

EI-850

MORRIS KARP (KRAPAVINSKY)

BIRTHDATE: MARCH 29, 1905

INTERVIEW DATE: FEBRUARY 19, 1997

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 92

RUNNING TIME: 57:20

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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UKRAINE, 1922

AGE: 17

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PORT:

RESIDENCES:

LEVINE: Okay, today is February 19, 1997 and I have just interviewed Zena [PH] Shapiro, who is the sister of Morris Karp, who is here with us in Century Village. And Mr. Karp came from the Ukraine in 1922 at 17 years of age and at the time of this interview is 92 years of age. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. Okay. Could you say again your birth date for the tape?

KARP: 1905.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And where in the Ukraine were you living?

KARP: Kharkov. [PH]

LEVINE: Spell it? No?

KARP: No, I don't [unclear] exactly but—

WOMAN: K—K-H-A-R-K-O-V. Khar—

LEVINE: Kov.

WOMAN: Kharkov.

LEVINE: Okay. And you lived in Kharkov up until you left for the United States.

KARP: Right.

LEVINE: Right. Okay. What—and your father—your father's name?

KARP: Joseph.

WOMAN: English.

LEVINE: In English is Joseph. And your mother's name?

KARP: His name I—

LEVINE: Your mother—mother's name.

KARP: You know, it's going to be tough. Well, my—the same thing that Zena said.

LEVINE: Leah [PH]? It's Leah, right?

KARP: Huh?

LEVINE: Was it Leah?

WOMAN: Leah.

LEVINE: Leah.

KARP: Leah, yeah.

WOMAN: And in English they called her—we all call her Lillian here. Leah.

KARP: That's right, yeah.

LEVINE: And do you—okay, and so when you were born you already had an older sister?

KARP: I think so.

LEVINE: Yeah, okay. Now, what do you remember of your boyhood in Kharkov? Do you remember going—

KARP: Yeah. You know, we went through a revolution.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KARP: I used to go marching. They used to take me and we went through quite a few pogroms.

LEVINE: What do you remember about them?

KARP: There's one—I'm 97 years. I never forget one story that lays on my head that I see it very often, which I was—I remember myself being a youngster, or your born, whatever it is. And I couldn't walk, or I was very [unclear]. You know what I mean?

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

KARP: So they used to let me out in the yard in Sirage [PH]. We had a lot of pogroms over there. One picture is, I'm 97 years, doesn't go out from my mind, that when we was—when I was a youngster I was in Sirage. That's was a two by four city. I know a city has [unclear]. That—we had a lot of pogroms.

LEVINE: What's the picture that always—you keep in your mind?

KARP: Well, that's what I want to [unclear] when I come to you. It used to be pogroms. You know what a pogrom is?

LEVINE: Why don't you tell?

KARP: They make an attack on the Jews.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

KARP: And they had one saying, “[speaking in foreign language]—kill the Jews and save a Russian.” That was their saying. And that picture that my mind—I was five years—I wasn't a healthy young boy, the way I understand, because, like, they tell me they used to—I couldn't walk and they put me out in the yards and you know what I mean, that's it. That picture is we used to have pogroms. A pogroms—you know, all of a sudden they come and they attack the Jews [several words unclear] bums riding horses, no saddle. You know what I mean? Just riding horses because they was good rider, and that picture that I cannot forget as long as I live. That [unclear] bum was riding on a horse and he tied

up a Jew [unclear]. And he was riding all over the little town [unclear] on the horse, no saddle, just riding the horse with a rope. And it was tied up to his head—to his feet and running all over, you know, the city, all over, you know. He went to—he went to the lake. Near [unclear] there was a lake. And he rode all over it, you know, with the Jew tied up. And that was his word. “Kill the Jews and save Russia.” You know, [several words unclear]. And then the life went on till we came to America, was already an elderly man—you know, younger man.

LEVINE: Do you remember going to school in Russia?

KARP: Never been to school, Russia and America.

LEVINE: How—how—why not?

KARP: [sentence unclear]. I was a busy man. I was working always in the shoe factory.

LEVINE: In Ru—in the Ukraine?

KARP: Here. No, here. Over there too, I was working there. Then I worked for a dummy. You know, what do you call it? You know, couldn't talk. He was my boss.

LEVINE: Oh, he was deaf and dumb?

