

EI-79

EMANUEL KIRWIN

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- **POLAND: TARNOW**
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LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm here today with Emanuel Kirwin. I'm in Hollywood, Florida in his home and it's August 27th, 1991, late afternoon. Mr. Kirwin came from Austria-Hungary, which is the part that is now Poland, in 1913, at the age of fifteen. So, I'm very happy to be here and I'd like to begin by your telling me your birth date.

KIRWIN: Thank you. My birth date is March 7th, (pause) 1898.

LEVINE: Okay. And can you tell me the name of the town where you were born?

KIRWIN: The name of the town is Tarnow. They call it usually Tarnoff, pronounce it as Tarnoff.

LEVINE: Okay. And did you live in Tarnow or Tarnoff for your fifteen years before you came here?

KIRWIN: No, I lived in Tarnow until the age of fourteen. Then I, next I was supposed to finish school that year at the end of July but I had this opportunity to go to Berlin where a job was waiting for me, where a friend of my mother's came from Berlin to town to visit his sisters or relatives and she spoke to him--she knew him--he says, " When he comes to Berlin let him come up there, I'll give him a job, for thirty marks a month."

LEVINE: Okay, then let's talk about I guess your first fourteen years, when you were in Tarnow.

KIRWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Can you describe the town?

KIRWIN: Well, the town, at the time, was a population of sixty thousand and was divided, you might say, half Jewish people and half non-Jewish, mostly Roman Catholics, if not all. And there used to be, at the time, until about 1908, we had no sewerage system, no water system, no electricity, gas in certain places; so for drinking water there used to be a water carrier, bring the water from the city, from the pump in the middle of the city, which was good drinking water. And you paid him so much a week or a month, whatever it was, to bring in what he had a barrel of it and you used it only for drinking and cooking. For washing and so on, they used to use a pump. Most everybody

had a pump there but the water was not suitable for drinking, even if you boiled it.

LEVINE: Will you describe?

KIRWIN: And there used to be, of course, then when the trolley car came along in 1910 or '11, they used to say kind of in, " You have such a *mazel as tramvay oyf Shabos*," in other words, because it used to be empty. The non-Jewish, very few of them rode in a trolley. They didn't have the money or didn't want to spend it. They were accustomed to walking, so the trolley was empty, just the conductor and the engineer, the fellow driving the trolley. So they wished them that kind of a luck and say, here. (They laugh)

LEVINE: Okay. Will you describe the house where you lived in Tarnow?

KIRWIN: Well, I know the house I was born in because every time I would pass my mother would say, " You were born in this house." See, the number was 18, but on my birthday, birth certificate they didn't put down the name of the street because I suppose it had, Jewish called it one way, Polacks called it some other way. They used to call it like " the wide street " or, but they left it off because, in fact, when I came back there in nineteen hundred and thirty, twenty-nine, they already called it by some Jewish name, not --I can't think of the name now. But, so I lived in there. Then we left, moved from there to a place in the market square opposite City Hall. And all I can remember there, at the age of, I was about three, I had a sister, a younger sister about two years younger, and all I can remember of her, only that she, where she died from pneumonia or something, 'cause they had tanks with, what do you call it?

LEVINE: Oxygen?

KIRWIN: Oxygen tanks and so on--that's all I can remember. And then I remember also from that house I was run over by a horse and carriage on my left arm and it was in a sling, cast for a number of months and my mother used to take me to the doctor for exercise, for therapy, and that's the only time I used to scream. So I have all my strength in my left arm now.

LEVINE: And then did you stay in that house until you left for Berlin?

KIRWIN: No, well this was, then we moved to another place on (pause) [Jewish or German name] they say, White Street, and my father was manufacturing men's clothing. So we moved there, and then from there we moved to a house that belonged to my mother's parents and belonged to the great grandparents, and it used to be a bakery. So it was a great big room like all these, matter of fact bigger than all these rooms here put together (indicating the rooms of his condo), so when they lived there we didn't use it as a bakery, only once a year to bake *matzohs*. So we moved out the day before Purim, and they set up their tables and things there,' cause they didn't have the machinery in those days as they have today here. The only machine they had was like a laundry, wash wringer, you know what I mean. You used to put the *matzohs* through there to kind of, to make little cake, you know and they used to be all round *matzohs*. And they used to clean them up and even as kid, and to this very day, I'm wondering how in the world they got through baking *matzohs* about ten o'clock in the morning, you know, they make what they call " the last *matzoh shmor*, " made in a hurry, you see, before the Jews left Egypt. And they would clean up. They would white-wash the walls and all the furniture was put in place and my grandmother used to make the *Seder*, prepare for the *Seder* for the family. Maybe there was ten or twelve of us at the table and I wonder to this very day, how it was she could it? (He is moved)

LEVINE: So now who was there? Who was in you immediate family?

KIRWIN: In town?

LEVINE: Yeah, maybe you could give me the names; your father's name, your mother's name...

KIRWIN: Well, my father's name was Sigmund Kirschenbaum. He, well like he says, he started out after he was married, he was a tailor. So he started out after he was married to make customs --well most all the people beyond the farmer, you know what I mean, they had their clothing made to order. There was no such thing as buying ready-made clothes, but my father made ready made clothes for the farmers when they came to town. And, so, what happened is when he was making these clothes for to order, would be some prominent man in town. Well, he was good for the money but my father needed the money, you know, to live on and had to wait until he was good and ready to pay him, you know, would be proper, the kind that's done for the money, you know. So, but anyway, so my father figured he better go into the wholesale business, he said, making one suit at a time; so he got into making clothing for, we call it " for the rack," but he didn't have racks in those days, so they folded them a certain way and put them on the shelf. And then merchants used to come, come to town and buy as many as they wanted, I don't know, six, eight, ten or twelve suits, you know. And that's the kind of business he did.

