community. You know, people live in a community and the Revolution came. There's always trash in a town, you know. They gave them arm bands, you know, and they were the ones that, and they were the authority. There was no police out there, they became, you know, you know this guy here is a bum, you know, but I mean, they came and they

started coming into your homes and ransacking everything, taking everything, especially in every community there's people that have a little bit more than others, you know, and they started coming into the homes and started taking things out. And, whatever they were able to get a hold of, you know, you couldn't fight with them because they were, all of a sudden they became the authority.

LEVINE: Would they kill you if you put up a fight?

KAPLAN: No, no, they didn't kill nobody, those were Jewish, you know, that were...

LEVINE: That had the arm band?

KAPLAN: Yes, those were the arm bands, the...

LEVINE: Well, did they come into your house?

KAPLAN: Sure they came into our house and they were, whatever was, we didn't have too much to take, whatever they were able to take they took, they took it out. And then, then, after awhile the armies started coming in, they started sending in soldiers. And those are the soldiers that were, that really did the harm.

LEVINE: And what did they do when they came into town?

KAPLAN: They arrested you and they sent you, if you read Does, the Russian Revolution was twenty million people, they took you out and they shot you. I remember, that was an incident in Vilna, we were on our way to the, to go to the country but we got, the marketplace in the big city. Vilnis is a big city. A girl, they used to sell, have a little stand, walk around sell

cigarettes and you know, you know they do it, some of them do it here in night clubs. Well, over there they do it in the streets, peddling. A soldier, a Russian soldier came over and got a pack of cigarettes, and he didn't pay. So he started screaming. A Russian lieutenant, a Russian lieutenant was nearby and he saw it and he grabbed the guy and he took out a gun and shot him and killed him. Just in front of everybody. I mean stuff like this that you see. And during that period before the Revolution, between 1914 and 1916, you know, it was a trench war in our town. We were the unlucky ones, that's where the trenches were four miles in the, and the thousands of soldiers that used to be, go in there. And they used to bring them back, dead, the dead bodies. Those that were wounded, you know, the synagogues, we had the syn . . we made the army hospitals out of them. And they used to bring in those soldiers with, there was no medication, disinfection, that they used that white stuff that I used to buy -- I don't know what they called it anymore. I was a kid in those days too. And so you saw a lot of this, the bombardment was continuously for two years, day and night, going back and forth. It was a, was a . . . Then the Revolution came, but after that there was Trotsky. You heard of Trotsky? He came through. He was the, he became the, see originally when the Rev .. started Kerensky was the Prime Minister. He was there for about a year. And then Lenin took over and there was, and he made Trotsky the War --what would you call it in this country? --the Secretary of War. And he was a very good speaker. He inspired the soldiers with the Revolution. He was a very inspirational speaker. So he went through our town and he made a speech there, you know, to the soldiers, you know to, for the Revolution. That's the part that I remember. Well, I don't know, that was, more questions, if you could...

LEVINE: When you heard him speak, Trotsky...

KAPLAN: Spoke in Russian.

LEVINE: How did you feel? How did it affect you when you heard him?

KAPLAN: During that period --we were kids, remember that --there was a, they had, they had like a, (pause) an election, before Trotsky became in power, during Kerensky's part there; this is the part. They had numbers. Number five I remember, that's what I remember, number five was for the Jews to have a country. Because that was unheard of at that time, you know. And I remember my mother, she voted for number five.

LEVINE: So that was one of the issues on the ballot...

KAPLAN: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

LEVINE: That you could vote for?

KAPLAN: There was a lot of issues on the ballot. But that didn't last long. As I say, then, then what's his name, then Lenin became the, took over and this here, what's his name that I just mentioned?

LEVINE: Trotsky?

KAPLAN: Huh?

LEVINE: Trotsky?

KAPLAN: Trotsky. Trotsky. You know, then Stalin, you know, got him shot in, in, right here they caught him. They send his agents into Mexico. You read it. Oh, you're not aware of that? You see, when Lenin died, Stalin

became, took over and all this, there was a big disagreements, the Revolutionaries. Trotsky wanted the whole world to become, to have a revolution. Stalin was not, anything that was, anybody that opposed him, you know, he killed. And Trotsky ran away. Nobody wanted him, but Mexico accepted him. So Stalin sent his agents and they, they killed him in Mexico, they had, and oh, that was big headlines in those days.

