

**EI-715**

**MAURICE KAUFMAN**

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- **POLAND: ROVNA**
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LEVINE: Today is November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1995. I'm here in Randolph, Massachusetts, with Maurice Kaufman, who came from Poland when he was eight years of age, in 1921.

KAUFMAN: Right.

LEVINE: And this is—today, as of this interview, Mr. Kaufman is eighty-three years of age.

KAUFMAN: Right.

LEVINE: And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. I think we can start. If you would say your birth date again, and where in Poland you were born?

KAUFMAN: I was born in Poland in 1912, in the town of Rovna. [PH]

LEVINE: Okay, and you lived in Rovna up until the time—

KAUFMAN: That we left for America.

LEVINE: Now, do you have many memories of Rovna?

KAUFMAN: Well the only memories I have is: the house that we lived in, the horse lived in the side of our house that we owned. The dirt was red dirt, because we had no roads. So it was clay. And I remember my mother putting out the dishes for the Passover to wash and clean. We put them out in the street, and washed them and cleaned them and brought them in again. As a little kid, that's what I remember.

LEVINE: Where was your water coming from?

KAUFMAN: The water was brought in; we had no running water. We had well water. We had to go to get it. The older boys would bring it back; I was too little to carry any of that. And that's the water we used. We had what they called storage water. You'd keep it in tall cans, with covers, like milk cans, exactly. And water would get stale; that would be tossed out, and we'd get fresh water. That was the drinking water, the bathing water, and the laundry water.

LEVINE: Do you remember the laundry? Do you remember your mother doing laundry?

KAUFMAN: No.

LEVINE: You had a horse, you said?

KAUFMAN: Yes, we did.

LEVINE: What did you use the horse for?

KAUFMAN: The horse was used—we had a little bit of land that we used to cultivate, or dig, or whatever, and we did grow a few vegetables. We had no fruit trees. These were, and other homes. Everything was too close to each other; we weren't too far apart. But that horse was mostly—I remember my brothers fooling around with him, but that's about it. I never did! I was too little. But I do remember that we never bought vegetables. We had potatoes, onions, and carrots. All good stuff.

LEVINE: Did people ride the horse to go places?

KAUFMAN: No, I don't remember anybody riding the horse. I don't. But I knew we had that horse, because I can remember that very clearly.

LEVINE: How did you get around town? How did you go from place to place?

KAUFMAN: We weren't in the town; we were in the outskirts.

LEVINE: Well, could you describe the community where you lived? What do you remember about that? It was on the outskirts of a city?

KAUFMAN: Yes, Rovna was a large city, where you'll read in that paper.

LEVINE: Okay, we're going to have that on file, this information.

KAUFMAN: You really read it. We weren't in the town; we were on the outskirts. But we never got to town, because everybody was very young. All the boys were young, my brothers, my sister, and I was the youngest.

LEVINE: What was your mother's name?

KAUFMAN: My mother's Jewish name or English name? My mother's Jewish was Chai Sora, C-H-A-I S-O-R-A. Chai is the definition of life. Chai, that was my mother. And she was quite a lady.

LEVINE: Tell me about her. What do you remember about her when you were young?

KAUFMAN: Very strict!

LEVINE: In what ways?

KAUFMAN: Well, you had to—there was no fooling around. I mean, everybody had to toe the mark. But where I was little, but where I really learned how my mother was, when we came to this country, and the older boys would start to work. My Dad was in business; my Dad had an antique shop on Charles Street, Boston. But none of us children went into it. And his brother lived in New York, and he had an Antique Shop on Second Avenue, New York.

LEVINE: Well before we talk about this country, is there anything else about where you lived that you recall? Did you have grandparents?

KAUFMAN: I had a grandmother. I had a grandfather and a grandmother. My grandfather was a peddler. Like, he would go with pots and pans from town to town. My grandmother was a very strict lady. She was very—she

was not my mother's mother. She was my father's mother. And he, my grandfather, and she did not live with us, but she was always visiting. And she'd come over, and she wasn't a good woman. She wouldn't part with anything. If she had fruit, and saw the kids coming, she would hide it. She would put over her apron. So I knew that she got some good stuff as a little kid, but I never got it. I don't think my older brothers got it, neither. But she was a grand old lady! And when I came to this country, I had an uncle that was in the—well, in the later years he was in the Home for the Aged, and he lived to be a hundred and seventeen years old! Yeah! But my Dad, my mother was ninety-eight when she died, and my Dad was ninety-seven. But they followed each other within eleven months, because it to the point that—my Dad was a very good eater. He'd eat anything and everything. And when my mother died, he decided not to eat anymore. That's the normal for some marriages that were so long. But he was some—she was the general. She was—she was tough. She had to be! She had a lot of boys that she had to keep a lot of control in. But she was good; she knew that when we all started making money, each kid had a bank book.