LEVINE: Now did he actually make the suits?

KIRWIN: He made a complete suit--I mean the jacket, the vest and the trousers. There was no, there were no special places like in this country, some fellow makes vests only. No, he did the whole, the whole thing on premises. He had a big machine with a table that would hold, oh, I think they could cut twelve suits at a time, or more--a big wheel with a knife, a knife, a big ring, you know, it went on rollers. And you had a big wheel that you turned, you know, got the thing

going to cut the---My father would lay out the patterns on the cloth, and chalk it, then just go with the clothing in the thing, the knife didn't move but he had to move the bundle into place to cut these suits.

LEVINE: And then did the family work in this suit-making enterprise as well?

KIRWIN: No, we had a nephew working there. No, they were all strangers. We had about twenty-seven people working, between men and women.

LEVINE: So this was your father's business?

KIRWIN: Yes!

LEVINE: And he employed about twenty-seven people?

KIRWIN: Yeah, about that many. Remember the buttonholes used to be done by hand. They didn't use the machines to make the buttonholes, to sew the edges around, you know. Everything was done by hand. And that big table, where, then we had a great big table where we used to do the pressing and so on and whatever they had to do by hand, you know, on the table. And that table, of course we had a lot of out of town people working. We had to prepare to give them Sabbath dinner Friday night and Saturday because there's no restaurants for them to go to or they couldn't afford it so we gave them those meals. So we had about anywhere from twelve to eighteen people that take the Friday night table and so on and Saturday afternoon after the services. And, of course, we used to serve gefilte fish that's made at home, soup, meat or chicken and so on, but the service from one course to the other course took a little time because my mother had a helper but it takes time to prepare all these dishes, so we used to sing. These meals had songs, you know what I mean, everybody had a rotation, start it and keep it going, and that's how we filled in the time, you see, for that.

LEVINE: So your mother prepared, with the helper, prepared for...

KIRWIN: Yeah, we used to have a girl working because she couldn't do it all alone. And you know, we didn't have--I have to describe the stove--was made from brick with a steel plate over the fire, with openers--a small opener and a big opener--and someplace there was a place to do the baking. The stove was stationery, you couldn't move it, see? And, uh...

LEVINE: Were most of the people who worked for your father, were they Jewish people or they were both Jewish...

KIRWIN: They happened to be all Jewish.

LEVINE: They were?

KIRWIN: Yeah, see the town, as I say sixty thousand people, was a commercial town. It used to be one factory there making, it employed about seven hundred people making clothing, ready-made clothing. And then used to be a lot of factories, about eight hundred or a thousand people who were employed in making hats, the felt hats, you know what I mean, on the form and whatever the styles were and so on. So it was that kind of a city, you know what I mean? And, of course, I say, wholesale businesses, you know, people come from the countries, say as far as fifty miles away or something to buy what they were selling.

LEVINE: Can you remember what you thought about that, about your father's business and about the...?

KIRWIN: Well, all I thought about it was this: see, what happened, my father left in 1908 we had a terrible depression. At the time --when I read now in the

papers what goes on now in Yugoslavia, with Croatia, Slavonia and Montenegro and Bosnia and Slovenia --all these names I learned when I was a kid, just from the, not the radio, but the newspapers and the talks, that there was a war going on in the Balkans, you see. Austria was having war with all these little countries there. So things got bad and so he just closed up and went to America, and left some money to my mother. We didn't have to go begging, we didn't have to, and we always had something to eat. Then he used to send money from America. And when I finished, I was about to finish school, see my school would end at the end of July; so in June this man came along and my mother talked to him, and he says, " Yes, I'll give him a job when he comes to Berlin." And my mother had a sister living there and she had five children. So I was accepted as one of their, as the sixth child, you see. And one of the sons used to work in the same place. He was already the big shot. Now I told my mother all the time, " I don't want to stay in town to work, to anybody here, because working here you just stay a nursemaid." Because the first two years you're supposed to be an apprentice. So what do you do? You help his wife carrying--you didn't have carriages even there, you have to lug all this stuff from the marketplace to eat or put it in a baby carriage, take it home--and you helped in the house and so on, you know, more so than business, you know what I mean? I said, " You don't learn very much that way, " so I didn't want to work in town, see?

LEVINE: Before we get to going to Berlin, while you were in Tarnow, tell me what your, what was the religious life in your family?

KIRWIN: The religious life was this. On the main street, on the main street were all Jewish businesses--find the name Dobrofsky, Tchaikovsky, whatever names there were, small shops. One was selling spirit, he called it "spirit," it was kerosene. One was, say, selling sodas. The other one had a little store with dry goods, you know, and another place something else, and that was on the street there. So, they were all Jewish businesses. They were all Jewish

businesses and they were closed on Saturdays and holidays, Jewish holidays. So if you went on the street on a Saturday or Jewish holiday was as quiet, like this over here. (Indicating the quietness of his condo) And, in fact, if they saw somebody on the street, a Jewish fellow, they say, "Hey, why aren't you in the temple?" or in *shul* they would call it, you see. And they used to bring out the prisoners, women prisoners, Saturday morning with brooms, you know, there would be about twelve of them lined up, you know, one starting here, one starting there. They didn't go over, they just--you know what I mean, they...

LEVINE: Swept the streets?

KIRWIN: Just swept the street, yeah, because, well horse and wagons, the horses use to leave a lot their droppings, so they'd clean it up once a week that way. And, uh...

LEVINE: And so, your family was religious?

KIRWIN: Everybody, I mean, we didn't know what to be religious meant. This is the way everybody lived.

LEVINE: Everybody lived that way.

