

EI-932

ANNE GREENBERG KAPLAN

BIRTHDATE: SEPTEMBER 30, 1907

INTERVIEW DATE: SEPTEMBER 10, 1997

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 89

RUNNING TIME: 1:23:52

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

RECORDING ENGINEER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

INTERVIEW LOCATION: NEW YORK CITY

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:

RUSSIA, 1923

AGE: 15

SHIP:

PORT:

RESIDENCES:

LEVINE: Okay. Today is October 10th, 1997.

KAPLAN: Right.

LEVINE: And I'm here in New York City at the home of Anne G. Kaplan. Mrs. Kaplan came from Russia in 1923 when she was 15 years of age. At the time of this interview, you are—at the end of the month you'll be 90 years of age. So you're—

KAPLAN: Correct.

LEVINE: —89 at the time of this interview.

KAPLAN: Right.

LEVINE: Okay. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. So I'm delighted to be here and finally to get a chance to hear your story, which you've seen a lot in your lifetime and it'll be very nice to have this all

recorded. Okay, Anne, if we would start at the beginning with where you were born and when you were born.

KAPLAN: I remember all the way back, living with my grandparents, my maternal grandparents in a small town in a big house where there were fruit trees. I remember my siblings, my sister under a tree playing with toys. And then I remember that one of my uncles, Avram [PH] Ostrowsky, was going to go to Switzerland to study medicine because a Jewish child could not go to a university in Russia. And there was a private tutor teaching the French language for him. And I was around and they included me so that I spoke French before I knew Russian.

LEVINE: Wow.

KAPLAN: Unfortunately, the rest of my life I did not have a chance to speak French. And as hard as I tried to remember it and go back to it, I haven't been able, except for a few words. But—

LEVINE: Where was that, Anne? Where—

KAPLAN: That was in that little town where I was a small child.

LEVINE: And—

KAPLAN: It—and there was that private tutor. And I loved the French language. I loved the sound of it. But I could never pick it up again.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. This is Kiev Gabernia [PH], the little town.

KAPLAN: Yeah, this Kiev Gabernia. The next thing I remember, we had moved to the city of Odessa. And my father had bought a little grocery store and we lived in back of the store. And I think we had, like, maybe two tiny little rooms. And we were a family of five. I had a sister and a brother and my parents. And I began going to school in Odessa. The school was excellent. They taught French and German. That was part of the curriculum there. And then, suddenly, there was that Russian Revolution and fighting all the time between the different groups, those for the Soviets, those against the Soviets. And I remember even German soldiers being in the desert because it was a seaport. And children—we run around [clears throat] and the Germans asked us to move back. [clears throat] And we didn't move back so fast. And they pointed the bayonets at us and said, "Zurig! Zurig! [PH] Which means, "Back! Back!" And we [chuckles]—we moved very quickly. [chuckles] Then I remember once I had gone to school, which was quite a few blocks away from where we lived and suddenly, some fighting broke out between the different groups, opposed, and those who favored the Bolsheviks.

And there was fighting in the streets. The school was dismissed and the children were told to go home. I was walking on the street in all that, and shooting all around us. And somebody grabbed me and pulled me inside the building. And later, when the fighting subsided, they took me home. At home, I was told that my parents had a big argument about that. My mother felt that my dad should go to the school and pick me up, and he said, "How do we know where she is now?" But luckily, I didn't get shot at.

LEVINE: This was a stranger who pulled you in?

KAPLAN: A stranger who pulled me in and took me home afterwards. Well, there always are some nice people in this world. Thank goodness.

LEVINE: Well, let's go back a minute. If you could say your birth date.

KAPLAN: My birth date is September 30th, 1907.

LEVINE: And when—how old were you when you moved from the small town in Kiev Gabernia to Odessa?

KAPLAN: I honestly don't remember, might have been about eight, maybe seven or eight years old, because most of my memories are of Odessa, very happy memories because I loved Odessa. It's a beautiful, beautiful city.

LEVINE: What do you remember about that city?

KAPLAN: It's beautiful boulevards. It's seashore. And I remember I had an aunt, my mother's sister, who was studying in Odessa, going to school. And she was very good to me. I was the first niece she had. The—of course, my sister was next. She brought me a beautiful outfit, like a sailor outfit. She took me to my first opera, which I remember as "Aida." [PH] And of course, I—I was th—thrilled. Also, this aunt of mine was very active politically at the time because the czar wasn't very nice to anybody, but especially to the Jewish people. We were very restricted. And she got—after the Bolsheviks came into power, she received the order of Lenin, which is quite an honor for the—for her. But when I saw her in 1965—I went on a trip there—I had the impression she wasn't very happy with the result she had worked so hard for.

LEVINE: Can you say more about that? About the order of—of—

KAPLAN: Of Lenin?

LEVINE: —and what she did and what it was [unclear].

KAPLAN: Well, she—

LEVINE: [coughs]

KAPLAN: She worked to undermine the government at the time. It wasn't the Bolsheviks yet. And she was in grave danger. Had she been caught at it, she would have been in jail for God knows how many years. But—

LEVINE: Were you aware of any of the things she was actually doing?