LEVINE: Now that was in this country?

KAUFMAN: We are now in this country.

LEVINE: Yeah, let's just finish off. Did you go to school at all while you were in Poland?

KAUFMAN: Yes, yes—in Poland, no.

LEVINE: No. I want to get the names of your—what was your father's name?

KAUFMAN: In Jewish or in English?

LEVINE: Both.

KAUFMAN: In Jewish it was Schlaime; [PH] in English, Sam. My mother's name was Chai Sora, in English, Heidi.

LEVINE: And your brothers, can you remember, from the oldest son down?

KAUFMAN: My oldest brother was named Reuben. My next brother was David. Then there was two brothers, Max and Joe, were twins. My sister, my brother Irving. That's it.

LEVINE: And your sister's name?

KAUFMAN: My sister's name was Harriet.

LEVINE: Now when you were still in Poland, was your family religious?

KAUFMAN: We—well, let's put it this way: I really don't remember how religious. But I know one thing—my mother kept the Sabbath. The candles were on the table; that I remember. But I don't remember how much religious she was. She was not too educated, my mother, because she didn't—but that's in the old country. She really—she had her hands full with all these boys, so there was no—I can remember what we ate. That's all I remember eating is vegetables, and a lot of potatoes, turnip, carrots. But I don't remember eating meat.

LEVINE: Do you remember any kinds of celebrations or events that happened in Poland?

KAUFMAN: Well, the celebrations that would be were in our house. I don't remember seeing any celebrations. I remember that my mother would have the celebration of Chanukah. You know, she'd make her own wax, you know, and she'd pour it into little cups, and take some thread, put it together for a wick. Did you ever know how they make it? And she would light them; that we knew. But I don't remember any other holidays. I don't remember going to synagogue even; I don't remember.

LEVINE: Were there mostly Jewish people living where you were?

KAUFMAN: In our community, no. There were very few in the area we lived. That's where I got to know that where the trees were, where there was more people. Growing, as kids you run around, and I did that. That's it. I don't remember anything about what my mother—how she did managed. But she was, she was strict. She was strict!

LEVINE: How would she be strict with you when you were little?

KAUFMAN: Well, we had—in the old country?

LEVINE: Yeah.

KAUFMAN: Oh, I had to be beside her all the time. She didn't let me out of her sight.

LEVINE: Did you have any chores?

KAUFMAN: I was too little! Yeah, I had no chores. But the other boys, the older boys that were home, I think they had a lot of chores. But never heard any squabbling or anything. I never heard arguing in my mother's house. So I was a gifted person.

LEVINE: Yeah. Now you said that your father—oh, Rovna was an Army town?

KAUFMAN: Yeah, the barracks, the soldiers lived. They had barracks that are familiar right now with the high-rise apartments. That was—Rovna actually was like a—soldiers going from one town to another, from one town to another, maneuvering all the time. But we would see soldiers constantly, constantly!

LEVINE: These were now the Polish Army?

KAUFMAN: The Polish Army. And then when the Polish Army would pull out, you'd have renegades. You'd have—everybody wanted to become a hero. And the Jewish people really didn't have a chance. We did not have a chance.

LEVINE: What do you mean when you say that?

KAUFMAN: Well, everything got so tight, we couldn't get everything. My mother couldn't get certain foods, so we didn't have it! We had—I remember one time there was a change of soldiers, and my mother was making noodles, you know, by hand, knotting them and putting them through the flour. And they ran into the house, and they ate them raw! The soldiers ate that stuff raw! I remember I was somewhere in the house, and I saw them.

LEVINE: Did you ever have any other contact with the soldiers?

KAUFMAN: No, my mother kept us away. There was no con—she didn't allow us to go up to the area where the soldiers were, the barracks were. Me, I remember not being allowed. The other boys, I wouldn't, I couldn't answer for them, because they were all bigger boys already.

LEVINE: Do you remember any experiences in Poland that involved any of your brothers or sister?

KAUFMAN: No, no. I lost one brother. They grabbed him [pause]. I don't know if I was seven, or seven years old. He was sitting on the kitchen table. He was learning to be a tailor. And they came in and grabbed him; we never saw him again!