KIRWIN: You see, for instance, my mother used to send me out on Friday to look out to see if my uncle, the *shoykhet*--you know, that means her husband was a slaughterer--if she lit the candles. She didn't know what time to light the candles, so if she lit the candles it was time for us to light the candles. I mean, there were these kinds of markers like, you know what I mean? So they decided, they used to send me, she'd say, "See if she's lit the candles already, see so and so. See so, come back and say that was it. So the religious life--everybody went to *shul*--when I say everybody that doesn't say a hundred percent, maybe one or two didn't, but it was an accepted thing. And you didn't

do anything to, so Saturday, even in the summertime you didn't do anything even if it got dark, late or early in the wintertime, I mean this was, you know what I mean, you just took the whole day off. And the baker would prepare special *khalas* like for these holidays, would be a round *khala*, you know what I mean? As I say, the fisherman used to go the lakes Thursday, come back late Thursday night and Friday there was a marketplace we sold fish. Another place, we just sold vegetables. All that stuff was brought to the big marketplace.

LEVINE: Now, were you in school?

KIRWIN: Well, I went to school for eight years: four in the elementary school, then four years. Well, four years less a month and a half or something, into the other school. So I didn't get any certificate for the last year. See, I felt I knew I was eventually going to go to America where my father is so these other things just didn't interest me.

LEVINE; Do you remember anything about school in Tarnow?

KIRWIN: Well, I remember our classroom in the elementary school, used to be about fifty children, and the teachers didn't complain. They got, everybody knew how to read and write before they left that class, I'll tell you that.

LEVINE: Was it all the classes in one room?

KIRWIN: No, no, no, we had, I have pictures if I can find them, of no, classrooms were about the size of, well like all these rooms together (he gestures) you know, and everybody, you had a table and a desk and, I mean a desk and a chair. Everybody had their own seat. It was all laid out, youngest, smaller people to the front, you know, bigger ones, to the rear and so on. And there was a lot of discipline; I mean the teacher was respected. I don't remember, see we

didn't have mixed classes in those days; boys, there was boy's schools and girl's schools. So I think there were men teachers in the boy's schools and women teachers in the girl's schools.

LEVINE: And did you like school? Was school something that you liked?

KIRWIN: That I liked?

LEVINE: Yeah, did you like going to school there?

KIRWIN: Well, it was, yeah, yes, maybe some kids that don't like it, stayed out, you know, made some excuses. But I was on time, I was regular. I can tell you a little story. Now you see in Europe, in the town there, they did not provide books and writing paper, like in this country. You had to buy it yourself. So, when the class started, teacher asked, "Now, can everybody and those who want to borrow a book to stand up. See, what they used to do, when the class ended, the teacher would ask if anyone wanted to, boys wanted to leave their books, so these other people can use it. So if they didn't have younger brothers or sisters that would use the books, they possibly would leave them, some would, some wouldn't, anyway. So about thirty kids stand up and I was one among them. They said that I couldn't afford to buy books. So, as I said there were thirty, and he said, "We only have twenty-eight books. Now sit down, and stand up those that actually have to have it." So the same thirty stand up again. Well, from then on one kid starts squealing on the other. He says, "Oh, Kirschenbaum, he doesn't. He's rich." " How do you know?" He says, "Well, everyday he eats a roll and sometimes it's got butter on it." So I was rich. (They laugh and then Mr. Kirwin is moved) And I never forgot that.

LEVINE: How did you feel when he said that?

KIRWIN: (pause) Well, I don't know. I didn't, I--how I felt? (Pause) Maybe I cried, I don't know (he is moved). I was then maybe about eight, . . . I may have been then eight, you know, nine, nine years old, ten at the most; so, you know, maybe I thought to myself, call him a name? You know, but I, you know, you, but I got the book.

LEVINE: Oh, you did?

KIRWIN: Oh, yes. I mean those, those are little things that-- (he is moved) I never forgot that. I was rich because I had eaten a roll. Believe me, that was not a fresh roll 'cause we used to go to the bakery early in the morning and whatever they had left over they sold, they gave you, say, eighteen for a dozen, see? So we had it in the house and we didn't have no refrigerator to keep it in. We put them in a drawer or something and that was it. And then you had, they didn't give you anything hot to drink so you were out in, they had a, in the courtyard they had drinking water and you pumped the water up and you pumped the water there. So that was, that was, that would be a break. We had to be in classes eight o'clock and then ten o'clock they give you a half an hour break. Then you went back to class again and, depending the grade you were in, so like in the fourth grade, you had the fourth year, you had to stay 'til one o'clock, see? The other classes stopped at twelve and others stopped at eleven. You see, maybe the ones the first year maybe they went home at ten, I don't remember. And I don't remember but that's the way it was graded. And sometimes, I think certain subjects, you have to come back, and maybe for an hour or two, but that wouldn't be every day, only certain days of the week.

LEVINE: And now, did you pay to go to these schools as well? Did you have to pay to go to the schools?

KIRWIN: Oh, no, no, and school was compulsory.

LEVINE: I see. So then did you have a separate religious training?

I mean, did you go to Hebrew School?

KIRWIN: Yes, I went to (Yiddish); I went to so-called Hebrew School from the age of three. That's when I told you before what that place was like, you know. You didn't learn very much, except you learned, basically you learned how to read, to read Hebrew, especially if you went to services, I mean then you followed, then you could follow anything. (Mr. Kirwin asks if his housekeeper has come back. Did the girl come back?) Well, you say the Jewish people were Jewish and did all the things. For instance, Purim, they would have a parade, and everybody closed their shops early or didn't open them, and there used to be a parade, masquerade you know, and before the parade, they would visit friends and so on; the idea was, would they recognize you?

LEVINE: Oh, they would all be in costume?