KARP: On the machine. Yeah, deaf and dumb. And I broke a needle. I was—he was teaching me, you know—

LEVINE: Teaching you to sew shoes?

KARP: To sew shoes. He was teaching on the machine. And I broke a needle that costed probably a half a penny. And he almost killed me for the penny. I had very tough life, very—they had the Revolution.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about the Revolution?

KARP: Well, all I know that there used to come in all kind of different government. This one chased out this government, you know. [unclear] and [unclear] and then a different one. They kicked out because that's—I'm talking right now about a little town that—named Sirage, a little town. And they was mostly gen—you know, goyim. And I worked over there for him stitching, you know, on shoes. And, you know, I was a young fellow. It was—wasn't so happy. Then the Revolution came down and I was marching with them, you know what I mean.

LEVINE: You were going to be in the military?

KARP: No.

LEVINE: No.

KARP: Never. Marching with them and, you know, in the parades.

LEVINE: Oh, in the parades.

KARP: Because always they had an orchestra or, you know, a band. And we used to walk and I walked with them, you know. I don't know how old I was then. I wanted to see that they listen so she can correct me because I don't know if she'll do well. So that was the life there in [unclear] Sirage, that small town.

LEVINE: Now, Kharkov.

KARP: Huh?

LEVINE: Kharkov.

KARP: Kharkov.

LEVINE: But—

KARP: That's—

LEVINE: But Sirage was—

KARP: Sirage was already, you know, a big area. You know, there. You know.

LEVINE: Was nearby? Was it nearby Kharkov?

KARP: No, no. No, it wasn't; not nearby.

LEVINE: No?

KARP: That was [unclear] Russia and then we came to what—what—what city, you said over here?

LEVINE: Kharkov.

KARP: Kharkov. That's what it is. You know, that life went on. My father used to make boots, you know, for Hebrew, a whole year.

LEVINE: Did you help him?

KARP: No, no. I was just—we was kids. We live in a house in Kharkov that was about five steps down, the whole room probably a little bigger than this.

LEVINE: The whole house?

KARP: The whole—there was an apartment. You know what I mean? So the apartment had—I don't think it was much bigger. Maybe if you would push in this wall over there you would [unclear].

LEVINE: So about 20 by 15 feet or something?

KARP: I can't tell you this.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KARP: On the right was the bedroom. Pa and Ma and me and—and me and Zena over here, you know. Our house was about—we had to make down three steps down to the house. So over here was the bedroom. Over here—over here was the—the bedroom and the dining room, you know. And over here was the door out to go out—upstairs apartment. Over here was a stove, you know, an iron stove. A man always worked over here. My father made boots always for the Hebrew. You know, he—for the Hebrew School he made—and over here was that little space, yeah. And over here—over here was the bedroom. Pa and Ma were there in the corner. Zena and me, where we slept was over here. Over here what I tell you was the dining room. Over here was the—where they worked, my father and that—that Gentile, you know, [several words unclear]. And that was a little place that he was sitting always making boots.

LEVINE: Were there any walls in the—in the—in the apartment?

KARP: No, no wall, except that was standing as the [unclear]. The [unclear] would stand between the bedroom, where my bedroom was, my—my—had—I slept over here with Zena. Over there was Pa and Ma. And over here was the dining room. So you can imagine what it was. Again, over here was the—the dinner and over here was the little factory, that my father had a stove. And there was work and [unclear] drunk and always drunk but a good worker. And my father used to help him, you know, put—and my father—he was a drunkard. My father used to cure him. [chuckles] When he got drunk, it was terrible. And he—then he [unclear] it was all right, you know. But once he got drunk was [unclear].

LEVINE: So the floor—the floor was made out of what?

KARP: That was a brick building. They had running water over there. The water was like a toilet. You went down—you didn't sit down but you stand up over there with all this [unclear].

LEVINE: Oh, [unclear].

KARP: You see?

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And when you went out the front door, what did you see?

KARP: The front door, you didn't go up; you go down.

LEVINE: Oh, when you go down, what did—

KARP: They—we had over there steps to go down to even up here on the floor.

WOMAN: What was the name of the street? She remembers.

KARP: Muskeyoka [PH].

WOMAN: Say it again.

KARP: Muskeyoka.

WOMAN: Muskeyoka. They remember.

LEVINE: Hmm. And what was on the street as you came out of your house?