LEVINE: The soldiers came in and grabbed him?

KAUFMAN: Yup. Never saw him again! They grabbed him. Well, you know, years ago, you didn't go to a list. They ran around from town to town, looking for the youth.

LEVINE: In other words, you think they took him into the army?

KAUFMAN: Absolutely! Absolutely! And at that same time, an uncle of mine disappeared; that was a brother to my mother. And they both disappeared about the same time, and we never saw them again.

LEVINE: Did you encounter any anti-Semitism from the Polish people?

KAUFMAN: At times we—well, I really don't remember, but my mother said it was time to get out.

LEVINE: Now, your father had gone—your father and your older brother?

KAUFMAN: My father and my oldest brother came to this country, and my oldest brother was with my father. But he—I don't know if—he ran away, my oldest brother, because they were going to grab him for the service. So he ran to this country, which was the normal thing. People would do that. But I don't remember the days or anything. But I remember my father coming, having a beard, and he didn't—he couldn't wear it after a while; they were making fun of him on the street car and on—he was telling me all that. And he had it taken off, and he was very hurt that he had to remove his beard. But now it's a normal condition—everybody got beards! Years ago, they didn't allow it. But I had a very good life as a little kid. I mean, we didn't have much, but she was a general. She was—she was something!

LEVINE: Do you remember what she wore, or what your grandmother looked like, or any of those kinds of things?

KAUFMAN: I remember my grandmother wearing a fichelle, you know what that is, on her head. She never went with a bare head. And she would wear a long apron, my grandmother, and if she had some goodies that she was eating outside, the moment she'd see the kids running, she'd cover everything over. There was no giving; she wasn't the type to give. But my mother took everything very well. She was a—she was a very strong woman. Oh, she was very strong!

LEVINE: How did the family get along when your father and brother were in the United States?

KAUFMAN: Well, we got along because my grandfather—he helped. He helped. He brought a lot of stuff—not telling his wife, which is my grandmother—but he gave us. And then the rest of the stuff—my mother would bake, cook.

LEVINE: Can you remember? Can you remember anything, the particular dishes that she'd make?

KAUFMAN: Yeah, yeah, I remember my mother making noodles herself. I remember her making bread. We never had rolls; I didn't know what rolls were. We had bread. We had a lot of potatoes and onions and carrots. That was—turnip—that was the main. Fill yourself up with bread! We had no butter; I never saw butter on the table. Milk—yeah, we had milk. At times, we had milk. But most of the time, we didn't have milk.

LEVINE: When your grandfather went around with the pots and pans and all that, what was his means of transportation?

KAUFMAN: He had a wagon.

LEVINE: A horse-drawn wagon?

KAUFMAN: With a horse-drawn wagon. Oh, he had a short cut beard. He was a very handsome man!

LEVINE: Did you ever go with him?

KAUFMAN: No, no. I remember him; I remember him pulling up to the house, stopping. And she would be out there first, my grandmother, to see what he brought! Because he shouldn't go anywhere else. She was really something! But the kids, I don't think we all had much to do with her. She was the grandmother, but she wasn't a good grandmother. You know, there's all kinds of grandmothers.

LEVINE: [Laughs] Right!

KAUFMAN: There's good ones, and bad ones!

LEVINE: Now do you know why it was decided that you'd come to the United States when you did?

KAUFMAN: Well, my mother felt—she had a very—she thought something was going to happen. And when you read this paper that I got here, you'll know how she smelled it.

LEVINE: Why don't you say it for the tape?

KAUFMAN: Pardon?

LEVINE: If you could say it for the tape, so it will be on tape as well?

KAUFMAN: Well, she felt that we had to get out, if not we'd be in trouble. So we did get one visa, and somehow we didn't get it. Then she—my father, my father was still able to send us a little money. In America, money was

pretty good; it was valuable. And she just didn't—she felt that we've got to get out and leave everything intact.

LEVINE: Now, did you have like a separate house where you lived?

KAUFMAN: We lived in a little house with the barn next door. No closure—the horse and the family, it was open. We had maybe in the house—I don't remember too much about the sleeping. I knew the winters were very, very bad. Very, very bad. Sometimes there was snow; it would really be high, and you couldn't see the house even. But she had everything. She would—she had a loft. You know what a loft is? Where she'd put potatoes and onions and carrots, and spread them out. And we had that, but we didn't have—I don't remember meat. I don't re—I remember chickens. We had a few chickens, and didn't have any eggs. She never had producing chickens, my mother, she just had edibles, which they don't produce eggs.