KAPLAN: No, no. As a child, I wasn't aware. I was too busy with my friends. I had friends and, towards the last couple of years, of course, I was a teenager. I had my boyfriends. I—I was really very happy with my life but I'm very—more happy [chuckles] that my dad decided to get out of there. My father was a socialist.

LEVINE: What was your father's name?

KAPLAN: Julius Greenberg. Now, he had a little grocery store. When the Bolsheviks took over the government, they closed the grocery store and they arrested my father and put him in jail.

LEVINE: On what charge? Do you know?

KAPLAN: Bourgeois. He was a bourgeois. He had the little grocery stores. So he went to jail. Remember my uncle who had gone to Switzerland to study medicine? When he heard about the Revolution, he got so excited he thought paradise came to Russia and to save the people. So he came back to Russia and, of course, he was supposed to be kind of like a hero to the people, that he came back. And so he had some power. He went over to the authorities in Odessa and got my dad out of jail.

LEVINE: Was he your father's brother?

KAPLAN: My mother's.

LEVINE: Your mother's brother. And what was his name?

KAPLAN: That's Avram Ostrowsky.

LEVINE: How do you spell Ostrowsky?

KAPLAN: O-S-T-R-O-W-S-K-Y.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, when he came back, then he was active a—as a social—

KAPLAN: Ah, well, he was a doctor. He was a good doctor. As a matter of fact, if we remember past history, Stalin had the list of doctors that he was going to put on trial. And one of them was my uncle. Now, someone leaked that information to him, to my uncle and he committed suicide before he was arrested, because he knew what a—awaited him.

LEVINE: Were you aware of any of the socialist activities of your father?

KAPLAN: My father didn't do anything. He wasn't active or anything but he was a socialist all his life, and socialists do not trust communists, ever, because communists believe in action at any price whereas socialists believe it should come gradually and by the will of the people.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. How about your mother? Was she involved at all?

KAPLAN: No. She was not involved in this. The only way she was involved is trying to provide food. Here, they confiscated the store. We had no income whatsoever and there was the family. And suddenly, there were a lot of epidemics.

LEVINE: What do you remember about them?

KAPLAN: I remember epidemics where people died and there was no way of burying them. And people just put those—the—the corpses in the street. And I remember dogs standing around and eating them. It was so horrible, such a sight. And of course, that created all those illnesses. We had cholera. We had all types of typhoid—typhoid fever and all. And my dad got typhoid, typhus.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

KAPLAN: And he was just burning up. And they believed in the treatment where they apply—

LEVINE: Leaches.

KAPLAN: —leaches to draw the blood. And the doctor did it to him and it seemed that it helped. And he did get better. But I also remember that we had no food and my mother took some—the most beautiful bedspreads that we had and went somewheres on the market where they—like a flea market and sold them and came back with—bought some food in the house.

LEVINE: Typhus, apparently is spread by lice.

KAPLAN: Yeah, that—

LEVINE: Was—was that a—d—were there a lot—was lice something that—

KAPLAN: Well, I imagine that cleanliness could not be very good at the time. And the way we lived, I mean, we didn't have very much room. I lived in back of the store. There was a big trunk and I slept on top of the trunk, I remember.

LEVINE: Did you have water? Did you have running water? Do you remember?

KAPLAN: Water, I remember, but I—I don't remember hot water, God forbid. And—or lights. We—many a times there was no electricity whatsoever. When light suddenly appeared, we knew there was a raid on, that they were going to come in—into your homes.

LEVINE: How would the light appear? How—what—what would you see?

KAPLAN: I—we didn't know. Suddenly, th—there's no lights and suddenly there are lights. They controlled it somehow.

LEVINE: Do you remember raids on—on your home?

KAPLAN: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

LEVINE: What would you do? When—what would happen?

KAPLAN: Nothing. They—they would ask questions. This—all kinds of questions. And, you know, you answered them and hoped for the best.

LEVINE: If you answered them wrong—

KAPLAN: Well, if you answered them wrong you could be in trouble. I don't know what they were looking for, actually.

LEVINE: Would they take people away? Do you remember?

KAPLAN: S—sometimes. Thank goodness. They didn't take my father away. But my father immediately started to work for a permit to get out of the country. He would get it one day. The next day, they would take it away. No more. So one time, he had gone. He came back and he said, "I have a permit. There's a ship leaving today for Constantinople (that was Turkey) and we're going to be on it." And we started, you know, taking whatever we could. The rest we left for the neighbors to—what did we take? Mostly, you know, your feathers, your blankets and your clothes, of course.

LEVINE: Were you a religious family?

KAPLAN: Were we religious? Well, we observed the holidays and all of that, as best we could. Actually, the rabbis came out and said at the time—because there was so much famine. People used to strip the trees of leaves and cook that, make a soup to eat. It was horrible. But the most horrible were all those diseases. And so we lended the—we were on that ship and we—we were there for a coup—at least a couple of weeks because I think that my—my dad's family had sent all the papers. We were supposed to go by different route, not [chuckles] Turkey. So everything had to be changed. So we had to wait. And when it came we were on that little boat, which was—it was a very rough voyage. And my poor mother, the moment we left she laid down, and not until we got to New York did she get off the bed.

LEVINE: What was your mother's name?