KARP: It was a regular street. And on this corner, you know, across was always some man selling ice cream. And believe it or not, the spoons that we eat, the plastic was—was at that time there.

LEVINE: Plastic spoons?

KARP: Yeah.

LEVINE: Oh.

KARP: Way ahead.

LEVINE: Huh.

KARP: Way ahead. You know, plastic. And outside, you know, we really [unclear] down the hill and Ma used to take me for a ride, you know. Pull me, you know [unclear].

LEVINE: In a little cart or what?

KARP: No, no. [chuckles] Not a cart.

LEVINE: What did she take you for a ride in?

KARP: On the sled.

LEVINE: Oh, on a sled.

KARP: And we lived on a hill in the house. Across the street was always a [unclear], a taxi, a horse taxi, you know. That was the life of there where we lived. This—the—Kharkov was a big—a big city. There was a—a bath. You used to go to a bath over there; they had everything.

LEVINE: What was that like?

KARP: They had an ice cream parlor.

LEVINE: What was the bath like?

KARP: Huh?

LEVINE: Did you go to the bath, the public bath?

KARP: I was too young.

LEVINE: Oh.

KARP: Yeah, I was too young. But Pa and Ma went to bath—to bath, you know. Yeah, used to go. They used to take me. You know what I mean? Because it was much intelligently made then than over here at that time. They had a movie there, you know. And what else can I tell you about? On the corner on the right side hand [unclear] that store was a [unclear], a taxi with a horse, you know. That was life. Pa made boots. He used to deliver it, you know, with a—you know, to the Hebrew. He was a [unclear]. That was his—and now, as the life went on.

WOMAN: And then when they found—when did [unclear] left—when your family left—

KARP: Huh?

WOMAN: When your family left for America, how did you get along with Ma and everybody there? What did you do?

KARP: Zena and Ma used to sell oil—oil, you know what I mean, that they drink. And they used to sell, I think, chickens or—

WOMAN: Geese?

KARP: Geese. Something like it. They used to walk from our store to the market. But they used to sell oil—buy and sell.

LEVINE: Do you remember the market?

KARP: I remember the market, yes, because we—everybody went there, you know what I mean.

LEVINE: What was it like?

WOMAN: They call it the—

KARP: What do you call the stores that you go by—

WOMAN: —[unclear].

KARP: —all kind of things? What do you call it?

WOMAN: It's [unclear] but it's all on the—

LEVINE: Ground, uh-huh.

KARP: Yeah, she has to help me because—

LEVINE: She says it was all on the ground.

KARP: Yeah.

LEVINE: The market.

KARP: And the life was tough, you know. She used to go to—to buy—help them—buy—Ma—you know, whatever it was that made a little living, you know what I mean? That's all I can remember.

LEVINE: Do you remember any foods that your mother made that you liked?

KARP: No.

LEVINE: Okay.

KARP: You couldn't be—depend that time at food. Then to go to our apartment we had to go down about four—four or five steps.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KARP: On the corner was a taxi, a horse taxi.

LEVINE: Did you have friends?

KARP: I was too young to yet. I was too young. And believe me, Russia was smarter than United States by a lot. Plastic—there was a wagon with ice cream. There was—they had plastic tools, you know—spoons—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

KARP: —and forks at that time.

LEVINE: Hmm.

KARP: You see? Well, the—what else can I tell you? I—I used to go out one day. I used to go out with cigarettes. I was that big. You know, cigarettes, you know.

LEVINE: You had a box.

KARP: A box.

LEVINE: Was that around your neck with a—

KARP: Yeah. I went out and it start to rain. It start to rain and I didn't know what to do. Hard to sell it, you see. So I laid down. I put the box on the floor and I laid down and I covered that. I must have been about—about seven or eight years, maybe. That's the life.

WOMAN: What did they call cigarettes then?

KARP: Popurossi [PH]. I used to sell popurossi.

LEVINE: Popurossi.

KARP: You know, had a box and cigarettes, a penny a cigarette or whatever.

LEVINE: Where did you get them?

KARP: We had a friend lend us money [unclear], you know—lend money. And I had a little box I made this way, you know. So I used to go out hanging this—

LEVINE: Around your neck.

KARP: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

KARP: So it start raining so I laid down on the floor and I [unclear] the box but it didn't help.