KIRWIN: Yeah, in costume. I'm not talking about children, that's something--I'm talking about the grown people. Then there used to be a ball afterwards, see, some big, big, maybe several of them. Now those who could afford it had horse and carriage. So you see the parade with maybe fifty horse and carriages, you know; and you know flowers and everybody. It was happy. Then, for instance the *Torahs*, they, we would have a parade with *Torahs* in the street, protected by police. But I don't ever remember any, any kind of a rioting or whatever you want to call it. Everything was orderly was expected, you know what I mean? You got ready for that. And it was, you lived Jewishly, put it that way.

LEVINE: Now was there any prejudice? Was there prejudice against Jewish people in your town?

KIRWIN: Well, I was too young to notice it, except once some kid was running after me throwing stones. So I just run a little faster than he did. I was not a fighter.

So I just ran a little faster than he did and got into my house where I lived. This is after my father left, you know. See, in the town we wouldn't see it, you know, where we lived. When my father left we went where it was cheap, you know, a little further out. So, in fact, we had nice, we had gardens there; we had a lot of trees. There was a barracks for horse guards, you know, for horses. So, I mean it was out of town already. So there you might take a little chance. In the city they wouldn't do it and if they did, they had strong, they had good politicians in town, couldn't do business so they'd get the city police and so on to handle it. They would call headquarters in Vienna or someplace. They send out what they call gendarmes, which is like state troopers, you know. But I don't remember anything like it. No, it was pretty safe. You could, nobody bothers you.

LEVINE: Now can you remember when your father left for the United States?

KIRWIN: Yeah, well, I remember when he left, yes; 1908. We had a kind of a short depression. People didn't pay their bills and so on and it was difficult so he, well, he was a young man yet and figured try his luck over here. He had a sister living here already so he didn't come in too much clothes. Then my mother had the one, two, three sisters living here, well not in New York! Places you never heard of--Ennis, Texas. Did you ever hear of Ennis, Texas? Did you ever hear of Rector, Arkansas?

LEVINE: No.

KIRWIN: Or DuQuoin, Illinois? Well that's where her sisters were.

LEVINE: I see. So was the family thinking when your father left that they would be following soon after?

KIRWIN: That the family would be sent for, yes. That was always the idea. So what happened, I didn't want to work in Tarnow. See, I told my mother I don't want

to work here, these fellas here, I mean I know the way they grew up. Now you say, " And he wears a high collar," in those days like those, you know. And I think my picture's with that kind of a collar. That kind of thing, he orders you around and carry stuff for the woman in the carriage, I don't want to do it. So I got the job with this fellow here in Berlin. So my mother arranged, there was a woman in town--not from that family, some other family--visiting her children--she didn't have a husband anymore and she was going back to Berlin. So my mother, so I didn't get any idea about Berlin at all or what I could expect or what it's all about. "Oh," she says, "she'll take care of you." So what happened, we went, we left Tarnow on a train and then you have to stop in Katavisa, which is now Auschwitz, you know the place there, used to be the border town between, where the train, where the locomotives or so change you know, train, and they would examine you. So we went through customs and I had, in those days the big thing was to have a wicker trunk. You see those pictures there, and I had one of those too with my stuff in it. And she bought the cheapest ticket, fourth class, which is a (pause) it's, like they had there for horses, I mean, well it's a passenger train. One train all they had was seats, bench seat at each end there and the rest have to stand. Being that I got started in Tarnow, the train started to Hamburg, which is a little further west, east I mean; and so I went in, got a seat and sit down. I was holding a seat and she came in. While I was there the customs men come in and they want her to come out with her baggage. And I picked up mine to go, and "No, you stay here!" and shooed me right back. She never came back. I found out later that the dress, the skirt she was wearing was bulging; they wanted to see what she had under the skirt. And what she had under the skirt was packages of matches. See, in our town we bought like these Blue, Bluebird matches. They had five hundred to a package, you know, when we used to have the gas, for gas stoves and to light up the --they were about this long you know. And you bought them, I think the whole box for a nickel. (Side ends abruptly)

END OF SIDE A, TAPE ONE OF TWO
BEGINNING OF SIDE B, TAPE ONE OF TWO

KIRWIN: And same way in our town, you bought a whole box for close to a nickel. In Germany, they had a monopoly on it. They didn't have those matches but only the Swedish boxes matches, which cost five cents a package and only got maybe I say twenty-five matches in a box instead of five hundred. So she was loading up with them because they had, in all the, (pause) for heating up, for hot water for breakfast or something, couldn't cook a meal on it you know? For preparing breakfast or some kind of, you know those with two burners or something? So in Germany, so you had to heat it with kerosene, so you had to have a match to get it started. So this is what she was bringing. She was saving twenty-five cents on the whole, but it was a lot of money in those days you know to people. So that was what held us up. So, oh, what happened, I went in a car all by myself and I wasn't told that Berlin you had several railroad stations--like New York, you got Harlem before you got to New York--because in our town we had the railroad station, that was it. Period. So I never had an idea that there was more. So the first time I saw Berlin, well, they had this, I got off. I got off the train. I got into the city, a great big square with trolley cars with different numbers running in all kind of directions, turning here, turning there, you know, and there were taxis in those days, and these horse and carriage. I went over to the policeman, see I spoke German, because that was compulsory in school. I spoke, so I asked him where, how do I get to this place here, (he speaks German), so on. So he says, well, you take trolley number so and so, then you change at Alexanderplasse, such and such a trolley; it was all Greek to me. So I got in a horse and carriage and told them where to take me. And it's the first time I saw a meter, and the thing was going up in price and I was counting all the time, I got to have, do I have the money to pay it, you see? Finally I had, finally got to the destination, I had the money to pay him. When I went up to their house, my uncle was getting ready, getting dressed to go to Alexanderplasse Railroad Station where he

expected me to come in, which was only within walking distance, you know. See, so that was my first experience. So he said something to my aunt, "Don't worry about him, he won't get lost."

LEVINE: (laughs) So then what? You took a job there?