LEVINE: So when you were about to leave, what happened with the house?

KAUFMAN: We left everything intact.

LEVINE: You just left?

KAUFMAN: Just left. My mother said, "Let's get out of here!" And we just left; we left everything. The grandparents were already gone.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything your mother packed to take with her to the new country?

KAUFMAN: I remember we—I don't think we had [pause] maybe two suitcases, and what was on our back. But we, when we left, we didn't go direct to America from Rovna.

LEVINE: Do you remember leaving Rovna?

KAUFMAN: Yes!

LEVINE: What was that like, the departure from the town?

KAUFMAN: Well, we got out in a sneaky way. Nobody was told that we were going to leave. And the word was not to talk about it.

LEVINE: Now, why was that?

KAUFMAN: Well, my mother was scared of the neighbors. Because the neighbors were getting—everybody was getting very restless, as you'll read in this

what happened. And she thought it was time to get out. And she got us out. We went—from Rovna we went to Danzig. We crossed over from Danzig and went to England, London.

LEVINE: It was your mother, five brothers--?

KAUFMAN: My mother, my sister, and my brothers.

LEVINE: And were you traveling with anyone else?

KAUFMAN: Nobody else. And we got to London, and we had to wait quite a while there, 'til we got cleared out. But she had accumulated some—I don't know how she did it, but we lived very good in London.

LEVINE: You stayed in London for a while?

KAUFMAN: We stood in London six weeks.

LEVINE: Oh! And where did you stay, then?

KAUFMAN: We stood at the Dorchester Hotel, which is still in London.

LEVINE: What do you remember about that time, that six weeks?

KAUFMAN: I have a good memory.

LEVINE: Yeah.

KAUFMAN: And she, when the time came to go, she got us on the board ship, and we were third class.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about London that struck you as a little boy?

KAUFMAN: No, no, no.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And so when you—she got you aboard the ship. Did you have any examinations at that end?

KAUFMAN: No. We got aboard ship. We were told where we were living; we were living down below, way down below! Steerage. And I remember how the food used to come down in a dumbwaiter, like a little—yeah, and we got food. I remember that I was sick, and all my other brothers except one of my brothers. He was well the whole time!

LEVINE: Which one was that?

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KAUFMAN: My brother Dave. He was a very—he was strong, and he—but the rest of us were sick! But we came here.

LEVINE: Before you get to this country, can you describe the accommodations in steerage?

KAUFMAN: Very cramped. You could figure out, like if you took a cruise now, and you went below, there would be two beds, or whatever. That was for us, for all of us. So kids were on the floor, kids were out in the corridor. But it was a long trip; it was fifteen days at sea!

LEVINE: And what were the beds?

KAUFMAN: Bunks.

LEVINE: Bunks.

KAUFMAN: Yeah, hanging from the side, just like they have now. If you go on certain cruises, you have an upper berth and a lower berth. And those were only two there, but she made room on the floor. I don't know how she got blankets and things. But she was aggressive; she knew how to get around. And we got here. The crossing was very—very, very bad. I don't know, it was the time of the year when it should have been pretty good. But we were so down low we couldn't feel nothing.

LEVINE: You didn't even go up on deck?

KAUFMAN: We went up on deck—I don't remember. I don't remember being up on deck. I think my brothers went up; I don't remember being up at all. I remember just where we were getting off.

LEVINE: Tell me about what it was like when the ship, when the Aquitania, came into the New York harbor?

KAUFMAN: When she came into New York harbor, they were shooting firecrackers! And I didn't know what was going on. I was close to my mother. And my other brothers, we all thought we were back home, and going to see shooting and all that. Then we were told that it was a celebration.

LEVINE: What celebration?

KAUFMAN: Yeah, July the fourth! So we landed in Ellis Island, and we were put in bins. We had to go through the bins, but my mother, she bought in London mesh underwear. You know what mesh underwear is?

LEVINE: I'm not sure.

KAUFMAN: It's underwear with little holes in it, like, so it would be clean. And we were clean! We went through physical exams.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about the physical that you had?

KAUFMAN: No, no.

LEVINE: And how long did you stay at Ellis Island?

KAUFMAN: In Ellis Island? [Coughs] I think we stood two days.

LEVINE: Oh, so do you remember—how did you sleep, and where did you sleep?

KAUFMAN: In Ellis Island?

LEVINE: Yeah.