LEVINE: Do you think that seeing all that and being in, you know...

KAPLAN: I feel that I had three lifetimes. The first lifetime was when I was there, being, growing up. Then I came to this country after my father, after we came here in 1921 and I, things weren't good and, by the way were you at the, at Ellis Island?

LEVINE: I've been working there since July, just a month.

KAPLAN: Well, they, you've seen all this here, those pictures of the ships, and I always see myself. I said, "That must be, that's me. That looks like me in there (he laughs). We went to..."

LEVINE: It could be!

KAPLAN: I don't know, I'm just saying it but whatever you seen there is perfect; that's the way it was. There was no, I remember the trip on the ship that we were on was Lapland it was called.

LEVINE: When you went from, when your father did, he sent money for you to come?

KAPLAN: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Now your family had to leave Lithuania, Russia and go to Poland first?

KAPLAN: First we went to, those were the, all of a sudden they say, "This is Poland." You know, the Polish army, we never heard of them and they were the worst anti-Semites, the Poles. They were the bad ones.

LEVINE: How did they...?

KAPLAN: We took a trip. We took a train from our place by train to go to Warsaw. And it was four nights, four days and four nights. They used to throw us out of the train, the soldiers. They seen a lot of men and women, no! Women and children take, n the trains they used to throw them out at the station. And we had to wait at the next station for another train.

LEVINE: Why would they throw them out?

KAPLAN: They were drunk. We were Jews. And they were Poles. And all that, they were the, you know in Russia they were anti-Semites, you know that. But the Poles, they did, I never, never realized it that they used to take in Warsaw, they used grab people in the streets with the beards and cut them off, you know. They were very, very, (he laughs darkly) . . . That's when we found out what anti-Semites are.

LEVINE: Now when you were in Lithuania was there also religious persecution?

KAPLAN: No, not around our way, you heard the pogroms and things like that, we didn't have that.

LEVINE: You didn't. Were you a religious family? Did you practice religion ?

KAPLAN: Oh, yes, everybody's religious. We're not like go overboard for religion but you live like a Jew. I mean you observe all the holidays and all the dat . . . all the mitzvahs, whatever you have to do. There was no...

LEVINE: Did you have much extended family in the town where you were? I mean did you have uncles and aunts and cousins?

KAPLAN: Oh, yes, we had my mother, all my mother's sisters and brothers and all this here. During the Holocaust they were all, they remained there and they were all annihilated. My, I remember one of my aunts that came, that was hidden, she came and she was telling me a story, you know, what happened, what she saw. There was, well you saw it in the movies, there was a barn and they grabbed everybody that they had. They were hiding in there and they put them in that barn. All the people that they were able to, put them in the barn. They locked it. They put gasoline over it and put it on fire. And she was telling me who was the, who they grabbed. Kids that I played with that I remember that was . . . She came here after the war and told me, told the story. For six months I dreamt about it; I couldn't sleep to remember. Then they had that movie, you know, you saw those movies on television. What was it called, the (pause) the Holocaust? They had a television program about the Holocaust and they went through the whole thing with the fires. Every time I seen that fire at that barn, it...

LEVINE: Well now, as a child growing up, I mean did you actually play. It seems (she laughs) like it was such a hard life.

KAPLAN: Sure we always prayed, that's the only thing you do?

LEVINE: Pray?

KAPLAN: You go to, you go to shul, you know, the time that you pray is like part of being Jewish.

LEVINE: And how about playing with the kids. Did you have games?

KAPLAN: Oh, sure, sure we played. We had nothing to play with. (he laughs) There was no toys. We had no toys.

LEVINE: So what did you play?

KAPLAN: Make-shift toys, you know that you make, whatever you made, make-shift toys. Here, I remember you, they made a ball out of something. You threw balls around and things like that. That's all you had. And during the war, there was as kids, the army, the Cossacks, the Russian Cossacks used to stay, you know, and we used to take care of the horses for them. Comb them and water them and that, that was playing. That was, there was not, you see we didn't know any better. It was a small town. This is what you do. I mean, there was nothing. You didn't emphasize how you play, you played whatever you, you find kids there. You invent games and you play.

LEVINE: So when you went then to Warsaw with your mother and your brother, right?

KAPLAN: And my sister.

LEVINE: And your sister. Now your sister was quite young?

