

EI-878

ARTHUR KARP

BIRTHDATE: JULY 14, 1914

INTERVIEW DATE: MAY 13, 1997

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 82

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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RUSSIA, 1922

AGE: 6 or 7

SHIP:

PORT:

RESIDENCES:

LEVINE: Okay. Today is May 13th, 1997 and I'm here in North Miami, Florida with Mr. Arthur Karp, who came through Ellis Island in 1922 when he was around six or seven, somewhere around in there. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and if we could begin at the beginning with your birth date.

KARP: July 14, 1914.

LEVINE: Okay. And where were you born?

KARP: In Harkov [PH].

LEVINE: Okay. And that's Russia, right?

KARP: That's Russia, right.

LEVINE: Russia. And you—did you live in Harkov the whole time before you left—

KARP: Yes.

LEVINE: —for the United States?

KARP: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, I know you were young but do you have any memories of Harkov?

KARP: Well, not too much. I know that my sister—she was the breadwinner of the family. My mother was a—a heavy woman and she couldn't do too much. And she wasn't feeling too well. So my sister, Zena [PH], she was the—she was the breadwinner and she was the one that took care of us.

LEVINE: And what did she do to—to make money?

KARP: She used to go every morning at five o'clock in the morning to the—what they call it—to the market. And she used to try to sell something that she could buy, a chicken or oil or anything that she could get her hands in. And she was—you know, to make a few dollars so she can buy some bread for us when we—when she would get home. And—

LEVINE: And she was a young girl then, right?

KARP: She was about 13, 14 years old; that's all. That's what—that's what she was, about 14 years old.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

KARP: And of course, my father left to go to America. And he says as soon as he get settled, he'll—he'll bring us over. The war broke out at that time in 1914 so we couldn't go anywhere. And that was the only way that we could make a living, that my sister done the whole thing. And—

LEVINE: Right. What was your father's name?

KARP: My father's name was—well, we used to call him Joseph and he was a shoemaker. When he came to America he opened up a little shoe repair shop. And that's the way he made a living.

LEVINE: Was he a shoemaker in Russia as well?

KARP: He was. He was a very, very good—

LEVINE: And that meant you made the shoes—

KARP: That's right.

LEVINE: —from the beginning, right?

KARP: That's right.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

KARP: Them days, you were a shoemaker, you made the shoe from the top to the bottom.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

KARP: There's no putting on lifts or putting on soles or putting on heels.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah. And what was your mother's name?

KARP: My sis—my mother's name was Lillian.

LEVINE: And do you happen to remember her na—maiden name?

KARP: Stoloff—Stoloff—S-T-O-L-O-F-F.

WOMAN: [unclear] his parents. Oh.

KARP: Yeah.

WOMAN: He said, "I have a woman [unclear] and this is his brother with his wife."

LEVINE: Oh.

WOMAN: [several words unclear] she died already—

LEVINE: Very nice.

WOMAN: —10 years ago.

LEVINE: Okay, thank you.

WOMAN: You're welcome.

LEVINE: Okay, so—

WOMAN: Yeah, I saw [unclear]. He went to [unclear].

LEVINE: Okay, wait. I'm going to pause. [tape off/on] Okay, we're resuming here again.

KARP: My—

LEVINE: Okay. So did you go to school or anything—

KARP: When we came here I went to school, yeah.

LEVINE: Before that, you hadn't been to school?

KARP: No, no. We didn't, no.

LEVINE: And what were you speaking in the home? What language?

KARP: Russian.

LEVINE: Russian.

KARP: Yeah.

LEVINE: Did you speak Yiddish at all?

KARP: I don't know. I don't remember, to tell you the truth.

LEVINE: Okay.

KARP: I don't remember.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Were you religious? Do you remember any religious—

KARP: No.

LEVINE: —occasions in Russia?

KARP: No, no.

LEVINE: No.

KARP: No, it was during wartime and we done the best we could to—to—

LEVINE: Were you—

KARP: —to get a piece of bread.

LEVINE: Yeah. So you were—you were often hungry, I imagine.

KARP: Yeah, most of the time.

LEVINE: Yeah.

KARP: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah. And how about your other—your brother, Morris, an—and Zena? They—

KARP: Well, my br—my brother, Morris was—he was about seven or eight years old and, I think, 10 years older than I was at that time, you know.

LEVINE: So, now, did they go—did he go to school? Do you remember?

KARP: I think he was to school. I don—I don't remember about schooling because I remember my sister had no time for schooling, tell you the truth. But I don't know if they did go or they didn't go.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Do you remember any pleasant occasions as a little boy in Russia? Do you remember anything that was—that you considered fun or entertaining or—

KARP: No.