KAUFMAN: They had accommodations.

LEVINE: So you were in a room?

KAUFMAN: You had to stay—if you passed the exams and everything, you had to wait for the person to sign for you to get you to this country. So my oldest brother came with my father to New York, and he took us off Ellis Island.

LEVINE: I see. Well, did you also go to the dining room there?

KAUFMAN: Where?

LEVINE: At Ellis Island.

KAUFMAN: No, we got food, though. I don't know how we got food, but somehow my mother had food. I don't remember being in a dining room. I don't remember.

LEVINE: Is there anything else you can think of about Ellis Island, or anything that happened at Ellis Island?

KAUFMAN: Really not, no. I couldn't remember. I'd remember people walking, people—a lot of traffic, but I didn't remember anything else.

LEVINE: And what was it like when your father and brother came there?

KAUFMAN: Well, he took us off, my father and brother. He brought fruit, and all goodies, you know. And we saw things that we didn't have, and he took

us into a restaurant. Then we took a train from New York. We came to Boston, we went to—I had an aunt and an uncle on Harrison Avenue, my mother's brother. They lived on a street called Seneca Street. It was a tenement, and we all went there. We were with my aunt until my father got—he got us an apartment where he was living. And we had a house already. No, we didn't own it, but we lived in a—but eventually my Dad bought a house. But most of the boys as they grew older, they all started to earn, and nobody saw the money but her [laughs].

LEVINE: [Laughs] Well tell me about some of the things that you saw during those first days in this country—

KAUFMAN: In America?

LEVINE: --That were new and different for you.

KAUFMAN: Well, I was too little to really realize, but there was so much good things. Because my aunt and my mother's brother, they already had a business here, so they—they had a lot of good food.

LEVINE: What kinds of food did you encounter, do you remember?

KAUFMAN: No. I remember—no, I can't remember what I ate. I remember it was all edible, but it was—we kids didn't know the difference. We ate everything! And even then, when my mother set up housekeeping of her own, my father, he was the sort of a man, he never came home without anything. He always had a shopping bag, and he'd keep bringing this and that. But my mother, she had a lot of respect for my father. He was—he was the king. We could not sit down to eat 'til he washed his hands and ate. And it was a good—I was brought up in a very good home, with nothing!

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BEGIN SIDE B

LEVINE: What was it like for you being around your father?

KAUFMAN: Well, I went to school.

LEVINE: You started school right away?

KAUFMAN: I started school—no, I couldn't start when we were living in Harrison Avenue. When we came to live in Roxbury I started school right away. My mother brought me to school. She couldn't talk a word of English, but she communicated with the people that she wanted me in school. But, I

started school. Then we moved to Dorchester. I was getting old already, and I went to a school called the Sara Greenwood School on Glenway Street.

LEVINE: What grade were you in by then, when you went to Dorchester?

KAUFMAN: I don't remember the grade.

LEVINE: Do you remember any of your teachers when you first came over?

KAUFMAN: No, no. But I remember I liked where I was.

LEVINE: How was learning English for you?

KAUFMAN: Very easy. Well, my mother wanted to learn English, so she didn't allow us to talk too much Jewish. Because she could never read or write.

LEVINE: So in the home, when you were in Poland, you were speaking--?

KAUFMAN: Yiddish.

LEVINE: You were speaking at the home, in the house?

KAUFMAN: Yeah, in the house, all Yiddish. We'd—my mother spoke Polish fluently. My sister—she went to high school in Russia, so she was very learned. But we weren't, the boys. She went to high school; she graduated high school.

LEVINE: Now, why did she go to Russia?

KAUFMAN: No, I mean in Rovna, she was going.

LEVINE: Oh, in Rovna.

KAUFMAN: Yeah, but she went, like, to grammar school. Then she graduated high school. But she kept it up. Even when she came to this country, she spoke Russian fluently. She could speak Polish. You see, Polish and Russian is very similar. If you—if somebody was speaking Russian very slowly, I would understand it, but I couldn't answer them. But she could understand it; she could write it, she answered it. So she was more educated.

LEVINE: Why was it that it was your sister, the one sister, who got more education?

KAUFMAN: Never knew!

LEVINE: That's unusual.

KAUFMAN: I never knew!

LEVINE: Usually it's the boy that gets the more education.

KAUFMAN: I never knew. My brothers—none of them. They got themselves, even when they came to this country, they all worked, and they all right away started to provide. But they were all home. She was too strict; she wouldn't let anybody go.