KAPLAN: Rachel, actually. But here she was—she was called Rose.

LEVINE: And what was her maiden name? Do you remember her maiden name before—

KAPLAN: Ostrowsky.

LEVINE: Oh, that's right. Ostrowsky. Uh-hmm.

KAPLAN: Ostrowsky.

LEVINE: And so she was seasick the entire time?

KAPLAN: The whole time. We—it was a very rough voyage. You know, you—but we would hold on and—and the children, you know. We'd run around, wild. To us, it was, well, like children.

LEVINE: And—

KAPLAN: You know.

LEVINE: [chuckles] Right. Well, now, you were the oldest child.

KAPLAN: Yes.

LEVINE: And then your sister was next. What was her name?

KAPLAN: Molly.

LEVINE: Molly. And then you had brothers?

KAPLAN: I had a brother, Sol—Solomon.

LEVINE: And so it was—it was you and your sister and brother and mother and father who were traveling together when you—

KAPLAN: Right. We all—

LEVINE: Did—

KAPLAN: —arrived in New York where my mother had a brother who lived in Manhattan with the wife.

LEVINE: Is this the brother who sent—

KAPLAN: No, no. He did not send. The—the ones who sent for us were my father's family, the p—parents and brothers in Minnesota. That's another story.

LEVINE: Yeah, tell that story. How—what—how was it that they came to this country, if you know, and how was it they went to Minnesota?

KAPLAN: Well, originally, my grandparents had a—Jews could not own land in Russia. But there were all kinds of manipulations. You got a Christian farmer or something to u—the permission to use his name. And my grandfather had that land and he cultivated it for many years. But suddenly, somebody told this farmer that the land was really yours. You can claim it. So he came to my grandfather and said, "I want my land." So [clears throat] my grandfather didn't know what to do. He went to see the rabbi, which in those days was the usual thing to do for advice. And the rabbi said to him, "You have nothing here now. Go to America." So—and the United States, at that time there were certain states who wanted immigrants so they paid for the passage of those immigrants. And the state happened to be Texas at the time. So my grandfather sent two grown sons to Texas, who landed in Galveston, Texas. They were not used to that climate. It was so hot they couldn't stand it. So they asked around, people, where's there a climate like the one they were used to in the Ukraine? So they were told Minnesota. So they went to Minnesota and this is how our family actually started life in the United States, in Minnesota. And when we came in 1923, we landed in New York and we wanted to remain here but the government—the State Department said, "No, you have to go to where your papers originally were"—

LEVINE: Issued.

KAPLAN: —“said to be.”

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

KAPLAN: “You have to go to Minnesota. If you want to come back, you can.” But who had the money? At the time, it was \$200 by train to go to Minnesota per person. It was so expensive.

LEVINE: That’s more than the voyage to the United States.

KAPLAN: [chuckles] Definitely. So—so we remained in Minnesota for many years. But my mother still had her brother in New York and my dad also had a brother who had the—a grocery store in Brooklyn. So when I grew up, I came to New York on a visit and I decided that I liked it. So I remained in New York. And that’s where I met my husband and, more or less, lived most of my life in New York, except for five years between 1942 and 1947 when we moved to Minnesota, because my husband was worried that he was going to be drafted. So he wanted me to be near my family. But in 1947, we came back to New York because, somehow, we loved New York.

LEVINE: Okay, well, let’s—let’s go back and fill in some of the places, starting in—in Russia. [clears throat] Did you know your grandparents at all when you were a little girl growing up in Russia?

KAPLAN: Oh, yes, because my mother’s grandparent—we lived with my mother’s grandparents before we—

LEVINE: Your grandparents or her parents? Your mother’s—

KAPLAN: My mother’s parents.

LEVINE: Parents, uh-huh.

KAPLAN: We lived with them. That was that big house. It had to be a big house because there were two brothers and a—and a sister at that time. And us five—my father was selling Singer sewing machines. I—I wonder how many he ever [chuckles] sold there. Who could afford a Singer sewing machine among the farmers, the people?

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

LEVINE: What would he do? Did he have a shop? Or he would go to [unclear]?

KAPLAN: Yeah, I think he would just travel with the machine and—and show it, how it works and everything.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So these were your early—like, up till you were seven or eight—

KAPLAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: —that you—what do you remember about your—your grandparents' mo—mother and father?

KAPLAN: I don't know except that, you see, my grandfather—I always wondered—I mean, I wondered since then how he could afford all the things—to supply all the things that he did. He was in charge of a nobleman's estate, taking care of it. So evidently, the house came with it and he must have been paid well.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Do you—can you describe that house, that big house that everybody was living in?

KAPLAN: No, except there were plenty of rooms, plenty of rooms for everybody and, of course, help was cheap. My grandmother had help. I remember when—when we left the small town for Odessa, there was a woman who helped my grandmother, you know, with all the children. Well, my mother, she cried so bitterly because she wasn't going to see us. And I cried with her because I loved her too.

LEVINE: Yeah. Now, you—did you go to school an all when you were living in your grand—

KAPLAN: They taught me.

LEVINE: The tutor.