KIRWIN: Then I took the job. It was, they had a catalog, in other words, a catalog house. Their main business was postcards. In those days the big business was, they would take a photograph of some actress or opera singer or somebody like that, say in six different positions. And they would sell the series of that actress. And if you were corresponding with your girlfriend, who I was there, or boyfriend, they would send this series, and everybody had an album where to put these. So they'd have one page for Sarah Bernhardt, another page for whatever the name was, you know, and so on. That was kind of the thing there. So, they had a mail order business for that and, of course, he sold wholesale to other places. So while they did, they had a catalog, people had say pocketbooks or valets or razors, so put it in the catalog, and when we got the orders, you'd go out and pick up from the warehouses, the wholesalers they had these articles, so be able to fill these, post these orders.

LEVINE: Now was this your uncle's business or...?

KIRWIN: Oh, no this was a stranger, friend; he was a friend. My mother knew the family.

LEVINE: I see. So how did you feel about working at that job?

KIRWIN: What?

LEVINE: How did you feel about working at that job?

KIRWIN: Well, I'll tell you. The first Saturday I had to work, I was shivering because I never worked on a Saturday, never went to school on a Saturday. We kept the Sabbath and here we had to start doing that, well, I saw my cousin working and other people working. Well, you know, the first couple Saturdays was bad but then, then you get into into the line of it, see? So most of my job was everyday to go out to pick up the stuff from the wholesalers, from these people, the packages used to bring back to be able to fill those orders.

LEVINE: I see. And did you like being in Berlin? What was it like living there?

KIRWIN: Oh, it was lovely. I was in a big city. (Pause) There were places to look at, you know, I mean, past the palace you know, and (pause) well, we used to have one, the brewery's name was Auchinger, and they had several beer places, you know, and they sold, they had frankfurters. You go in there and get a frankfurter for ten *pfennigs*, which is two and a half cents. And you get all the rolls you wanted, they had them on the table there with salt in them, you know, so make you thirsty. And get a big pint of beer for ten *pfennigs* also, two and a half cents, something like that. For very little money you could have a nice time, you see? You go to these places there, and, of course, you didn't go to restaurants. Of course that was expensive. But sometimes on a Sunday they had also these beer, *bierhaus*, like a garden, you see a beer garden; that's it, a beer garden, the breweries. So the people used to meet. For instance if you wanted to see Mr. Schwartz, well on this Sunday he would be at such and such a place, beer garden. See, each brewery had a beer garden. So they knew already or they would go to a coffee house, where they didn't sell coffee but they actually sold wine or beer, and you knew that, so, but the people hardly entertained at home. It was small, so they, they met their friends at these different, these meeting places like. And everybody knew everybody else, so if you wanted so and so, " Oh, Mr. Wright. Well, he's tonight at this, Tuesday, he's such and such; you go there you find him."

LEVINE: And is there anything else about Berlin that you remember?

KIRWIN: Well, I was there for a year and a quarter, a year and a quarter so I remember. Well, I used to go to a temple every Fri, not every Friday night. Some Friday nights they had a great big temple, must have seated three thousand people. They had a cantor there. They had a nice big choir and that was very nice. Then I used to go to theater. Oh, I, my friend, one of my cousins was friendly with somebody who was, called him a "clasher"; he applauded. So he used, used to take so and so, we used to meet him someplace and he say, "Well, tonight we go to such and such a theater." So, he had the tickets and we go there and before the curtain goes up and when we heard somebody clapping then we were supposed to, to get it started, to get it going, you see.

LEVINE: Was that a job? Did he get..?

KIRWIN: No, maybe it was a job for him; maybe he got something for that but we didn't pay him anything for the tickets.

LEVINE: I see.

KIRWIN: Some shows I saw three times. Some I didn't see at all but I could go to a show every Saturday night or Sunday, whenever they were playing. So that was one of the things. And, you know, there was a, there were museums. There was nice places to visit, you know, that they had there; so, it was interesting.

LEVINE: Now, then when did you find out that you were coming to the United States?

KIRWIN: Well, my father was here already and the idea was, so I was to come over here to help him. See how we'll be earning, help in the family. So I came here on August 27, 1913 on a, it was then called the S.S. Imperator. The Imperator, he sent me a ticket to come later on, in October some time on the Princess Augusta the Victoria. Well, I didn't want a ship that was a new ship. Why shouldn't I go on an old ship? So I went down they said Imperator, which was making the second trip, round trip from Hamburg. She had made one, what do you call it...

LEVINE: Maiden voyage.

KIRWIN: Virgin, first trip and came back because we saw, we had in mind the Titanic. See, which went down in 19 --I was in Berlin at the time. See, it went down in 1912. But I figured, look, I'm not the only one going on the ship, so you went, you know, you went. I worked on the theory, look, it's regular. It's nothing unusual. Something's liable to happen any time. So, I went on the ship and, and I was in third class. I didn't go to what they call steerage. And I handled it all myself, made the changes and so on. Went to the Hamburg-American Line and changed it over to that ship. I didn't have to pay extra, either.

LEVINE: Now does that mean you were in a cabin in the third class?

KIRWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Did you have cabin?

KIRWIN: Yes. Not by myself!

LEVINE: No.

KIRWIN: With three others. There were four in a cabin --two on bottom, two on top.

LEVINE: And what was the ship like?

KIRWIN: The ship, oh, it was a big ship. It was the biggest ship that floated at that time.

LEVINE: Oh.

KIRWIN: So I used to sneak into the second class where they had concert music, you know, with tea in the afternoon and so on, and I was always --well, the way, that's the only suit I ever owned, you know, at the time, so I was always dressed and looked clean. I mean you didn't look like -- so and I didn't make myself a nuisance, you know, sit down like other passengers, talk with them whenever I had to talk. There was one, one fellow in our third class, he came with a violin and he used to play the operatic pieces you know, just to entertain us. The one I remember was "Tales of Hoffmann." And it was very nice and he did a nice job.