LEVINE: Well, did your mother treat your mother differently?

KAUFMAN: Any different? No, no. My sister—my sister was, she was a good person. And she was close, but you know, sometimes not too close to my mother in later years. But in the early years, she was a good person. She had problems, which everybody has. But she came to this country; she worked. She had two sons.

LEVINE: Well, when you finished school, what--?

KAUFMAN: I went to—I went to work very early, and I—

LEVINE: Why was it you went to work?

KAUFMAN: Well you know, I saw things that I wanted that I couldn't have unless I earned. So I went to work for Swift and Company at a very early age, and I learned the meat cutting business. And I worked for Swift and Company for a while, but I saw working for somebody else, there was no money. So I went in business for myself, and I opened up a meat market in the area of Dorchester, by myself. And things were pretty good, so I kept staying in business for a while. Then two of my brothers had also a meat market elsewhere, and they weren't doing too well, so me foolishly closed my store, and went in with them, which was the greatest mistake of my life! And we were together for over twenty years. After I left them, I didn't open—I bought a meat market in Winthrop, and I ran it by myself for twenty-seven years. So I was in business forty-seven years, all by myself twenty-seven, and twenty with two partners. But, well, some of that is water over the dam, which is not nice to talk about.

LEVINE: Okay. How did you meet your wife?

KAUFMAN: Well, my wife lived next door to me where I lived in Dorchester. This lady is my second wife. My first wife died. She died November the twentieth, many years ago.

LEVINE: And you did have children. What was your first wife's name and maiden name?

KAUFMAN: My first wife's name was Anna. Her maiden name was Phillips.

LEVINE: And your children's names?

KAUFMAN: My children: I have one son, Milton, I have a son Ernie, and my daughter Dorothy. I have three children. And they were all very good kids.

LEVINE: Did you and your family maintain ties with people from Poland when you got to this country?

KAUFMAN: No, no, never! Never met anybody else. The only person I met that had any idea of—it was funny, this man that got me this information from Poland would be sitting next, in back of me, in the temple. And he heard me praying, and he turned around one day, and he said, "Gee, I think I know where you come from." And he told me! I says, "Yes, I do." I said, "How do you know?" He says, "I came from there with my brother." I never knew them. So he says, "You know, some day I'm going to get you something, what happened to the town that you lived in." And I didn't hear for a long time, and one day the phone rang, and he said, "Come over to the house. I got something for you." And that's when he brought me this copy, which his brother got out of Israel.

LEVINE: Now how did he know when he heard you praying? How did he know that you were from Rovna?

KAUFMAN: Well you know, there's two different—some people pronounce the Hebrew one way, and some do another way. You see, there's Ashkenazim, which I am. And then there's another one. They pray the same; it's just like Orthodox and Reformed. You go into Reformed temple, before you look around you, you go home. You go into an Orthodox temple, you can sit—my Dad would sit, they wouldn't let us out, until the last minute. Because when we all came in, his foot would go up, and the gate was closed! So we had to stay put. But he was very smart, my Dad. He knew—he knew when to leave and go.

LEVINE: Were there any kinds of attitudes or ideas that your mother or your father tried to instill in you and your brothers?

KAUFMAN: What do you mean by that?

LEVINE: I mean, did they have certain ways they wanted you to be?

KAUFMAN: No, oh, no. Oh, no, that didn't go on. That never went on in my mother's house. She was very strict, but she did not lay down any rules that we had to follow. The only rule we had to follow was bring the envelope home unopened. That was it. There was no—she would—I don't remember my brothers ever being told, or anything.

LEVINE: Well, the story you told me earlier about the plum tree?

KAUFMAN: Yes, the plum!

LEVINE: Why don't you tell that?

KAUFMAN: That was next door, where we lived. And I saw those plums, and my mouth was watering. And I figured, gee, maybe if I'll get them. And I was little! And I got them, but she caught me, the lady, and she beat the hell out of me--not facial, or anything. And then when I got home I got the rest of it from my mother! And the woman was right. She had told my mother that if he wants anything, or any of the kids, come over and we'll give it to you. But I didn't know that, so I did something which was—which I would never do again in my life! Because I only live by one rule. There's no other way with me. It's either the honest way, or it's nothing. I can tolerate a liar! I can't, because to be a liar, you got to be very smart. You got to remember two things: the truth, and the lie. If you can't remember both things, you can't be a liar! And I had a brother—I still have him, let him be well. That's all I got left is one brother. And he is a liar. One of the biggest in the world. But I tolerate him, because this, my wife, she likes peace, so she made me go to him. I would never go to him. I really wouldn't! It's a terrible thing to say, but I don't like bragging people. I don't like you telling me what you've got and I haven't got. Who cares what you've got? You didn't give it to me! I don't believe in taking anything from anybody. Maybe that's why I'm just, I'm getting by. And I'm happier than they are, maybe! I haven't got much, but I don't care. I can go out, and do, and associate. I haven't got any, too many Jewish friends.