KAPLAN: The—the—not the tutor but I think my uncle and my aunt. I still remember, they would write the alphabet or words in pencil. And I had to go over it in ink. And my handwriting is very much—I—I can't distinguish it from my uncle's. Exactly the same, good handwriting. And then they would—they taught me reading, a little arithmetic, because when I came to Odessa I was—I was given a test to enter a school and I passed it with flying colors.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Now, if you—is this the same aunt that was—that was doing the political—

KAPLAN: Yep.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KAPLAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: So they were also with you in Kiev Gabernia and then they moved to Odessa.

KAPLAN: We moved to Odessa. They remained there.

LEVINE: I see.

KAPLAN: They remained. And she moved to Odessa, my aunt, when she had to start going to school. She wanted to be a dentist, which she was.

LEVINE: Hmm. Uh-hmm. And do you remember why the family moved to Odessa when they did?

KAPLAN: No, I guess—[clears throat] I—I guess they felt there was a t—it was the time. You see, in old Jewish times, in those times, when a couple married, part of the dowry, I think, was living with the wife's family for a certain length of time. That was part of it.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-hmm.

KAPLAN: And maybe that was the end. Well, it was the very long dowry, anyway.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Well, you were there seven years anyway, so—

KAPLAN: [coughs]

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. So [clears throat]—but it sounds as though your—oh, it was your grandfather who had the good position—

KAPLAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: —of the—attending the estate.

KAPLAN: He was the one.

LEVINE: What was your father doing? Do you remem—oh, he was selling the sewing machines there or was that—

KAPLAN: There. When we came to Odessa, he had bought that—

LEVINE: Grocery.

KAPLAN: —grocery store.

LEVINE: I see.

KAPLAN: [coughs]

LEVINE: And before we go further, is there anything else you remember about those early years, those first seven or so years, that you haven't already spoken about? Anything about the people in the community around where you were?

KAPLAN: No, I was too—too young for that, I think. All I remember is that they were happy years. They were—yeah, they were. They were very happy years that I knew.

LEVINE: What was the language that you were speaking at home?

KAPLAN: Well, this is—that's what—it seems like I was speaking Jewish in that—while I lived in that little town, because I remember when we came to Odessa [coughs] and kids would talk to us, and I answered in Jewish and they made fun of me. They would laugh and make such fun, repeat what I said in Jewish, you know. So then I picked up—I picked up Russian very quickly. I was very good at lang—children are good at languages.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

KAPLAN: And—

LEVINE: Would it be Yiddish? Is that what would—when you say Jewish, would have been Yiddish?

KAPLAN: Would have been Yiddish.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KAPLAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KAPLAN: Yiddish.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KAPLAN: And by the time we came to this country, I had forgotten Jewish completely. So my grandfather said to my dad, "What did you bring me, goyim?" So then I had to learn Jewish [chuckles] all over again. And the thing was, we could not speak in—speak to them in Russian. We could only speak to them in Jewish, which we didn't know, or in English, which another language we didn't know. So we were forced to [chuckles] learn Jewish all over again. And then I remember my uncle taking me over to the library, over to their section of Russian books. Oh! I pounced upon them. I wanted to read 'em. I was going to take 'em. "Oh, no. Oh, no. You cannot take any Russian book. You have to learn English." Of course, I did.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Do you remember—did you learn English more quickly than your mother and father?

KAPLAN: Yeah, I imagine so. I imagine so. But they also learned. I think—my dad was given a job in one of his brother's drugstores. He had—I think he had two at a time. So he was given a job in one of them. And—and we, you know, rented an apartment, an upstairs apartment in a private house.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Was there much of a—a Russian immigrant community around where you were in Minnesota?

KAPLAN: Not really. Not really, because it was—it was Minnesota. If we had lived in New York, most probably we would have been, but not there.

LEVINE: Where in Minnesota was it?

KAPLAN: Twin Cities, St. Paul.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

KAPLAN: Not even Minneapolis, which is a much more metropolitan city, even though St. Paul is the capitol of Minnesota.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. So did people make fun of you as a greenhorn or did they—

KAPLAN: There, n—not so much because we started going to school and, very quickly, they found out that I needed glasses because I was squinting, you know. [coughs]

LEVINE: So was that—did that make a big difference to you once you—once you—

KAPLAN: Oh—

LEVINE: —had glasses?

KAPLAN: No, you just—you sort of accept things.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. So it was your grandfather, your—the—your two uncles and now your family were the—was the extent of the family that was there.

KAPLAN: [coughs] Yeah, but the—my grandparents had two or three sons yet who weren't married. Was a large family. [clears throat]

LEVINE: Was there a Jewish community that—

KAPLAN: Minn—

LEVINE: —in Minnesota?

KAPLAN: Yeah, St. Paul had a Jewish community. [coughs]

LEVINE: So—let's see. So you stayed in Minnesota for—

KAPLAN: Um—

LEVINE: —about how long?

KAPLAN: Till 1932, which is how many years, '23 to—

LEVINE: '32. Nine.

KAPLAN: —'32. And I finished high school already because I went through in three years.

LEVINE: So—

KAPLAN: And I wanted to go to college but my parents couldn't afford it.

LEVINE: How did your parents like being here?