LEVINE: W—could you—could you say anything about your mother, what kind of a woman she was? What—

KARP: Well, she was—

LEVINE: —her temperament was?

KARP: She was a very—a nice woman. She was, you know, a mother. A mothers and when I was small I don't remember her as much. But when we came to America, she was our mother and she was the one that took care of us.

LEVINE: Now, do you re—do you remember leaving Harkov?

KARP: No, not very well, tell you the truth. I don't remember how we got to the port even to—to go—to go to the boat. You know, I don't—I don't remember those things.

LEVINE: Okay. And anything about the voyage is—do you—

KARP: Well, the voyage, I remember at that time that quite a few people were sick. And they really was—you know, really bad. But I—I don't think I was sick at all. I didn't—I know there was a lot of broken dishes going on every time we used to eat. But I remember the time when we came to America it was during the nighttime and everybody started to holler, "Hurry up. We're in America. Go see the—the statue." And everybody came onto the—

LEVINE: Deck?

KARP: —to the deck to the railing. They all, you know, "We're in America."

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KARP: You know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KARP: And we couldn't land because we came in at that time during Thanksgiving Day, Thanksgiving. And Thanksgiving Day everybody was out of work. So—and the island was closed so we couldn't get into the—off the boat. So in the morning my father, with his couple of cousins, took us—a boat and they came over to the boat. And my mother and my sister and my brother called, "Ar—Arthur. Come—come over here to take a look. There's your father. There's your father, see?" Because I never met him. When he left my mother was pregnant with me. See? So I never knew who—who my father was. But then my sister said, "Arthur, here's your father. [unclear]." You know? And, you know, I waved like this and my father waved like that, until the next morning he got us out.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KARP: And at that time, I don't remember. We went up to, I think, a cousin's house in New York.

LEVINE: Do you remember—when your father left, do you remember—

KARP: I d—

LEVINE: —why—well, you wouldn't remember, but maybe your mother or father told you—why he left when he did?

KARP: He left because he wanted to make a better life for himself. He—"I'm going to America and [unclear]—I'll get straight—you know, I'll get a little

job or something. I'll bring you over." Well, and the war broke out and he couldn't deliver. So—

LEVINE: And he had cousins? Or did he have any other relatives here?

KARP: I think he had cousins in New York.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KARP: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KARP: And then we got off the boat the next day, which was after Thanksgiving. And he took us over to our cousin's house. And the next day we went on to the train to come to Boston, Massachusetts.

LEVINE: Now, how was it that your father settled in Boston? Do you—do you know?

KARP: Because I think that he—we had cousins in Boston. You know? We had cousins. So he was sort of [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

KARP: And we—brought us up and he had an apartment for us ready on the third floor, way up on the top. And we came up and that was our home. That's where we lived.

LEVINE: And what was—do you remember where in Boston?

KARP: Yeah, lived in—on Geneva [PH] Avenue near Leroy [PH] Street. Leroy Street on the top floor.

LEVINE: Were there a lot of immigrant families around that area at that time? Do you recall there being other people who had just come over?

KARP: I can't tell you. I don't know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

KARP: I don't know. I know there was a lot of Jewish people there.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KARP: Lived in that area.

LEVINE: How about Ellis Island? Any recollections of that? No.

KARP: No.

LEVINE: [unclear]. And when—the first night in America, you were in New York, I guess.

KARP: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Did—did—do you remember?

KARP: I don't remember if I slept or I didn't sleep. I don't know.

LEVINE: Yeah, yes. How about the first few days or weeks? The things that struck you, a little boy—struck you as so different? Anything particular?

KARP: It struck me because I never saw—we used to live on a corner of a main street. And the streetcar used to run. And the streetcar at that time made a lot of noise, you know, on the tracks. And—

LEVINE: The trolley?

KARP: And the trolley.

LEVINE: Yeah.

KARP: And we couldn't sleep because half the night we were up waiting for the trolley. But once we got used to the noise, didn't bother us anymore.

WOMAN: Then you can't sleep without the noise.

KARP: Yeah. [laughs]

LEVINE: And so then you started school soon after?

KARP: Then we started school, yeah. And as a matter of fact, when they brought me into school there, there was two brothers—two boys also about my age. They pu—he—they were there, I think, a little bit longer already. So they put me in the middle of—so the teacher put me in the middle of them. They should explain a little bit because they were already—knew a little English, you know.

LEVINE: Do you remember being considered a greenhorn? Did—was that a word that was—that you heard used?

KARP: A greener. A greener.

LEVINE: Greener.

KARP: Yeah. "Here comes the greener." [laughs] And I started school and they helped me out with a few words. And then we were—became very, very friendly, the both brothers. And we were together, lived together about—quite awhile in the same location, you know, because I think their father was also a shoemaker, you know. So—and we lived there and—

LEVINE: Do you remember your father's shop where the [unclear]—

KARP: Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Now, did he work for someone?