LEVINE: Why is that?

KAUFMAN: I don't know. I hang around in a coffee shop in the center of Winthrop, and I'm the only Jewish fellow there. They're all very fine people; they're Gentiles. They respect me; I respect them. And if they don't see me one day, they'll call the house. And they're all younger people. I'm the grandman of all of them! But I love what I'm doing.

LEVINE: Why don't you tell your present wife's name and maiden name?

KAUFMAN: My present wife's maiden name is Foreman. Her name is Ida Foreman. She was born in Maine. She was born in Auburn, Maine. And we have a

very good marriage; everything is just wonderful! I'm happy, and I have everything that I need, and I got good kids!

LEVINE: That's wonderful! I was going to ask you—was your mother—did your mother and father had the attitude that they wanted to become American? Or did they want more to hold onto the old ways of the old country?

KAUFMAN: Didn't want it at all—wanted to be here. My Dad especially, where my Dad was in a very fine business, I remember as a young man already, Governor Fuller was then Governor of Massachusetts, and my Dad was designated to buy furniture for his home! Because my Dad was a very, a very, very good authority on furniture. He was a cabinet maker by trade, and then he became—he had a store called, in Charles Street, Charlie Andrews and Company. But my father kept the Sabbath.

LEVINE: Now you said earlier, your father also had an antique shop?

KAUFMAN: That was the store.

LEVINE: That was it?

KAUFMAN: Yes, and he would never work on the Sabbath. He would close like three o'clock, and open Monday. And they respected him. And I lived by the same rule. I mean, I don't—I wouldn't belittle anybody. If your belief is that, I'd go along with you. But they know, people know when it's my holiday, and I know when it's their holiday!

LEVINE: Do you feel like the fact that you came to this country as a eight year old with your family, and immigrated—do you think that affected the person you became, the fact that you had moved to this country and changed your life?

KAUFMAN: No, no, no, no. I was too young. What I believed as I got older, to live by one rule: don't take anything from anybody unless it's yours. That's my belief, and I live by that rule. And I don't envy people! I don't care what somebody else has, if they have more than me! I have more than them in certain other things.

LEVINE: What do you feel proud of, or what do you feel satisfied about, that you did in your life?

KAUFMAN: Well, I'm very glad that I'm alive and well. And I have a nice wife, and I have a nice home—what else can you ask for as a person? I have everything! A lot of people don't have anything. You know, a lot of people have everything, and they think they haven't got enough! They're jealous, they're—those are not well people. They're sick! Somebody has a

beautiful home—good luck to them! Who cares? You got a million dollars? It's not mine! But everybody don't believe that way. Everybody it's—the world that we live in, it's greedy. It's dog bite dog. And I wouldn't want to—I think I lived my life the way I would like it. I wouldn't care. If I lived it over again, I wouldn't ask for anything more! I got a good family, and I've got good kids; I've got good grandchildren—beautiful grandchildren! So, what does a guy want more?

LEVINE: Well, you mentioned before we started, that your name when you started out was something else. Will you tell about that, your change in your last name?

KAUFMAN: Well, they changed it at the—when we got to Ellis Island, it seemed that the inspector that was processing us changed the name to make it easier for him to write it, or spell it out. He asked my mother—I think my mother did all the talking. I do not remember how, when, or why, but I do remember when I came to this country, and my father told me—I knew I had an uncle here, and his name was Stoffman, S-T-O-double-F-M-A-N. So I said to my father, “How come you're Kaufman and he's Stoffman?”

LEVINE: And why don't you say on the tape what your name was when you started?

KAUFMAN: When we left Poland? Stoffmacher. That's what it was. But when I came here—I became a citizen when I married my wife. She was a citizen, so years ago, if your wife was a citizen, you automatically would go to get the swearing in, and you became a citizen.

LEVINE: What year was that, when you were married? [Sound of paper shuffling] Oh, uh-huh. Let's see, July 16<sup>th</sup>, 1935.

KAUFMAN: Yes.