KAPLAN: I—they were very happy, I think. [clears throat] And I came to appreciate it too. [chuckles] Because I corresponded with one of my boyfriends for years.

LEVINE: Hmm.

KAPLAN: But, yeah.

LEVINE: So how did you feel as a 15-year-old when you first—

KAPLAN: I wasn't very happy.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

KAPLAN: You didn't know the language and you had no friends. I had a group of boys and girls, friends, you know, in Odessa. [clears throat] Then I got—[clears throat] I got a letter from one of my—from the parents of one of my friends that she died from an infection. She went for—to podiatrist, got an infection and died. Terrible.

LEVINE: Do you remember when—was there a turning point? Was there a time that you remember when you—you didn't long for Russia but you were happy that you were here?

KAPLAN: Well, I—I don't think, with all the stories you heard about Russia, that you could be very—long to go back. I was very happy my dad made that choice [clears throat] when he did. God knows where we would have been.

LEVINE: When—when you think about your mother and father when you growing up, were there certain attitudes, or were there ways that they tried to instill in you about yourself, about life? Did they have a certain orientation that—

KAPLAN: Well, the orientation I always got [clears throat] was—I was always socially minded, always.

LEVINE: Do you remember their philosophy? Can you—or what you [unclear]?

KAPLAN: Well, my dad, being a socialist, I remember—I remember the—the family, you know, the brothers talking about the rich, the Rockefellers—oh, the people who—how did they get their money? By working the workers very hard and paying them low wages. It was—the atmosphere was always socially minded. And to this day, I am.

LEVINE: Hmm, uh-hmm.

KAPLAN: Can't change.

LEVINE: And when they came to this country, that socialist attitude, did it—

KAPLAN: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: —stay.

KAPLAN: Always.

LEVINE: [unclear].

KAPLAN: Especially here, yeah, because they saw the—so much difference, you know. [clears throat] It was the rich.

LEVINE: So how did the Depression affect your family, in particular?

KAPLAN: What?

LEVINE: The Depression?

KAPLAN: The Depression—well, the way it affected me, of course, was that I wanted to go to college and I couldn't. And it—life was very hard for my dad because, to provide for a big family, five people, first generation, just worked and worked.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. So it was 1932 when you then came—

KAPLAN: When I came to New York—

LEVINE: And what was the [unclear]?

KAPLAN: The height of the Depression, I'm looking for a job because I want to stay here.

LEVINE: Now, h—was that you made a visit? Is that how you came to—you—you came to visit family and you decided you wanted—

KAPLAN: Yes, I came to visit my uncle, my mother's brother, because they had no children. So I stayed there and [clears throat] they supplied me with references. Some of their friends would give references. And it was impossible to find a job. There was some kind of, oh, what do you call it—an agency that t—to—to look for work, for office work. And I had—how—how she worked, I will never know, because I wasn't supposed to name her—to name her agency when I went for a—an interview. So I come t—to an interview and I'm interviewed. Everything is fine. [clears throat] They wanted the handwriting. "You got nice handwriting." Everything is fine. Then the reference was of a friend of my uncle's, Mary Ruben. Suddenly, the interviewer says to me, "Mary Ruben. Is Ruben really Rubenstein?" I said, "No, not that I know of." But there was your anti-Semitism right away. So I knew I didn't get the job.

LEVINE: Well, in other words, the person didn't think you were Jewish by your name—

KAPLAN: I don't—n—certainly, Greenberg is—

LEVINE: J—right.

KAPLAN: I don't know what it—but why?

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. So—so did you—was that your first encounter with racism?

KAPLAN: That was my first encounter. You come up against a lot of—in—but that was my first one, actually. [laughs]

LEVINE: And how about in Russia before that? Did you—did you—

KAPLAN: I worked in—in St. Paul.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KAPLAN: I worked. My first job was in a coat factory doing trimming work. I was called a trimmer for a few years. Then [clears throat] I went and I worked at Swift and Company as some kind of a—at the bookkeeping machine. [clears throat] There I had the nice experience because, came to Jewish holidays and the—my supervisor, who was in charge there, and I had to tell him that I wouldn't be able to come in on the Jewish holidays, and I didn't know what to expect. And he said to me, "That's all right. You're entitled to—to celebrate your holiday like we are." Which was really something. I still remember his name, a Mr. Jackson.

LEVINE: Hmm, uh-hmm.

KAPLAN: So certain things are—stay with you.

LEVINE: Yes.

KAPLAN: You know, in your memory.

LEVINE: Yeah.

KAPLAN: Pleasant [chuckles] and sometimes unpleasant.

LEVINE: Right. So—so after you ran into the anti-Semitism when you went for the job interview in New York, did you continue then going and [unclear]—

KAPLAN: I tried and tried, yes.

LEVINE: And were you able—

KAPLAN: And finally, I did get a job with a dress company, S. Schwartz and Brother. And I worked there in their bookkeeping department for many years.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And then where were you living when you were back in—when you came to New York?

KAPLAN: I was—I lived with my uncle, what—well, I was here. At the beginning, I slept on the couch in the living room. Then they took a larger apartment and I paid them par—you know, some money, which was ridiculous amount. But my uncle insisted that was it, \$15 a month rent. [chuckles] Oh, they were wonderful people. Oh, that's my uncle.