LEVINE: It got wet anyway.

KARP: I got wet anyway.

LEVINE: So—

KARP: Then—from then, I think, my father used to make boots for the Hebrew school all year long. You know what I mean?

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. You—the Hebrew school had a lot of children and that's what—he was making the boots for—

KARP: That's right.

LEVINE: —all the children?

KARP: A whole year they used to make, you know, boots like for a—for poor people. But—but it went through to the Jewish organizations, made boots. And then they used to deliver it.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about the Jewish organizations?

KARP: No, I was too small.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KARP: Our brother once woke up. She was in the market. [chuckles] She was in the market and Ma was somewhere else. My brother walked out all naked and he walked way out to the market. [laughs]

LEVINE: How old was he?

KARP: How old was he? I don't know but—

WOMAN: Three years old.

LEVINE: And he walked to the market?

KARP: He was naked.

WOMAN: He was [unclear] from the market to the—to the [unclear]—

KARP: We lived—

WOMAN: —[unclear] him and put him to sleep for a nap. [sentence unclear].

KARP: We lived in an apartment, you know, with running water. You know, that corner had running water in it, always running. You know what I mean?

LEVINE: It was inside the apartment?

KARP: No, no, no.

LEVINE: No, outside the apartment.

KARP: Outside an apartment.

WOMAN: Do you remember going in the fields with Ma and what were—you were stealing things [unclear]?

KARP: I was what?

WOMAN: You went in the fields and you were stealing food [unclear]?

WOMAN: Remember? You were hungry?

KARP: I don't remember this.

WOMAN: Potatoes?

WOMAN: [unclear] potatoes.

KARP: Well, it would [unclear].

WOMAN: Morris, I told you to dig out [unclear] potatoes and now dig out five while the family is sleeping and take them home. And the next day we had potatoes for dinner.

KARP: Yeah. You know, she [several words unclear]. Then we came to America.

LEVINE: How did you feel about coming to America?

KARP: Well, we—I was too young to realize. I know we're going to see our father. You know what I mean? We knew that so then we was in the boat, and she told the story about my father that was there—in about to come to see us. And we seen him. You know, we was on top on the boat. There was a holiday and we couldn't go down. They couldn't take us out because it was a holiday.

LEVINE: It was Thanksgiving.

KARP: Thanksgiving, that's it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KARP: So then they came next day, picked us up.

LEVINE: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty when you—when the boat came into New York?

WOMAN: [sentence unclear].

KARP: I don't believe I seen it. If I seen it, you know, I was too young to realize what it is. You know what I mean?

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. So your father came. You had to stay on the boat.

KARP: Yeah.

LEVINE: And your father—

KARP: There was a holiday, like—no—

LEVINE: Thanksgiving.

KARP: My father couldn't take us out because we had to stay over one night.

LEVINE: What did you do on the boat all day long?

KARP: Well, like a kid is, run around, run around here and there, you know. We played and one day we got a—a hell of a storm and we thought we were all done. You know what I mean? Everything fell off from the tables all over, you know, and—but somehow, we made—we made America the

golden land. My father already had an apartment for us. Of course, she told you.

LEVINE: How did you feel when you saw—

KARP: I went to work.

LEVINE: How did you feel when you saw the apartment?

KARP: Well, most naturally, you can understand. You know, it was a nice apartment, a nice—you know, you can understand it. When we came to America already it was already a different story. We was already older. We went to night school.

LEVINE: What was it like for you? Because you didn't even remember your father, did you?

KARP: Sure I do.

LEVINE: Oh, did you remember him when you first saw him in America?

KARP: Sure.

LEVINE: Oh, you did?

KARP: Sure. Then, you know, we came there, you know, and he had a little—it was selling rubbers, I think, so whether I'm right or wrong, in a store, you know.

WOMAN: Shoe repair shop.

KARP: And I used to go in there already, get a little [unclear]. Maybe I'm mixing up, you know, so forgive me. I do the best I know how.

LEVINE: Yeah, that's—that's—that's good.

KARP: That's about all I can tell you. And Kharkov—I'm a—I don't want to say it, you know—more intelligent people, beautiful—not market—you know, like they make [unclear] over here, you know. Hundred year—all the way that is over here. What do you call that?

LEVINE: Like a mall?

KARP: Like—not a mall. Open.