KAPLAN: Oh yeah, she was a little girl. She was about six years old I think. No, I

don't think she was six years old. Well, around that age.

LEVINE: Yeah, so you went and you had to stay in Warsaw for six months?

KAPLAN: Yeah, six months we stayed there.

LEVINE: Now, where did you stay when you were there?

KAPLAN: We stayed with a family. You know, you paid rent. You know, people were poor there. Families that lived there, you know, HIAS, they used to assign you to that, that they'll take care. And you pay them. You know, you stayed with them.

LEVINE: And do you remember that family that you stayed with?

KAPLAN: I remember them but I forgot the name (he laughs).

LEVINE: Can you describe what it was like there where you stayed?

KAPLAN: It was on the fourth floor, Genische, I think the main street was Genische, Genische, yeah. And people were poor. We had one room, the three of us. They gave us a certain spot in the apartment and that's where, and those were hard times.

LEVINE: What did you do for food? How did you get along...?

KAPLAN: Well we used to buy food. You bought food and you tried to make it. My mother, you know, she used to scrounge whatever you were able to. And you tried to get by.

LEVINE: Did your father know where you were at this time?

KAPLAN: He knew but there was nothing they could do. That's when the immigration, 1920,'21. You know, the whole world was going in and you had to wait six months for your passport, until it came to your turn. From there we went to Antwerp, Belgium, Antwerp, used to be. We were in Antwerp for about three, four weeks.

LEVINE: And where did you stay then?

KAPLAN: There, there was, the HIAS had a big place there.

LEVINE: Say what HIAS stand for.

KAPLAN: The HIAS was a Jewish organization that took --it still is in existence --they take care of immigrants. They supplied a certain amount of money, the communities in this country gave toward HIAS to, for the immigrant, for the people to maintain. We were already like in an open, in Antwerp we were in an open place. They had cots all spread over maybe a stadium, not a stadium, an indoor...

LEVINE: Like a barracks.

KAPLAN: In a barracks, yeah. And we stayed there for about three weeks in the barracks.

LEVINE: Now was this supplied by the steam ship company?

KAPLAN: No, no, the HIAS, the Jewish organization. And we had to pay certain amount, you know.

LEVINE: I see. When you got on the ship, you were, you had a sore on your neck, or you had some kind of a skin...

KAPLAN: Yeah, boil, boils on my neck. You know it came from my, from your diet, you know, break out with. Here you have vitamins and all this here. Over there I didn't know. That's what happened.

LEVINE: Now did you feel ill when you were...?

KAPLAN: No, I was, I never felt ill but you used to scratch it and tear it off and it was opened wounds.

LEVINE: When you finally got on the ship, what was that like?

KAPLAN: Well that was a happy day.

LEVINE: To get on finally.

KAPLAN: To get on finally, but then everybody got sick except me, sea sick. It was a slow boat. It went through the English Channel, you know, where it was . . . As soon as it started going out to the open sea there, everybody was singing and dancing and all of a sudden, boom. (he laughs) But I wasn't sick at all. I was a, I...

LEVINE: Now were you in steerage when you went?

KAPLAN: Steerage, yeah, oh yeah.

LEVINE: And how was that? What were the conditions?

KAPLAN: (he laughs) How can you describe steerage? Steerage is a, it's in the bottom of the boat. And you have certain little, what do you call it? (he gestures)

LEVINE: Cots?

KAPLAN: Cots. One on top of the other. And you, that's where you stayed. You go to sleep there. And you eat whatever they, you're most of the time, you're out on top there.

LEVINE: On the deck?

KAPLAN: On the deck. Sure, you don't sit.

LEVINE: And was the food okay?

KAPLAN: And the food (he laughs). I didn't know of any food. Whatever they served, I ate. I don't remember the detail of the food. But the only thing I could say, the only place, when we got to Ellis Island, and the HIAS also took care of the immigrant. It wasn't like it is now, the Ellis Island. They had roped off in different spots, you know, so many people in from different ships. This one here, this one there. I taste a corned beef sandwich, the first time in my life. And then I also I had an orange. That was the first time I tasted an orange and a corned beef sandwich over there.

LEVINE: And did you like that?

KAPLAN: Sure. Who doesn't like corned beef (they laugh).

LEVINE: Who doesn't like corned beef?

END OF SIDE A OF TAPE            BEGIN SIDE B

LEVINE: Well, what can you say about Ellis Island? I mean, what was the experience like?