LEVINE: Oh, I've been looking at that. It's a—it's a painting.

KAPLAN: That's my uncle. Yeah, that's a painting.

LEVINE: Who did the painting?

KAPLAN: A friend of his did it.

LEVINE: Hmm, clever.

KAPLAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So now, what was this uncle's name?

KAPLAN: This one? Yasha [PH].

LEVINE: Yasha [PH]. And he and his wife didn't have children?

KAPLAN: No.

LEVINE: And so you—

KAPLAN: So—

LEVINE: —stayed?

KAPLAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what was he doing? He was in Brooklyn, right?

KAPLAN: No, no.

LEVINE: No?

KAPLAN: They lived in Manhattan.

LEVINE: Oh—

KAPLAN: As a matter of fact, I remember on 110th Street and Lenox Avenue their windows faced the park. And my aunt always complained that the—the ducks woke her up in the morning. They quack, quacked too much.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KAPLAN: You can imagine what a beautiful view that was.

LEVINE: And—and what did he do for work?

KAPLAN: He was a sample maker in a very good dress house.

LEVINE: Okay.

KAPLAN: Very high priced.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And did your aunt work or she was—

KAPLAN: Yeah, she worked too. There was a couple who were [unclear] to invest money, went to buy and when to sell. You won't believe it. They made a lot of money. And af—she lived till about—very close to a hundred years and she had personal care 24 hours a day for years after he died on that money.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Now, was he of a socialist leaning as well?

KAPLAN: Oh, yes. Yes. A—very much so.

LEVINE: Was he involved in any way, like with unions or any—any activity in New York that—

KAPLAN: Well, he did what he could, I imagine, something—he was involved with the HIAS, I know, because he got us off the boat without ever seeing—being interviewed at Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Oh.

KAPLAN: He came with a official from the HIAS.

LEVINE: I see. Now, when you were coming over in the voyage, would you say you were steerage, or third class, as a passenger?

KAPLAN: No. We were on a boat that had what you would call steerage and first class. There were no second class or anything. But my dad had a rupture. And he—the tickets were first class because they felt that he would be stopped. He would not be admitted to the States because of that. And the way my uncle arranged it with the HIAS, we never—never saw the people, never asked any questions.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

KAPLAN: Just went right off.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about the HIAS at all?

KAPLAN: I don't remember anything about them except that my uncle came with the HIAS in a little boat. And suddenly, they were calling, "Greenberg, Greenberg." So I heard it so I got—went for my parents and they said a couple of words, I suppose, and they came on board and they took us off. He—he must have had a paper to—for us to get off with that interview.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And do you remember your first impressions when you got off the boat and you were—you were in Manhattan [clears throat] that first little while?

KAPLAN: Well, then we went right over to my uncle's house.

LEVINE: How did you go? Do you remember?

KAPLAN: I imagine it had to—well, how could we go in a cab?

LEVINE: Cab, you could—

KAPLAN: Hmm?

LEVINE: Yeah, you could have taken cab.

KAPLAN: Could we?

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

KAPLAN: Too many people.

LEVINE: Well—

KAPLAN: Do cabs take that many people?

LEVINE: I—I think—I would think so.

KAPLAN: We were five.

LEVINE: And then your uncle would be six.

KAPLAN: And my uncle, six.

LEVINE: Yeah, I suppose you could.

KAPLAN: I don't know. I—that I don't really remember.

LEVINE: And do you remember getting to his—so you went uptown to 110th Street?

KAPLAN: To 110th Street there and, oh, we had a lot of relatives on my father's side from—who lived in Brooklyn all over and all of that. And they came over to see us. I remember somebody brought gifts. I was given silk stockings in those days! Can you imagine? [chuckles] But I also remember quite an embarrassing moment. Some of those relatives were very religious. I was not well informed about certain things. So when they came and there was an old man, I stuck out my hand to shake hands. He moved back in horror because the religious Jews, the men do not shake hands with women. [chuckles] And so it had to be explained to me because I felt terrible. [laughs]

LEVINE: Huh, yeah. So you hadn't encountered that in Russia, that the man who would—wouldn't touch women?

KAPLAN: Hmm?

LEVINE: You hadn't encountered that, the man—

KAPLAN: I had never known about it.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

KAPLAN: Who knew?

LEVINE: Yeah. Wow. Were there other things that were new and different that struck you when you first came that you can—

KAPLAN: Well, some of the foods were, you know, that I had never seen. Whoever saw a banana?

LEVINE: Wh—when did you see that?

KAPLAN: I think when we came to St. Paul is when I first saw that. Certain things. And some of the foods tasted funny. Nothing was as good as it was in Russia. An apple wasn't an apple. [laughs] It didn't have the flavor that they had. See, that—little by little, you get acclimated.

LEVINE: Yeah. Okay. Well, I think we should pause here and I'll put on another tape and then we'll finish up.

KAPLAN: There more?

LEVINE: Well—

KAPLAN: What else can I tell you?

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B]

[BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A]

LEVINE: Okay, th—this is the beginning of tape two and I'm speaking with Anne Greenberg Kaplan on September 10th, 1997. Okay, so we were talking about [clears throat]—let's—let's go to where you were—you came back to New York from St. Paul. And you got a job eventually in, what, a factory in the—as a bookkeeper?