KARP: No, he worked for himself.

LEVINE: He had his own—

KARP: He had his shoe shop.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And where was that? Do you remember?

KARP: Also on Geneva Avenue in Dorchester.

LEVINE: Oh, Dorchester.

KARP: Right. And he was—he made a living, okay? He didn't make no fortune but he made a living. And then we lived in a nice—well, then I grewed older and we moved to another apar—another house a little fur—a little further away. And my father got sick. He was—well, that was awhile back.

LEVINE: Did you—did you—could you talk about what it was like for you to learn English when—when you first came?

KARP: No, I don't know. I—I must have caught on.

LEVINE: It just happened naturally, kind of.

KARP: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KARP: Just came to me naturally, yeah. And—

LEVINE: And what about your brother and sister? Now, did Morris go to school—

KARP: Yeah, I think so.

LEVINE: —[unclear]?

KARP: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: And Zena?

KARP: Yeah. Yeah, they came—they came to school also. And what else can I tell you? That's—I grow up and I worked.

LEVINE: What was the social life like for the family? Did they get together with other people from Russia or—

KARP: Well, not too much. Not too much. Not too much. My father bought a car at that time and he was driving. And my mother didn't want to drive with him. She was afraid because he would—especially, he says to her, "Leah [PH]." You—do you know how to understand Yiddish?

LEVINE: Very little.

KARP: "You see, I drive and I come—and I'm okay. So why do you—why are you afraid to come with me?" "Well"—

WOMAN: She was afraid to go in the car with him?

KARP: Yeah. [laughs] And [unclear]—"I don't want to go with you. I want to go with Arthur and drive b—he drive better than you." [laughs]

LEVINE: So you had a car then?

KARP: No, no. I drove my father's [unclear] car.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KARP: Yeah. I don't know—no, it wasn't me. It was my father's car.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KARP: And that's the way I grew up.

LEVINE: Were your mother and father happy to have come to this country [unclear]?

KARP: Oh, yeah. They were very happy together, yeah. My father was sick for awhile, had an operation on his kidney. And he couldn't work for awhile so I had to go into the store and help out and do what I could do. And I used to bring up the soles up to the house so he could, you know, get it—cut it around for me so I could put it together on a sole, because he couldn't come to the shop. But then I—then he got better and he used to come in and help me out then.

LEVINE: Well, now, were you still in school when you were doing that or—

KARP: Yeah.

LEVINE: —is this after?

KARP: Yeah, yeah. School, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KARP: Yeah.

LEVINE: So then after you finished with school—

KARP: Yeah.

LEVINE: —what did you do next?

KARP: And then I went—I got a job. I worked. Then I got a job, went to—went to work. And I don't remember what I was doing, to tell you the truth. Then the war broke out.

LEVINE: Well, how about the Depression? Do you remember—

KARP: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: —how it affected your family?

KARP: Was really, really very bad. We had a real—you know, it was tough. But my father made a little living. You know what I mean? He didn't make any fortunes but he made a few dollars, just enough to buy a piece of meat and milk and a bread and so forth. We had a little something to eat.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KARP: You know. And we got by—I think we got by fairly good. And then the war broke out, 1945—1944. When did the war broke out?

LEVINE: 1945, hmm.

KARP: [unclear] to 1940—

LEVINE: We went in later.

KARP: Yeah. And I remember that—the attack that Japan attacked us. And then I got—and then I got a job in a defense factory.

LEVINE: And what was that like?

KARP: Then I worked everyday, went to—my [unclear] and I used to go there to Cambridge, Massachusetts.

LEVINE: Oh.

KARP: And I used to work there. Then a few times I went to the Draft Board, a couple of times. And I don't know. I couldn't—they wouldn't take me. They examined me and they—and I didn't go in.

LEVINE: You wanted to go?

KARP: I wanted to go, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

KARP: But then I worked in a—in a defense factory so they—

LEVINE: That—

KARP: They gave me a deferment.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KARP: And then after—after the war I met a girl and we got married in 1945. 1945, I think we got married, had two children in—so—

LEVINE: And then what did you do then after you stopped worked in the defense plant?

KARP: After the defense plant, I went to work—my brother had a job as a super—superintendent in a shoe factory. So he asked me to come to work for him. He needed some help. So I went to work for him, for my

brother. And we worked—I worked there quite a few years in Webster, Massachusetts.

LEVINE: Oh.

KARP: And my children were born there. And after that, they—my daughter got married and my son was with us. Then my wife got sick. She passed away and—

WOMAN: Sanford was [several words unclear].

KARP: Sanford [PH] was taken during the Korean War, during the Vietnam War.