KAPLAN: Well, we weren't there too long. We were there about two days I think.

LEVINE: And what do you remember of that? Do you remember, was it clean? Was it, do you remember...

KAPLAN: It looked better, I didn't, when I was there the other, couple of months ago, it wasn't like that at all. I mean it was hard to recognize it. It was, was, the entrances were different, the... (microphone noise and interview pauses) After we passed through the inspection.

LEVINE: What was the inspection like? Do you remember that at all?

KAPLAN: Yeah, they used to, they used to check you ov . . . , my mother was getting ready to go back with me to Europe if they ever sent me back, but they passed me.

LEVINE: Did they look at the boils?

KAPLAN: I don't remember how it was because my mother was, that was, we were

shaking all of us. After we passed the inspection there was a boat that took us in to the, those ferries to New York, yeah. My father was there to pick us up.

LEVINE: And do you remember when you had the meeting with him?

KAPLAN: Oh, sure, sure I remember. It was a long time ago. See my father, they were here seven brothers, six brothers. And all my uncles, they all remember, how I remember them, oy! They used to play with me, you know, when I was a kid.

LEVINE: Now did you know your uncles from the old country?

KAPLAN: Oh, yes, from there, from the old country. That's where I knew them from. They all came over. They came over in 19 --before the war started, before the World War I. During that period, they all came over then. And when we were supposed to go then the war started and we were all broke up.

LEVINE: I see. It must have been a joyous time.

KAPLAN: Why certainly, it was, my gosh. You know, as I say, when I see that was, it's too, some people have talent to describe certain things and I admire that in people when they describe, writers that they can describe things. And for me to, I could say there was so much that I would like to say but it's hard to express myself about those times.

LEVINE: It must have been very emotional.

KAPLAN: It was emotional because once we were here, after we came here, it was, it wasn't that, it was a strange land, nobody un . . . you don't speak English,

you didn't understand. That, that's something, when you're in the street, somebody asks you a question, you don't know that, that was a terrible downgrade because while you were there you spoke with everybody, that's, we all spoke Yiddish, you know, the way we, people that you were with.

LEVINE: Even if they came from a different country they were still speaking Yiddish.

KAPLAN: Yes, yes, yes.

LEVINE: This was like, now, the beginning of your second life, right? (she laughs)  
Once you got to...

KAPLAN: Yes.

LEVINE: Now what was that life like? What was it like when you first came?

KAPLAN: Well, then I, then we went to night school.

LEVINE: Did you work when you first came?

KAPLAN: Yeah, I started working in a grocery store. We got up at four o'clock in the morning to deliver to the apartment houses. You know, people that used to order, I used to bring up the food there. I was there for about a couple of months, worked there. And then my father, through my father I got a job with somebody else as a diamond setter, worked as a diamond setter. I worked in that place for about, oh, my gosh, it was about a year I think. There I went on to, to another, to the garment industry, and that's where I remained.

LEVINE: How soon after you got here did you start taking the night school classes?

KAPLAN: Oh, that was about in a couple of weeks. Yes, they started night classes, school.

LEVINE: Well, what was that like going to the English classes.

KAPLAN: Night school used to go to the regular schools. You and she was trying to teach us, you know, they ask questions like how you say it in English and how you say this. And that's the way, and you learned the reading and writing like you go to school, I mean.

LEVINE: Now was everybody in the class, they were all from different places with different languages?

KAPLAN: Yes, yes. No, the ones that we were, were all Jewish. There was no outsiders during that, it was the East side of New York.

LEVINE: Yeah, where did you go? Where were you living when you first came here?

KAPLAN: On Montgomery Street, on the East side, near the East River.

LEVINE: And how long did you stay there?

KAPLAN: Oh, we stayed there for about, oh, we lived there for a couple of years, about three, four years.

LEVINE: And what was your father doing then when he was...?