KAPLAN: In—well, yeah. There was a factory and—and an office. And I was—yeah, I was a bookkeeper or, I think at that time there were three or four girls in the office.

LEVINE: Did you become a citizen at some point?

KAPLAN: Soon as I could, I became a citizen, before I was married even.

LEVINE: Were you here in New York then? Or you were in Minnesota?

KAPLAN: I—no, I was here.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

KAPLAN: And I remember he was my witness to—he went with me, my uncle.

LEVINE: And—

KAPLAN: My dear uncle.

LEVINE: And you took classes, did you? Did you—and you had to—you had to answer questions?

KAPLAN: Yeah, I had to answer questions. You read up and if you keep up with current events and everything, and—or if you're kind of an interested citizen in what's going on, I don't think you have much trouble to become a citizen.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. How about the rest of your family? Did your mother and father ever become citizens or not?

KAPLAN: Everyone.

LEVINE: Everyone.

KAPLAN: Everyone became a citizen.

LEVINE: So on—once you got back to New York from Minneapolis—I mean St. Paul, what was it about New York that—that drew you, that you liked so much?

KAPLAN: Well, I like a big city. I came from Odessa and I loved Odessa, was a big city. And it had everything too. And what did—in New York, I—of course, I had trouble finding friends originally. I didn't know anybody. But then that's where my other uncle came, shall we say, handy, because he knew a lot of the relatives on my father's side. And among them was a cousin, Jean Berkowitz [PH]. She was very nice. She was very friendly, very helpful. She introduced me to a girl who was from a family that knew my grandfather's family in Russia. And we liked each other. We were friends for many, many years. So we would make appointments, where to go, what to do, and one time, I had a date. It was some kind of a holiday where there was a parade in the city. [clears throat] And I had a date to go to the Music Hall with somebody. But I had told my date that—that after the Music Hall I had to go to the Metropolitan Museum of Art for a concert that evening to meet some friends. And that was to meet my friend, Celia, who was there with some other girls and I found there was some boys too. It was a big group of boys and girls and among them was Phillip Kaplan, whom I met. And he took me home across Central Park to Lenox Avenue and 110th Street. You didn't have to worry about security at that time to walk through Central Park. And we kept seeing each other and eventually we married.

- LEVINE: Hmm. So did your social life in New York revolve in large measure around people—
- KAPLAN: Around these groups—
- LEVINE: —who had come from Russia who were either family or friends from—
- KAPLAN: Well, there were but had—who came at various stages, some of them much earlier than I did. Now, Celia came with her family many years before as a child, small child.
- LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. So did you take part in the cultural life of—of the city at—at that point?
- KAPLAN: Oh, yes, at that time we did. There were different clubs, different social clubs.
- LEVINE: Wh—do you remember where they w—the one that you—
- KAPLAN: No. All socially minded.
- LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. And let's see. So then did you have children?
- KAPLAN: Oh, yes. Let's see. I was married in 1935. In 1938, my son was born and then I wanted a daughter very much. But because I had a son, I decided I was going to have another child. I was cautioned by my dear uncle that it was—it'll be hard to support two children. And I was so brave, "So I'll work. So I'll work." He said, "It'll be very hard." I wouldn't listen. And in 1941 my daughter was born, my dear, dear daughter.
- LEVINE: Hmm. And what—what's your son and daughter's names?
- KAPLAN: Sheila.
- LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And your son?
- KAPLAN: My son is Martin.
- LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. So then did you work after you had children?
- KAPLAN: I—yes, I did. At some point, my husband developed back trouble. He worked in a supermarket, which was hard work and heavy work. And when he developed the back trouble, and there was a time when he couldn't walk and couldn't work, and at one point I remember—and we lived on—on the top floor of a building. And I said to the doctor, "Doctor, will he walk?" And he said to me, "I don't know." That's when I decided

that I had to be ready to pick up and become the provider. And so I started with part-time work, which eventually led to fulltime work.

LEVINE: As a bookkeeper? Were you—you—

KAPLAN: As a bookkeeper.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Wow. And—

KAPLAN: And I'm on my own Social Security earnings. I'm not on his at all.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. So it's—when you married, is that when you moved to Brooklyn?

KAPLAN: When we married, no. Well, originally, we lived in the Bronx because my husband loved the Bronx. There was nothing but the Bronx. We lived in the West Bronx, and, oh, for many years. When did we move to Brooklyn? When we came back from Minnesota d—in 1947 and we could not find an apartment. We found an apartment by paying \$500, what they called under the table, to the landlord to give us an apartment, which happened to be on the top floor, three flights up.

LEVINE: Hmm. So when were you—you—when were you in the West Bronx? That would have been—

KAPLAN: That would have been from 1935 until 1942 when I—we left for Minnesota.

LEVINE: And can you describe what it was like in the West Bronx at that time?

KAPLAN: It was nice because they always claimed that the air is better in the Bronx for some reason. Whether it's so, I don't know. But it was nice. I had—I always had a one-bedroom apartment as far as I know. Well, the children were small when we left for—for Minnesota. If we left in 1942, my son was about three and a half and my daughter was a baby, you know, so I didn't need more than one bedroom.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And then did your husband go into the military during World War II?