LEVINE: Going in to New York Harbor, can you remember when the boat got into New York Harbor?

KIRWIN: Yes.

LEVINE: Do you remember the Statue of Liberty?

KIRWIN: Everybody got up on, especially all the immigrants. In fact, everybody gets up on the top deck so we're able to see the Statue of Liberty, which we did. In fact, we, further, before we got into the harbor, we had to stop off at San--what the hell is it, Hook...

LEVINE: Sandy Hook?

KIRWIN: Sandy Hook. Sandy Hook, but we stopped and the pilot would come on to take you up the harbor. They unloaded the mail and we used to stay there for quite awhile until you unloaded all the mail and so forth, and then it went along. We didn't get into dock maybe about seven o'clock at night. Then, of course, the people that were American citizens came off first. They checked through customs and what not and those, and then foreigners who visas come in. And so then, then those who, the immigrants for permanent had to stay on the ship overnight to be checked, checked through Ellis Island. So we stayed on the ship overnight and the next morning, then we heard, then we heard that there was a fire on the ship during the night. I wasn't awakened. I fell asleep and so on but the fire was in one of the boiler rooms, and one of the ship mates and so on was, what do you call it, asphyxiated with the smoke and so on and he died, so he was taken off but we didn't know it. They didn't say anything to us until I learned it. So what happened, I wrote a letter to my father and told him I was coming on the S.S. Imperator, arriving at such and such a date, such and so and so on. So, he, like all the immigrants, they used to a, to a bank of Rivington Street. It was a bank--I forget the guy's name, what the fellow's name was, like Schwartz Banking, I don't know, some short name--he went there because that's where he bought his ticket for me, what he sent me. So they called and they looked through the manifest. I wasn't listed. So my father says, "No, he's not coming on this ship." But I wrote him a letter. So next day--this is Wednesday night--I mean got, Thursday, he's supposed to call for me Thursday morning. He didn't show up. He told his cousin that he was living with on Cannon Street, well "Emil is not coming on this ship. I checked with the bank, the agents and he's not listed." Then goes, when he went to work in the morning. Then, when he comes back from work--in the meantime on this ship I sent a postcard that I'm in New York Harbor and it went off, then mail was delivered in the morning, of course, after he left for work. See, and she couldn't read or write; so she didn't even know what was said there, but it was the picture of a ship. So when he comes home, he says, "*Mein Got*," you know, Yiddish, "there was a big fire on the ship. Thank God

that Emil didn't come on this ship." So she says, "Oow, Jingo, there's a postcard here," and she digs out in the bottom of the carriage, you know, under the pillows, takes out the card and reads it. He sees it. Got an American stamp on, mailed from Sandy Hook. (He is moved) So the next morning he was early there, but I slept, I slept in Sandy, in Ellis Island overnight.

LEVINE: Can you remember Ellis Island when you first got there? What was it like? Can you describe it?

KIRWIN: No, no it didn't, that to me it looked all, there were a lot of people there that came off as immigrants the same as I did, you know. And the only thing was with me, I felt kind of a little upset because my father wasn't there when other people were going off on Thursday, instead of him coming, he came on a Friday. So, I, look, somehow or other, in fact my wife said, "Look, Emil, "she called me Emil, "you were never a boy. You were always a man." So I stood up with, you know, among all of them, I went along with, just did what was, as I said when I had to change the ticket, I changed it. I didn't, I figured out what the procedure would be, went to the steamship company, and had no problem. Was the same way there. Of course, as I said, I didn't like it. He wasn't there and I didn't, and I couldn't get off. I didn't have enough money to let me off and they had, then I was not only an immigrant but I was a junior, you know. I wasn't of age. So that was another thing, too. They want to be sure that I go to the right place. So anyway, he came, he was there bright and early, about seven o'clock in the morning he was there already.

LEVINE: Can you remember when you saw him?

KIRWIN: (he is moved) Sure. So we went up, down Broadway. We took the open car in the summer time, you know. It was in August. The trolley cars used to have in the summertime, just benches and a runner. You run on, you can sit.

So that went up on Broadway, and then we had to change for the Delancey Street to go up to Rivington. There was a horse-driven car that came up and it would change into that. Then we got up to Delancey Street and then we had to go to Cannon Street to so and so. So I went there, he left me there, and he went to work to get a day's pay. So he got there, I must have gotten up, let's say, ten o'clock, eleven in the morning; so he went back and had the day's work. So this was now, so I saw it going up, I couldn't see it under the bridge, under the Williamsburg Bridge, they were selling fish and all sorts of things, the men were in undershirts, which I never saw in Berlin--everything there was nit and nat. You know, it didn't look appetizing, and they say "Ahh, Ba, Ahh, Ba", you know, "Two for a nickel, three for a nickel," something like that, you know what I mean? They were selling other merchandise too, you know. So, as I said, then he took me up there and we were up on the fifth floor on there. Then I stood by the window to see what was doing and the people were hollering "Iceman, iceman," you know, to get ice and so on. Well anyway, my father came home from work, washed up, so then he went down for a walk. So, went for a walk and so you meet all kinds of *landsleit*, your countrymen, you know. They said, who's this boy?" "Well, this is my son. He just came from Europe. He's a greenhorn." Then I say to my father, "What does this man do?" "I don't know, he's a tailor," and so on. And he says, and then if some other man comes along, "What does he do?" He says, "Aww, (Yiddish) he's a, he says, (Yiddish) in Europe become presidents of *shul* in America. In other words, all the bastards were born out of wedlock or something in Europe, he says they become presidents in America. So he wanted me to be president of the temple. I told him I didn't want to be president. (They laugh) I don't want to be president. I don't want to be president. My father says every louse or every bastard becomes president of the *shul*. (They laugh)

LEVINE: So were you impressed? How did you feel when you saw New York? When you went on the streetcar and when you walked...