- KAPLAN: Doing, he was a musician, played in the silent, remember the movies? The movies were silent movies and they used to have music, musicians play. That's what he was doing. Wasn't doing too good.
- LEVINE: And how about your mother? Did she work when she got...?
- KAPLAN: No, she didn't work. My mother didn't work. My mother had a baby. And the baby didn't, died about six months, lived about six months, little boy. We always talk about him.
- LEVINE: And what was his name? Do you remember?
- KAPLAN: I don't, that I, I never remember the name we gave him.
- LEVINE: What about your brother David? What was he doing?
- KAPLAN: My brother David did the same thing I did. My brother lived right here not, not far from here; right in another building here.
- LEVINE: And then how about your sister? Did she...
- KAPLAN: She lives right here, too.
- LEVINE: Did she go to school?
- KAPLAN: Yeah, well my sister, she went to reg . . ., she didn't have to go to night school, she went to regular school. You know, she went to the, she went to the, then later on they moved to the Bronx.
- LEVINE: Now did you and your brother and sister start speaking English fairly

soon?

KAPLAN: Oh sure, sure, sure.

LEVINE: And how about your mother and father, did they learn too or...?

KAPLAN: Well, they didn't, the mothers and fathers they didn't pick it up so good, but they used to understand. In fact, my children, one of my youngest child is still mad at me because we didn't teach her how to speak Yiddish, 'cause some of her friends speak Yiddish and she doesn't know how to speak. My other two children they can't speak. They just get some drift of it. Not like the Spanish, the Cubans.

LEVINE: They speak it. They make sure their children know how.

KAPLAN: Well, the Cubans in here, they don't know how to speak English until they start going to school, (pause) those that are born here. But among the Jews, you had to learn how to speak English and that was the whole, and that's why we all tried to speak English.

LEVINE: Now what did you do for a social life after you got here?

KAPLAN: Oh, there was clubs, that they organized clubs from different organizations. Clubs, we used to have dances, used to go to dances on the East side we lived. There was the theaters, the Jewish theaters and a lot of these social clubs, what we called. We used to have dances and we used to get together, play games and whatever it is, cards or go out, go to the movies, whatever it was.

LEVINE: So then you got into the garment industry and that's where you made your

livelihood for the rest of your life. Now where did you go when you left Montgomery Street?

KAPLAN: Oh, we moved to the Bronx, they moved to the Bronx and they lived near Florensberg someplace, Southern Boulevard if your...

LEVINE: S, s...

KAPLAN: Southern Boulevard.

LEVINE: Southern Boulevard? I know the Bronx just a little, yeah. Okay, so were there ways that your family kept that were a throw-back to Russia? In other words, maybe your mother or your father, ways of doing things or ideas they had that they kept from the old country even when they moved to New York?

KAPLAN: Well, you always think about the old country, no matter who you are, where you are. You always, right now that everything that's going on and I watch it all the time and I recollect the things that happened. You always think of this, the place where you were, where you came and who the people were and their reaction and all this, the things here.

LEVINE: Can you think of any things that your mother and father impressed upon you and your brother and sister that, you know, had to do with how you should be or...?

KAPLAN: Well the main important thing, the impression was always to do, the old folks, not only my mother and father, but all the mothers and fathers: You got to be fruderal.

LEVINE: Frugal.

KAPLAN: Frugal: Save money: Don't spend it: Don't go out and live above your means. Always make sure that you have some money in the bank, something left on the side. I mean these are the things that, and that stays with most of the people that live in this, saving! That's what it is, you see because this generation I see, they, and we are not brought up like that. That's the difference.

LEVINE: And how about the effect of all the Revolution and the violence and the, all that, do you think that affected you from then on?

KAPLAN: The impression, no, that, I, the only the affection is that you're glad your out, you came, you went out of it. Because the starvation was so bad during the Revolution, while we were there. Food was, if you ever seen kids with bellies, both of my friends, I remember, that died because they, I used to, my grandmother, she was a . . woman that was very, I used to steal a piece of bread from her, from the kitchen and bring it out to my friends. In fact, I had, during that period, typhus, you know...

LEVINE: Typhoid Fever.

KAPLAN: Typhus Fev . . it used to be what do you call it? Half of the town died.

LEVINE: An epidemic.

KAPLAN: An epidemic. We had an epidemic. We had these epidemics. And I got, I get typhus. I had it. And my mother stayed with me in the hospital, in shul, you know they had those little...

LEVINE: They made the shul into a hospital?

KAPLAN: Yeah, sure. And they, there was no hospitals, we had no hospitals. We had no doctors then either. And she stayed with me for about a whole week until the fever left me. But after that when I came home I got very hungry, you know, food, but there was nothing, no food. I couldn't, if I could have eaten up the whole world, if I had food. That's why I remained so, my growth stopped because of that, because of starvation. I know what starvation is, that was a, you never had enough to eat. We were always hungry. That's why if you see people that from Russia, bread is the main important. If you don't eat bread, you're not eating because the other is (Yiddish), everything else we eat. And that's what, you had to have bread and that's what we didn't have.