LEVINE: You mean a shopping place?

KARP: A shopping—what do you call it that—

WOMAN: A flea market?

KARP: A flea—a flea market there was there always, you know.

LEVINE: You mean people would sell things that they had?

KARP: That's right, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KARP: Then they used to buy it and sell it. And then had a moving picture, a moving picture. They had a nice ice cream parlor and they had a barbershop. And they had—something else I want to say.

WOMAN: The taxi stand.

KARP: The taxi stand outside. There was—at that time, they had—like over here we have a sale. They had in Russia—it was also very rich. Across from us was [unclear]. A big company had the store, like A&P.

WOMAN: [unclear]

KARP: A&P, yeah. And that's all—then, you know, when we came to America life opened up.

LEVINE: How did it open up for you?

KARP: I lived a life when I grew up already. I never went to school. I went [unclear] to night school one or two or three nights and not show up. But I was smart in shoe factory. I went to work in a shoe factory. Maybe I'm skipping a lot. You know what I mean?

LEVINE: That's okay. That's good.

KARP: And from then on it went my way. I went to Chelsea and I worked over there. I was smart, already grown up. I was smart in the business and the boss made me Chelsea—made me like a—a little foreman, you see. And then went up—everything went up to me. I was smart in the shoe business, in the—in the factories. And then we—we had—what—what did we have?

WOMAN: Somebody got married.

KARP: Wait, that's already too far.

LEVINE: You kept moving up in the shoe factory because you—

KARP: I just—no, I just—yeah, I was smart in it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

KARP: And then it went like fire. I was smart in Chelsea and I was working. I was already about 16, 17, a small little factory. But I was very smart in the shoe business. And the foreman—the boss made foreman out of me. Today—that's already life. I was already a mensch; you know what I mean?

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KARP: I lived in Chelsea. People worked for me already. The boss made me [unclear] because I was smart and I bought already a little car, an open car, a Model T, and then went up. Then everything went up at me.

LEVINE: So how did you meet your wife? Were you working in Chelsea in the shoe factory when you met her?

KARP: In shoe factory—well, yes. I took her in—in a shoe factory. I was already made boss. You know that's already jumped, you know, so much. I was made boss.

LEVINE: Did you stay there a long time?

KARP: A long time. Quite a few years, you know, but never went to school.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. So you were working at the shoe—

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

KARP: I grew up, had a car already.

LEVINE: What was your wife's name?

KARP: Ethel [PH].

LEVINE: And her maiden name, remember?

KARP: The maiden name, Ethel Cohen [PH], I think. I think so. I'm not sure.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay, uh-hmm. And—and you liked her right away when you first met her?

KARP: I liked her and I—I think so. But right away, I don't know because I was already about—

LEVINE: You were in the 20s, maybe.

KARP: In the 20s already.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KARP: I drove a car already, you know, a cheap car.

LEVINE: And so after the shoe factory in Chelsea, where did you work after that?

KARP: Again in a shoe factory. But I worked up and I skipped quite a few. I worked up there, you know, in Chelsea to—what would the factory—there was—Worcester. Worcester, Massachusetts. That's about 60 miles from Boston. And our boss—I was very good in the business—in the work. I could do everything so first they made me foreman and then supervisor. And then life start to go up. Yeah. Webster, Massachusetts.

LEVINE: Webster, uh-huh.

KARP: Yeah. You know, that's near Worcester.

LEVINE: Yes, I do. Uh-huh.

KARP: I was already boss and they liked me. They came in [unclear] factory. First, I worked on their machinery; then they made me boss, you know. Chairman people came in from New York—from New York and they hired me to be a foreman.

LEVINE: Were there any strikes in the factory when you worked there?

KARP: No, we didn't have—that was Webster, Massachusetts already, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

KARP: Then already life started going up. I was already a man, intelligent man.

LEVINE: Did you have children?

KARP: I had a house. No, I didn't have no children.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

KARP: Later on [unclear]. Then I would—in [unclear] I was already with intelligent people. I was big boss and I made money. There was a New York factory hired me as—they thought I was smart in the business. Then—then I lived a lifetime a very good life—I was already married—with respect and people always looked up to me. I played cards over there, you know, for instance, with businessmen and with doctors and lawyers, because it's a small town. It was all friendly.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Were there a lot of people who were immigrants who were working in the factories?