LEVINE: Now, do you remember the Depression? Did the Depression in this country hit you personally?

KAUFMAN: No, no, no, it didn't hurt us! We—we had everything. I mean, we didn't have abundant of stuff, but we had mostly everything. I mean, we had no—my Dad was a good provider. And then when the boys started to earn money, and everybody really had a bank book—I mean, it wasn't much, but my mother—

LEVINE: Tell about the bank books.

KAUFMAN: Well, when worked in Swift and Company, we were getting paid in cash. So I thought one time that I would open up the envelope, and take out two

dollars. And I did. I came home, gave my mother the envelope. Everybody did. And when I gave her the envelope, she didn't say anything, but late in the afternoon she called me at her side, and I felt her hand right across my face! She said, "If you ever want any money, you ask! Never take it again!" And that was the greatest lesson I ever learned! And I took that with me for the rest of my life, that you can't outsmart a smart woman! And she was smart!

LEVINE: [Laughs]

KAUFMAN: You like that?

LEVINE: Yeah!

KAUFMAN: She really was. What else can I tell you? I told you my whole life?

LEVINE: Let's see. I'm sure there's more. Well, how is this time in your life, now that you're retired?

KAUFMAN: Now?

LEVINE: Yeah.

KAUFMAN: I want to tell you something, Miss: these are the best days of my life!

LEVINE: In what way?

KAUFMAN: I have everything I need. I buy what I want. I can go where I want to go. And I can help, if God forbid, I had to help the kids, we are right there, my wife and I. So how much more can you want? You can only wear one pair of shoes and one pair of pants, and if you wore any more, you'd look like a freak! I have everything. I really have no want. I do, would like to have all of us should be healthy and well. That's the most important thing. If we're healthy, and I'm going to live to see a lot of good pleasures, I'm all for it!

LEVINE: Were there any heroes that you've had over your lifetime? People that you looked up to, that you can recall?

KAUFMAN: I only looked up to one person: my oldest brother.

LEVINE: Which one was that?

KAUFMAN: My brother Reuben. He died; he was about ninety years old. He was a very fine person.

LEVINE: What was it about him that you really admired?

KAUFMAN: Goodness. He was such a good person! He loved to live; he loved to go places. He dressed beautifully—he was a handsome man! He lived nice; he had a nice home. But he was something, because when we used to pick him up to go out to eat, my brother couldn't read or write. And he was in business in this country. And he'd sit beside you in the restaurant, and when you picked up the menu, he'd get close to you and look, and say, "What looks good to you? I think it looks good to me, too." And he'd say, "You're going to order that? I'll order the same thing. I think it looks good." You see, that's how—a smart person, doesn't become boisterous, he just becomes calm, and he makes a selection. But everybody has faults. I have faults; I'm not perfect by any means. I'm far from perfect! But everybody got certain faults. If you all were perfect, there'd be something wrong here. So I can't speak for you; I don't know you or other people. I have my ways. I have sometimes good days, and sometimes bad days. I do have bad days, which I can't help. I don't know why.

LEVINE: When you say bad days, what do you mean?

KAUFMAN: I could—some day, nothing bothers me, and some day, nothing bothers me, but I bother other people in little ways that are not—that shouldn't happen. And they do happen, but I can't do nothing about it. Maybe I'm getting senile, but I don't think so.

LEVINE: I don't think so. I don't think so.

KAUFMAN: I don't think so, but I get a little bit hard of hearing, so I have to tell people sometimes talk a little louder, or get on the left side of me. My left side is better than my right. So I turn on the television a little louder; I can't hear it. But otherwise, I walk every day. I walk every day from about six-thirty in the morning, kibbutz, come home, drive the car, go anywhere. So what else can I ask? I'm really happy. I don't want nothing else. Just want everybody to be well, and go along what they're doing. As long as the kids are all well, let them be well, I mean. They're not taking nothing from me. But you got to be lucky for a lot of things. Sometimes you strike it, and—but if I'm going to die, I have no conscience. Nothing is—I don't feel that I ever did anything to hurt people. That is the story of my life.

LEVINE: Well maybe we should end right there. I think that's perfect.

KAUFMAN: Thank you.

LEVINE: Okay, thank you. This is Janet Levine. I've been speaking with Maurice Kaufman.

KAUFMAN: I have it right here.

LEVINE: And I'm going to have a number of papers on file with this tape. And it's November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1995. We're here in Randolph, Massachusetts, and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm signing off.

END OF INTERVIEW