LEVINE: And what was your wife's name?

KARP: Franny [PH].

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

KARP: Hittner—H-I-T-T-N-E-R. Fanny Hittner.

LEVINE: And your children's names?

KARP: Sanford and Sandra. And my daughter got married in Connecticut. And my son was left with us, the three of us. And then my wife passed away and we were together for awhile, my son and I. Then I met my wife, Helen.

LEVINE: And Helen's maiden name?

KARP: What—Helen?

HELEN: What—[unclear]. My maiden—

KARP: Huh?

HELEN: My maiden name?

LEVINE: Yeah.

HELEN: Or from my first husband?

KARP: No, from your maiden name?

HELEN: Blitza [PH].

KARP: Blitza. Helen Blitza. And I met her a couple of times and—and she lived in Connecticut and I lived in Massachusetts. So I came home and I told my children. I says, “Sanford”—my son—“I met a woman that I think that I could be with and want to—think I would like to marry her.” So I brought her home to meet my kids. And my daughter was there and my son was there. And they looked at her and they said—my daughter says, “Daddy, it’s okay. She’s very nice.” So we got married and my son was left alone. But then he met a girl and he also got married and—the time when I got married. I moved in with Helen to New Haven, Connecticut.

WOMAN: They went on a boat five years ago.

LEVINE: Okay. You’re going to—

KARP: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. Okay, we’re resuming here. So when you look back on your life, what makes you feel proud or very satisfied?

KARP: Well, satisfied. I brought up two nice kids. My son is an accountant and my daughter is a—works for the hospital in [unclear], Connecticut as a home—what do you call that?

LEVINE: Home nurse or home—

KARP: Home nurse. A home nurse.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KARP: And she has two nice boys, [unclear] my two grandsons. And they got married, both of them. And I am a great grandfather. And I’m very happy with my wife. She has two nice children. She has a son that lives here in Florida and she has a daughter that lives in Connecticut. She has nice grandchildren. She has three—three grandchildren. And she’s not a great grandmother yet, but pretty soon she’s going to be a great grandmother.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

KARP: And—and right now, as I say, we live here and we’re happy and we have a lot of friends. And we belong to a couple organizations and we pass the days away like this.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. What organizations do you [unclear]?

KARP: The Ben Gorian [PH] Club. It's—it's what they call a survivor's club. Ninety-nine percent of the—that—that belong there are all survivors from the Holocaust.

LEVINE: Oh.

KARP: And I'm the only American now.

LEVINE: Why did you choose to be in that group?

KARP: Well, when we came into Florida 17, 18 years ago they had a meeting. So we came there to the meeting.

HELEN: No, that wasn't [unclear].

KARP: [unclear]. See, there was a meeting. And when we came into the—upstairs, it was a—in a hall, we had decided, "Look, let's join." Okay, shut it off.

LEVINE: Okay. I'm going to stop here. [tape off/on] Okay, we're resuming here.

KARP: Yeah, it's—there it says "Survivors of the Holocaust." So I say 99 percent of them are all survivors. I'm the only American there. So—and I'm on the board since we got here. And they—they hold me like a, you know—one of their own. You know, and I—I get—I send out—every month I send out the anniversary cards, you know.

HELEN: [unclear]

KARP: You know, wedding anniversary card. So I send them out every—every month.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KARP: And this is—this is the way we spend our time now. So when we have nothing to do, we ta—we go to the mall and we buy something or we do something. And we go out evenings to dancing sometime. On a Saturday night we go out to a—to another condominium where they have shows and dancing. And that's the way we—and—

WOMAN: Kill the days.

KARP: That's the way we kill the days.

LEVINE: [chuckles] Uh-huh.

KARP: And that's—that's the end of my life, I guess. That's it.

LEVINE: Well—

KARP: What else can I—what else can I say?

LEVINE: Do—

KARP: I'm very happy that I'm in America. [laughs]

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Can you imagine what your life might have been like had your family not immigrated when they did?

KARP: We would probably in Russia like the rest of them or during the wartime we would have been killed, because they lost an awful lot of—22 million Russians were lost during the war.

LEVINE: Okay. Is there anything else you can think of? Maybe we didn't—we didn't catch about—

KARP: I think I—

LEVINE: —coming to this country and—

KARP: I think I gave you everything.

LEVINE: Yeah, I think you did too. Well, I want to thank you. That was very nice. It was a pleasure talking [unclear].

KARP: No, I can't hear it. Can you—can you—can you run it back?

LEVINE: Ah, wait. Okay. Let me just sign off. I've been—

KARP: Okay.

LEVINE: —speaking with Arthur Karp. It's May 13th, 1997. And Mr. Karp came from Russia at about six or seven in 1922. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service.

[END OF INTERVIEW]