KARP: A lot of them, yeah. A lot of—

LEVINE: Uh-huh. A lot of different kinds?

KARP: Yeah.

LEVINE: Different—different places?

KARP: There's a lot of—the Jewish population was small but every one of them was a businessman. And I had already a house and then another house and—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And do you remember the owner of the factory?

KARP: The owner is Desko [PH] Revelation?

WOMAN: That's the name of it.

KARP: Desko.

LEVINE: Desko.

KARP: But—yeah.

WOMAN: Desko [unclear].

KARP: Well, they worked up—the factory worked up very rich.

WOMAN: What was the bosses' name, Morris?

KARP: Huh?

WOMAN: What was your bosses' name?

KARP: Diamond.

WOMAN: Uh-hmm.

KARP: Diamond.

LEVINE: Emil [PH] Diamond?

KARP: Yeah, that's his name.

WOMAN: Emil—

LEVINE: Emil.

WOMAN: —Diamond.

KARP: Emil Diamond and his father, you know. Emil was the son. And I had about 300 people working for me, and that's already life went up.

LEVINE: Wow.

KARP: I was there and I was an [unclear] mensch, you know, and a person, respectful. People appreciated me. I used to make Christmas parties. I always invited the police, the fire department, the priest and the—everybody, the big shots. I used to invite them. The people appreciated me because I let them make a living, nice. Everybody made money. I made money, a lot of money. My wife drove a car. One day she picked up a [unclear] and I drove a car. And one day she took the car out—you know, a brand new car and somebody hit her. So they [unclear] on the loudspeaker, "Morris, your wife wants you." So I know already, trouble, you know. That start to end up that I was already big man. I worked in one factory—oh, where is it? By the fishermen side where—

WOMAN: In New Bedford. New Bedford, Mass.

KARP: Huh?

WOMAN: New Bedford.

KARP: In Webster.

WOMAN: New Bedford.

KARP: New Bedford. I worked for a boss, a German fellow. I was very smart in business. When he came in in the morning—so on the loudspeaker used to be, “Mr. Karp”—what’s his name? “Lipid [PH]” [unclear] wants you.” He went—I had to take him over the factory—all over the factor and he wouldn’t talk to a worker man. “Why are you doing this?” You know, stop near a worker. I had to answer to him. Then he walk around every morning. “Why are you this, this, this way?” And “Why are you this—this way?” All this. He never talked to a worker man. They would ring for me everyday and he’d come in. Lipid, you know. Everyday come in, you know, and never talk to a worker man. Well, what can I tell you? I became so known in the trade. I was big, a big man and made an awful lot of ladies shoes. And I used to buy a lot a material. It would—there was a war, you know, and all those things, you know. People was fighting for me to be their boss, their manager.

LEVINE: Do you remember the Depression in this country?

KARP: Yes.

LEVINE: Well, how did it affect you in particular?

KARP: Well, it wasn’t too bad, you know, because we didn’t [unclear] too much. You know what I mean?

LEVINE: You didn’t—say again?

KARP: But we had enough.

LEVINE: You had enough.

KARP: We had the house, didn’t like this, wanted this.

LEVINE: And how about the Second World War? How did that affect you?

KARP: Then my wife was sick. She couldn’t—they cut all the ovaries and they had to operate on her and she couldn’t have babies. So start of the story to adopt a child. We had a lot of terrible—that’s—you know, it isn’t so easy to get a child.

LEVINE: Right.

KARP: But she found one. It was a boy. I told her, “Ethel”—that’s my wife’s name. “Let’s have a girl,” you know. No, she wanted a boy. So she worked hard. She had an operation; she couldn’t have the children.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

KARP: She—we bought—I mean, we adopted a baby when [unclear] went me and Ethel and [unclear]—to the home in—in [unclear].

LEVINE: [unclear], uh-huh.

KARP: [unclear]. I mean, the [unclear], you know, it's a city.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

KARP: And adopted the child so we didn't take him home. We took him to the hospital. You know, they should make him right. And then my wife was already busy in Webster, you know, with—with rich people. Lawyers, doctors, [unclear] with lawyers and doctors and jewelry men. Not pennies but dollars. When we went in a restaurant, you know, everybody used to appreciate that because I was already a big [unclear]—a big man. And the people—is a small town. In a small town you're known.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

KARP: Everybody knew you. The bank—the bank president used to say hello. They all—the big—the doctors—I played cards with doctors and the jewelry men. I became big. The war broke out so I became a big buyer.