KAPLAN: No, never did. First of all, he had two children. That alone would have kept him out. And besides, he had trouble with his stomach a lot. I think that also would have kept him out. But he was so worried and so afraid. That's why we moved.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Now, he—he was born here? Your husband?

KAPLAN: Oh, no.

LEVINE: No.

KAPLAN: Oh, no. He came—let's see. They always kidded us that he followed me so he must have come the following year. He came from Russia also. But he came from the—what would you—White Russia, because it was from a small town near Minsk.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. I see. So [clears throat] when you look back on it, coming here as a 15-year-old girl and—and starting life again here, do you think that made a difference in the kind of person you became? Do you think the immigration had a—a certain impact in—in your life, in yourself?

KAPLAN: Well, it certainly did. I can't imagine what would have happened if I had remained there, what kind of a life I would have had there. Being quite an outspoken people and socially minded, I might have been in trouble there because sometimes you say things. [coughs] I was horrified on my visit in 1965 to Russia.

LEVINE: Why did you go back?

KAPLAN: Oh, because I still—there was still my mother's sister. And I went with his wife. He was gone already and she was an older, you know—older person.

LEVINE: What was her name?

KAPLAN: Sonja.

LEVINE: Sonja. And his name was Avram? No.

KAPLAN: Avram is the doctor who committed suicide.

LEVINE: Okay, right.

KAPLAN: This is Yasha.

LEVINE: Yasha, uh-hmm.

KAPLAN: Where was I? About—

LEVINE: And you went back with Yasha—

KAPLAN: Yeah, so as we arrived in the hotel, first of all, we—in 1965, I went as her companion so that she paid everything. I couldn't afford a trip like that. And we're in the hotel and she had a lot of family. One of her sisters came and some friends came and we're in the hotel. And one of the friends makes like this, makes like this, "Walls have ears."

LEVINE: Hmm.

KAPLAN: And we would never speak in the room. People—you walked up and down. You talked outside. One woman asked another woman a question, did she know English? And she asked her, "How come you know English?" And she—did she get angry, because what is her business to ask how she learned English, how does—comes she speaks English. You suspect everything so—because there were tales to the KGB, you know.

LEVINE: So there were things that you might have said that would have gotten you into trouble.

KAPLAN: Oh, yes. Oh, definitely.

LEVINE: Like what kinds of things would have—would have been picked up on? Do you—

KAPLAN: Well, [chuckles] it doesn't have to be very much. Somebody could say I said something against Stalin. That's enough.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

KAPLAN: And the children were encouraged to get—say things against their parents. So what—what could be worse? Nobody trusted anybody. God! What a world.

LEVINE: So, how long did you stay when you went on that visit?

KAPLAN: Well, let's see. We were in Kiev. We did go to Odessa, which I wanted to see the house I lived in. Didn't recognize it. Think—it didn't look at all that I—what I remembered.

LEVINE: What—

KAPLAN: Nothing.

LEVINE: What was different?

KAPLAN: I don't know. It seemed like it was a different house. After all, we had a store. There was a door, you know, to go in and all that. It wasn't there. We were in Kiev, Leningrad, Moscow and Odessa. She had relatives all over, my aunt, so that's why we went to all those cities and Odessa, because I came from Odessa.

LEVINE: Hmm.

KAPLAN: [clears throat]

LEVINE: When you look—

KAPLAN: I found Leningrad to be a beautiful city.

LEVINE: When you look back on your life, what do you feel satisfied about?

KAPLAN: Satisfied about, I don't know. I would say my children. Thank goodness, they're all right. My son, who is a doctor, who married a Danish girl, a Danish nurse. They live in Texas. And, ah—and the fact that they appreciate the—that I worked very hard to give my children everything I possibly could, and that my daughter-in-law said at one time when they offered me something and I didn't want to accept it, and she said, "I don't know why you're fighting it. You're the one who made it all possible."

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And how about here in—in New York and your life now? How is that?

KAPLAN: I love it. I love my apartment. I love Waterside [PH]. I try to be active. I try to do whatever I can. It's getting harder, I must admit. [chuckles] But I'll still continue.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay. Now, is there anything you can think of regarding coming here to this country and—and your life—

KAPLAN: This country?

LEVINE: —that you can think of that maybe we didn't touch on or you want to say anything else about?

KAPLAN: [sighs] I was—I was appalled and I was shocked at the way companies laid off workers who worked for years for them without any thought of the consequences. I hope, somehow, they find a way of—what are they going to do with all the poor people? The moment it comes to saving money, they start looking at all—at all the things that affect poor people, cutting here, cutting there instead of trying to cut poverty. I hope—I hope the best for this country. It's a wonderful country. Let's keep it that way.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, thank you for a wonderful interview. I feel privileged to—

KAPLAN: You're welcome.

LEVINE: —have been the person to conduct it. And I've been speaking with Anne Kaplan, who came from Russia in 1923 when she was 15 years of age and is 89, about to turn 90, at the time of this interview on September 10th, 1997. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm signing off.

[END OF INTERVIEW]