KIRWIN: Well, I, the first thing I did, I took, I got a map. So I knew how to get someplace, you know what I mean to, like to City Hall, I mean to go down the Bowery, go Park Place. So, going down to Park Place there used to be a lot of places were selling postcards, all kinds of greeting cards, whatever. I went in there looking for a job. And, of course, I only spoke German to them then. I couldn't speak English. Nobody wanted anybody. They didn't want me. I suppose it used to be a father and wife business you know, most of them, they didn't have any, well, then I was, then we lived with these people. I say these cousins, and the man's brother, the husband's brother was working at some butcher shop or someplace there up town, and there was a man there wanted a boy, was selling dry goods out of the basement, you know. So, I went up there and supposed to get a dollar a day. It was six dollars a week or something like that. And they had to take a carton or boxes--they didn't have too many cartons in those days--boxes with remnants of this and remnants of that, that kind of stuff there. And women come along. He wanted ten cents for something that he only wanted to give them eight. They used to argue over pennies. You hear that, mind you I was only here a little while. I said, I can't be in a business like that where they argue over pennies, you know, in buying, laying out ten cents I don't mind--I argued for pennies later on, but I was buying a hundred thousand pieces, it's something else. So I told my father, said this not me, I don't want that kind of a business, you know. I'll get something else. So then, as I say, this cousin came along and said, "I'll take him down. I'll take him to this place." He took me to the Harris Company. That's where I stayed all these years.

LEVINE: Why don't you say what position you started at with Harris and Company?

KIRWIN: Well, I started at Harris Company as a, to help out in the shipping department. So the first thing I had to do is sweep the floors upstairs where the office is and sweep downstairs. And it got to be wintertime and we used to have a pot belly stove, so we used to make the stoves, get the stoves going so they'll

have heat in the place during the, then, then they would send me out on errands to pick up packages. They also had catalogued certain items which they didn't carry in stock in any quantities and get them locally from other people; you know what I mean, in the business. And, so then they used to make jokes--and I didn't know what they were writing--they said, ask for a bucket of steam. You know, things like that, you know, or they send me to a place and they had a lot of houses, they say oh, no, it's too heavy--the thing must have weighed a ton--I told them to put in two packages. I didn't say, "No, I can't carry it." I carry, I took on the two packages; I put one on the floor, walk with the other one, put it there, then went picked up the that one, brought it along a little further, and just did it that way. When I went in and brought it into the place, the guys looked at me, "How the hell did you carry this?"--This is like Broadway and Canal Street and we were on Warren Street, you know. But I did it! It was no such thing as a "no." The, when we were putting up the building, the architect says, "Now, you have to clean it out within a week because we're going to start Monday morning to tear things down," and so on. I said, "How in the world can you do that?" Well, it's got to be done, and they all go away and they say you're in charge of it, you know, like that. Well, I got people and I got, worked it out where I had two or three trucks working. One was being loaded while the other one was being unloaded; the other was coming back while this one was being loaded. I kept them there all night --of course we paid them, you know, for the extra helping. And we got it all over to the other place, we got it in place. We got out of there about, so they could come into work Monday morning.

LEVINE: And say how many years you were with this company.

KIRWIN: For fifty-nine years, fifty-nine years, yeah.

LEVINE: And then what was your title when you retired?

KIRWIN: Vice-president and secretary, but it was just a title.

LEVINE: Your work didn't go along with it?

KIRWIN: Well, the attorneys prepared--we had a meeting at the attorney's office--they prepared the minutes of the meeting and so forth and I had to sign it. Or if they had something had to do legally and they had to sign it as secretary, I read it over--I never signed anything without reading it, see--and if I didn't like it I would go back at them, you see? I, when the young Harris came--see Mr. Harris was a big dealer, give people credit--his son came in, who was a Harvard graduate--everybody should pay on the tenth of the month when they're due. So we had this one customer, for instance, this Columbus Cycle Company in Columbus. The name is Shaperstein, who gave out millions of dollars for charity here--that is the grandson (he is moved) the Shaperstein grandson gave millions of dollars for charity--they made it during the war years, and other than bicycle business, you know, buying up the discontinued items of old stuff. I mean they were able to move it. So, Mr. Harris wrote him a very sharp letter. I took the letter and I said--now mind you, I wasn't supposed to see it, you know, but I saw it--I said, "Look, I happen to be putting some stuff that was on the top, I couldn't help but read it." I said, "Mr. George, don't write a letter like that. The customer has been buying stuff like that from us for years. We shipped him stuff that he never ordered. He accepts it. So he pays a little bit later. Don't, don't, he ordered, for instance, something, that--we only stocked orders on stuff that we actually made. See we had a factory in Reading making handlebars, the stems for the handlebars and some other things there. So something that we made in our own factory that we were responsible, we liked to push that stuff in. We feel if we give them more then he doesn't buy from the competitor, you know that was Mr. Harris' philosophy. 'Course we knew where to do it and where not to do it. So I said, "Look, he'll pay before the month is over, don't have to be promptly on the tenth." You know, because there were times that we couldn't pay, I'd tell him, I'd say

"There were times we couldn't pay either promptly on the tenth during the month. So he (he laughs), he listened to me. (Both laugh)

LEVINE: Let's talk for a minute about what, (pause) how you think about your life now, from where you started and living here...