LEVINE: Buyer of leather?

KARP: A big buyer, you know, for the whole factory. So this must bring it out to you. I became big buyer and the—all the servicemen liked me because I used them right. Once a year they used to make a party in New York. They invited Best Customs [PH]. I was invited to hotel—what? What [unclear] hotel [unclear]?

LEVINE: Plaza?

KARP: Huh?

LEVINE: Plaza?

KARP: No, no, no.

LEVINE: No?

KARP: Anyway, in a hotel. I was invited. The boss was a very nice man. You know, used me very good. So they invited me to a party in New York once a year. There is nothing in the lobbies because this is something

that the life I lived. When I come in from Webster to New York, you know, and I rang the bell upstairs and I said, "Mr. Karp is here." Because they invited the biggest buyers, you know, and I was buying for the bosses, made money for them. So when I come upstairs a girl opens the door and she walks in. And I opened the door, or the men was there already. I must tell it [unclear]. There was a whole big table with about—people like me, you know, and girls, all naked, you know, at the party. That must—I must say it. And I didn't know what kind of party—she walks me up right away. [sentence unclear]. When I went in everybody play cards naked and the girls are over there, you know. The reason I say, because I was a big man and the [unclear], the president knew me and always, "Hello." The restaurants always had room for me, my wife to dance and to drink. And that's the story.

LEVINE: Well, how do—do you think it made a big difference coming to this country from the Ukraine?

KARP: No ques—

LEVINE: Made a big difference

KARP: No question. I was just a kid, a youngster. You know this—I'm talking about 30 years already, you know, way ahead. Sure, it's a different—

LEVINE: Did it make a difference in the kind of person—do you think it determined the kind of personality you had? The fact that you started out in Russia; you came here.

KARP: Yeah.

LEVINE: You were good in your work.

KARP: Yeah.

LEVINE: And you built up.

KARP: Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you think it made a difference that you came from Russia compared to with—say, if you were born here?

KARP: Well, I kept—I had to come from somewheres.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

KARP: So, you know. So I couldn't tell the difference. I lived very rich.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

KARP: Very rich, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

KARP: People—because that's a small town and everybody appreciated me, when I went in in a restaurant, to the jewelry men, to anybody. I used to come into the bank, you know, for money or a deposit or whatever it is—was every—every time. It used to be very nice. I lived very intelligent—interest.

LEVINE: Now, when did you retire?

KARP: When did I retire?

WOMAN: I can't—

KARP: I—

WOMAN: 1968.

KARP: I don't even—can mention the date because—

LEVINE: Laura thinks 1968. And how—how has your life been now since you—since you're down here?

KARP: Very no good because I am—my wife got sick. We came here, you know. And we went to a party. My—I have a brother, lives in—I lived in—

WOMAN: Hollandale [PH].

KARP: Hollandale. And he lived in—

LEVINE: North Miami?

KARP: Yeah.

LEVINE: Is that where you—

KARP: Yeah, I had two apartments. One, I mean, sold. I made money [unclear]. So we went to a [unclear] party and she came home and she says, "Morris, I don't feel good," in the morning. And she fainted by the sink washing the dishes. So we called the—they came down. They took

care of it and shortly arrived. They left and she fainted again. So the doctors—so our doctor said, “We’re going to take you in the hospital and they’ll clean it off.” She was a—a petite, you know. She was a little woman, size four shoes. She didn’t miss a thing. She went in the store for shoes, 20, 30 dollars. She want this pair. I said, “Take two pair. Take three pairs.” [unclear]. She had her account; I had my account. She didn’t miss no money. She lived a very interesting life. She was president in the [unclear] Hadassah. She was secretary—another organization, always drove a big car. I have a car and Bobby had a car, my son.

LEVINE: Did—did your wife come to this country from someplace else?

KARP: Yeah.

LEVINE: Or she was born here?

KARP: From Russia, from deep Russia. And we lived very nice life till a long time ago we—[unclear] moved in. They flooded a—we had an apart—you know, a house, one condominium, another condominium. She lived a nice life. I lived a nice life. My son already was a son that was in the Marines. He signed up for the Marines, you know.