LEVINE: Now you said you had three different lives. What was the third one?

KAPLAN: The third one is when I came to Florida. (they both laugh) That was nineteen years ago.

LEVINE: How is that life different from the other two?

KAPLAN: Well, at least you stop worrying, I mean, you know, your children got married, you did your, you provided whatever you were able to and when you came here the pressure left you, you don't have to, about financially or anything else like that. That you were set up and know that you don't have to worry about where your next meal is going to come from. So that's the third life.

LEVINE: Yeah. It's a relief, I guess.

KAPLAN: Yes, it was a relief.

LEVINE: How did you meet Mrs. Kaplan?

KAPLAN: Oh, we were introduced.

LEVINE: Were you on Montgomery Street?

KAPLAN: In Brooklyn. No, no, in Brooklyn. My sister introduced me to her through a friend. And that's why, because I didn't live in New York anymore, I was up in Pennsylvania. That's where we lived for about, how long? Forty-five years.

LEVINE: Did you have your own business?

KAPLAN: Yes, yes, yes, yes. I was head partners. There was two partners that we had. We had a plant, a sewing plant. Made ladies underwear.

LEVINE: And in Pennsylvania?

KAPLAN: Yeah, yeah. That's where, when we got married, that's where we moved. And that's where our children were born.

LEVINE: You have two children?

KAPLAN: Three children.

LEVINE: Three children. And what are their names?

KAPLAN: Let's see, what are their names? Arlene is my oldest daughter, then Paul

is my son, and then there's Marsha. She lives right here in Florida.

LEVINE: And what is your wife's maiden name?

KAPLAN: What is, Alexander.

LEVINE: And now do you have grandchildren?

KAPLAN: Sure we have grandchildren. One is real odd; he's in Jerusalem; one of my grandson's is in Jerusalem. And he lives there and he's going to medical school there and he's, he became very orthodox. And that's where he's going to be. He's going to the Haddasah Hospital there, where he's learning. And another grandson is in Philadelphia. How old are they? Are they twenty-three or twenty-four? (Mr. Kaplan asks his wife) Twenty-four. And then I have two, two grandchildren that live here in Miami. (to his wife) Show her the picture, Rose.

LEVINE: Is there anything, I forgot to ask you about coming in to the New York Harbor when you first came.

KAPLAN: Oh, that part. That's my youngest daughter (showing a photograph) They all, people ask me what was like when you saw the Statue of Liberty. I mean that's what everybody wants to know. We were not educated in that part yet.

LEVINE: You didn't know about it, about the Statue.

KAPLAN: Yeah, we heard about a st . . so we saw the Statue of Liberty. But, you know, the emphasis of the Statue of Liberty, the meaning of it, we weren't -- Just seeing that alone that we knew that we're coming here, that in

itself was a great, I think it was really break, day break, you know, when we...

LEVINE: Oh, when you came into the harbor.

KAPLAN: When we pulling into the harbor. And you saw it. You know, everything is a rumor, we, see this thing that we thought about this, Liberty, Freedom or What, we didn't know anything about these things here. You learned that afterwards when you came here what the difference between there and here, but until you come here you don't know.

LEVINE: You were really getting away from a real hardship, a real hard life, and it was really, rather than going toward something . . . that's an ideal.

KAPLAN: That's right. Yeah, it wasn't, it wasn't, as I say, you're young, thirteen years old, whatever it is. You're not the philosopher at that age. (he laughs) You just, you live from day to day, you can not, it's hard, maybe somebody that comes with, you know, that's older, you know what I mean and he can express it a little better than it, it makes a difference.

LEVINE: Well is there anything else that you can think of that has to do with (Mr. Kaplan coughs) your three lives that you would like to mention?

KAPLAN: Well, I don't know what else I could tell you except that we, we are happy to be here, we're happy to be alive and I enjoy watching this thing with the Russians, that they're going down the drain, the Communists, a bad bunch. (he sneezes)

LEVINE: Well, thank you very much.

KAPLAN: All right.

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine signing off for the National Park Service, having spoken with Mr. William Kaplan.

END