KIRWIN: I say this: If I had to live my life over again, I'd live it exactly the same way as I did. There was a disappointment at one time. Mr. Harris' son, who inherited the business, was not in good health and he had two sons that he wanted to have in the business, and he was actually more or less embarrassed to bring them in because they weren't like the father and certainly not like their grandfather, and certainly not like Kirwin, you know. So Mr. Harris, George Harris, the father of the two sons, called me--nobody heard him or anything -- and said, "Look, I have these two sons and they don't know anything." And he said; "Now I want you to help them." I told this one son to learn Spanish; we're going to make him a salesman for South America. So even though he does something not just right, just let it go. As long as he does it, if he does it right or wrong just let him go at that." And the other one, he was in the army, well he was in the service in the Second World War, and so was the other one. And he was mostly in Japan and he was a secretary to the commander of the army over there--not MacArthur, but Way . . . something with a W, I can't think of the name. Anyway, he was the secretary. So he was there a lot and he kind of, he was in the country, not in Tokyo, but somewhere up in the mountains. And he got involved with this girl, not, he fell in love with her, put it that way, and he married her, see? But I mean nothing, they had no children, never did. But the point is, so he was kind of, you know, I took him on my Japanese trips to learn the business; the other one to the Europeans. So he would, in the morning he'd say, "Now Mr. Kirwin, we're going to see Asia Machinery today. What are you going to tell him?" I said, "Tom," I says, "I haven't thought it that far. Wait till we get there. Then when I say 'Hello' and see how the wind blows, and whatever there is to start the conversation going,

then pick up from there." And I used to have mail with me, of things that were pending or so on. So I'd refresh my memory on that, you know, to read it up a little bit, and so on, and then get the conversation going. Then at the end of the day he wanted to know "How in the world did you think of that, and how did you do it?" I said, "Tom, I don't. As I go along I think of what's the right thing to do and the wrong thing to do for the business, and then I decide how I will go about it." I said, "I can't sit here, think about what's going to happen tomorrow or the next day." So, so, we would do, so I was negotiating-- change was always the big item in the business--so I was negotiating with a factory in Japan, in Tokyo. And I couldn't bend him, couldn't bend him in any way at all. It finally turned out, I think they wanted us to, wanted me to give them a letter of credit, irrevocable--that means you can't cancel it--irrevocable credit for the entire amount of the order for shipping during the year. So say it amounted to a hundred thousand dollars. Well, we don't actually have a hundred thousand dollars, but we use up our credit in the bank; so, in other words, the bank gives us a half million dollar credit just for the hundred thousand and so on, between five factories, I'm suf...I can't get any more letters of credit till some of it expires and so on. So, we were arguing about it. So we were going back to the states on a certain day. So this went on for a couple of days, he went up to the country to meet his Japanese girl that he was catering to--I don't know much about it--and I finally got them to agree and I said, "Now look, we can't give you a year's letter of credit because it ties up our credit too." See they wanted there because they could borrow that money against the letter of credit at some kind of very, very low rate of percentage. So, I knew what they wanted, I forgot which, I didn't bring it out in any way, but I just said, "Look we're not the richest people in the United States and we can't just tie up one day what we, for a whole year, because we got to use that credit for the year and so on. Anyway, they finally agreed to ship it, and I went downstairs, and Mr. Harris came back and I was just coming downstairs after my, when they finally agree. And I says, "Tom, come over here," I said, "you better sit down and have a good, heavy drink," I said, "I did it." (He laughs,

then is moved) He said, "Mr. Kirwin, how did you do it?" Don't tell him how I did it, you know. "I was persistent, I reasoned with him." Now they were telling me things that I could just jump up in the air and say, "What in the world did you do in Pearl Harbor? You didn't keep your word there," or something of that nature, you know, but I wanted those chains, you see. So what happened that we gave them the letters of credit three months at a time. They made a shipment; we gave them the next, the next month, and so on. Well, towards the end they weren't shipping the chains, see. I know why! Because they were getting more money. See, they were selling against the chains when I was in Italy at the factory, the fac gets a cable, shows me the cable; and he says --from the Schwinn Company --he says, "If you can ship five thousand chains this month we'll give you thirty-five cents a piece. He gave me an order twenty cents. He says, (as an Italian) "What's this?" I mean I knew, I wouldn't tell him. I said, well, the fellow's destined for chains this month, so he can keep production going, that's why." Now whether he shipped them or not, I don't know. But the point is this was going on in factories; so importers were pitting one against the other, see? So they stopped shipping chains there for a while. So they gave me some kind of hard excuses. So I told them in the letter, very plainly, I said, "Now look, if you don't ship these chains as the order go. You have the letters of credit. I'm going to the Japanese Embassy to put in a complaint and see what can be done about it." And the minute I wrote that that got fixed, (he is moved) without going to a lawyer.

END OF SIDE B - TAPE ONE OF TWO
BEGINNING OF SIDE A - TAPE TWO OF TWO

LEVINE: Okay, now let me ask you--we're near the end of this, so let me ask you--a specific question. Tell me the name of your wife.

KIRWIN: Yeah, my wife's name was Goldie --Golda Ray we used to call her.

LEVINE: Goldie. Her maiden name?

KIRWIN: She had a middle name. She had a middle name.

LEVINE: And what was her maiden name?

KIRWIN: Burros. B-U-R-R-O-S.

LEVINE: Okay. And the names of your children, from the oldest down.

KIRWIN: All right, the oldest one down; Stanley Ira, Paul Harris, Peter (pause)--they got some middle name

LEVINE: You don't remember his middle name. (She laughs) You don't use that . . .

KIRWIN: They don't use it.

LEVINE: Yeah, right.

KIRWIN: In fact, I complain to them now. They write letters, and they imprint stationery, they leave their middle name out. (She laughs) And I told them, I said, "Look, I'm not a lawyer but--you can ask your father and all lawyers--you're name should be known a certain way on all papers, especially legal papers that's going to be printed." I said, "And you, in one place, you shorten it here, you shorten it there, you'll never know which one it is."(Interview ends abruptly)

END OF INTERVIEW