WOMAN: In Korea [unclear].

KARP: And we had enough money. She lived like a queen. She was president of the Hadassah and she was president where they take care of the—when they sell—when they have rummage sale. Rummage sales. She was the boss over it. You know what I mean?

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

KARP: She drove a car, big car, a Buick. They took over a—a family from Germany and they told me I got to take in a family in [unclear], that I had to take in a family there. So they brought her in and she had a woman, you know—

LEVINE: To take care of her?

KARP: No, no, no. By herself. A beautiful woman and she—she was chums with her, you know what I mean. Always driving the car—

LEVINE: Oh.

KARP: —together and she had a beautiful car. And the other woman—the family—still here. I’d meet them here in New York, the family that I took

in. And one day when I made a Christmas party, I used—a small—a small town. Only 16,000 people there so I invited to the party the priest, the chief of police, the chief from the fire department, the priest and the rabbi and everybody I invited, you know. And we had enough money. She enjoyed life. She drove our car herself. One day she went out with a brand new car. I had a Christmas party. And all of a sudden, an hour later they called, “Mr. Karp. Your wife wants you.” I knew already [unclear]. She smashed a day—a day-old car. You know what I mean? But didn’t bother. Money, that was there, you know. The neighbors [unclear]. What else can I tell you? But now is the trouble. I’m here. I’m all—I’m almost alone because I can’t see well. I can’t hear well. People don’t want to take up with a man like [unclear]. I kept company with one woman for about four, five years. She died. She had a cancer in the back of the neck. Then I went with another woman over here, with another one for five years, cost me a lot of money. But I’m—can’t see well. I can’t hear well. And I’m amongst—this is my [unclear] and this is my sister. That’s what—my brother is not here, you know. So what else can I tell you?

LEVINE: Maybe—I think—I think you probably covered it.

KARP: Huh?

LEVINE: I think that’s fine. I think you remembered a lot.

KARP: Yeah, and I got a—

LEVINE: And I thank you.

KARP: I’ve got a brother here, you know—as you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

KARP: He—he remarried. He worked for me. He remarried and, you know, this age. You know, it’s already—[unclear] feels good. [unclear]. What else can I tell you? Anything you want to know, ask me.

LEVINE: I think—unless there’s anything else you can think of about coming to this country or life before you came—did you feel American? When did you start to feel comfortable here, like you were—

KARP: When I was here already and I already bought a Model T, you know. And I was already a man when I bought a [unclear] car. My father made a living, you know. And then that’s the story and life went on.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Well, you can be proud of what you made of your life.

KARP: I made a lot. I never went to school.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

KARP: Used to go in school [unclear], you know. But I got through. You know what I mean?

LEVINE: Yes, uh-huh. Yes.

KARP: My problem now is that I can't see well, you see. And nobody wants to take up already with a man, you know what I mean, that can't see well. For instance, I've played cards with people. It takes me long. I don't see this card; I don't see. So I used to try to make up, you know, [unclear]. And they don't want to do it. The people are very mean. I don't mean here. All over. People don't care that somebody's dying. They don't care if somebody [unclear], you know, in trouble. They don't care because [unclear] all over here. Century Village, over here—I think how many people—about—

WOMAN: Seventeen thousand.

KARP: How much?

WOMAN: Seventeen thousand.

KARP: Seventeen thousand. That's a—that's a whole—

WOMAN: City.

KARP: —city.

LEVINE: Right. [chuckles]

KARP: And everybody has his own problem because they're all in this same class, except a few that, you know—so, you know what I mean?

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

KARP: I kept company to—with one girl. I told you she died and I—lately, I kept company with a girl, a very nice girl. She cost me money. But, you know, I can't see well. I can't hear well. They don't want to take—take this up. You know what I mean?

LEVINE: Okay.

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KARP: And you can't blame them. You can't blame them. But I feel bad. I feel bitter.

LEVINE: You feel bitter.

KARP: I feel very bitter, you know, that it worked out this way.

LEVINE: Well, you can look back on the good life that you had—

KARP: Well, I try it.

LEVINE: Yeah. Okay. Let me—let me turn this off. I want to just say that I've been speaking with Morris Karp and this is Janet Levine on February 18, 1997. And I thank you for your remembrances—

KARP: You're welcome.

LEVINE: —of your life.

[END OF INTERVIEW]