KECK-150
KITTY SLAP MOROZOFF
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ENGLAND, 1907
AGE 7

APPLEBOME: This is Edward Applebome and I'm speaking with Mrs. Kitty Morozoff on Friday, February 7th, 1986. We're beginning this interview at 3:50 in the afternoon. We're about to interview Mrs. Morozoff about her immigration experience from England in 1907. Mrs. Morozoff, can you tell me first, what your maiden name was?

MOROZOFF: My maiden name was Slap, S-L-A-P, it was a Dutch name.

APPLEBOME: And where and when were you born?

MOROZOFF: February 12, 1900.

APPLEBOME: And where?

MOROZOFF: In the East End of London.

APPLEBOME: And what was it like growing up in London, what did your family do for a living?

MOROZOFF: My father was a cigar maker, he was a Dutch Jew. My mother had been born in Britain, so was my grandmother, but my forbearers before that were all Hollanders, they all came from Holland. And growing up in London the early 1900's was poverty-stricken and very bad.

APPLEBOME: How had your father come to immigrate to England?

MOROZOFF: Ah, my father wanted to leave England a long time ago--

APPLEBOME: Excuse me, when he came to England because you said he was a Dutch Jew?

MOROZOFF: He came to England as an adolescent, they wanted to make, he was an only son, and they wanted to make a Rabbi of him in Amsterdam, his family and, but he didn't want to so he left Holland and went to London where his family were there, some family and there he met my mother and eventually they got married and so on.

APPLEBOME: And what was life like in your household, you say you ere poor?

MOROZOFF: Very poor.

APPLEBOME: What kind of house did you live in?

MOROZOFF: We lived in a place called Stillney Lane Buildings. It was like a tenement and we lived in the Dutch, what they called the Dutch Tentaground and when I was there back for a trip in 1958, my first trip back since I came in 1907, the street was

still there, but it has been bombed out int the Second World War but I once read that it was called the Dutch Tentaground due to the Dutch Jews made a ghetto for themselves in that part of the East End of London. My grandfather was a peddler. I'll tell you the whole thing warts and all, okay?

APPLEBOME: Did he live with you, your grandfather?

MOROZOFF: Oh no, my grandparents lived in a little old house in the area for over fifty years and my grandfather was, helped establish a Portuguese schul, a Portuguese temple, the first one in the East End of London and they were very religious. But my father never was and we were brought up, the children and the household, where we didn't have, we never spoke anything but English. My parents always spoke Dutch when they didn't want us to know what they were saying and growing up in London. I went to school, we were in school when we were three years old. So when I came to America, I had almost four years of schooling and as I said--

APPLEBOME: What kind of school did you go to in London?

MOROZOFF: My older sister and my two older brothers went to the Portuguese school and that was like a parochial Jewish school, but I went to a so-called, in this country, a public school, but you know what a public school is in England, its really a private school but that was fore the very rich. But this was an ordinary grade school that I went to but I went to get my religious training in the afternoon when I came home from school, we had a lot of schooling in England, you know. So, and it was, it was very bad, my father drank and as I grew older I realized it was just an escape from poverty.

APPLEBOME: Where did he work?

MOROZOFF: Ah, in the cigar factory.

APPLEBOME: There was factory nearby?

MOROZOFF: Everything was nearby because we all came home for a hot dinner, that's the way, you know, it was London, everybody, well we anyway, always had our meal at noon, then tea at four o'clock when we came in from school, and a very light supper.

APPLEBOME: Did you have friends that you played with?

MOROZOFF: Oh yeah, there was plenty of children, after all I guess that the only thing was they knew, was to have children, you know, and--

APPLEBOME: At the time do you think you knew that the family was poor?

MOROZOFF: No, oh yes, oh yes, definitely, I sure did.

APPLEBOME: And so, what prompted your family to leave?

MOROZOFF: The poverty, and my mother never wanted to leave her parents in England and my father came a few times to America, always wanting her to come with him. Well when my grandfather died and they had taken my oldest brother, my mother couldn't cope with all those children and my grandmother couldn't keep the oldest boy and so when my mother could take her oldest son, then we came to America and that was 1907.

APPLEBOME: As a little girl, your father had come, gone to the United States and come back?

MOROZOFF: Oh yes, oh yes, he was back and forth, two or three times, it cost very little in those days you know.

APPLEBOME: Why did he come back each time?

MOROZOFF: Well, he wanted my mother and the children to come. In spite of the drinking, he was a devoted father.

APPLEBOME: What would you hear about the country from him?

MOROZOFF: He lived with a sister, his only sister and they lived in Harlem and the Harlem of those days was very lovely and when we got to America we saw how he lived with his sister and it was so different from what we had ever seen. We thought they were very, very wealthy and they weren't of course. And, but it was just by comparison that we thought they were wealthy. And we loved Harlem, at least I did.

APPLEBOME: Let's back up first and talk about the trip over to the United States. What do you remember about leaving England, about telling your friends that you were leaving?

MOROZOFF: No, I don't remember too much about friends. I remember all my aunts were standing in, outside my grandmother's house and I remember someone saying, "Kitty, you didn't say goodbye to your grandmother," whom I was named for and the Portuguese Jews named for the living, whereas the European Jew, we called them the European

Jew, they named for the dead as you probably know. And I remember one of my uncles, my Uncle Len, he took, he got on the train with us and we went to Southampton and I remember every single one of the children, six of them my mother had, and the oldest was fifteen and the youngest was eighteen months, everyone was sick on the train. And we were going from place to place, it was pretty bad.

APPLEBOME: Your father was with you now?

MOROZOFF: No, my father was in america. He had sent her third class tickets to come to America, but somehow or other it had got fouled up and she came steerage. And we got to Southampton eventually, I don't remember how long it took and then we got on this so-called--

APPLEBOME: What were you traveling with, what did you take with you?

MOROZOFF: Well, my mother actually wasn't very practical, knowing that she was traveling with six children, she didn't take any food and no money and I don't know how we managed on the train but evidently we were all so ill we wouldn't have eaten anyway. We got on the tender in Southampton and aboard ship and the name of the ship was Umbria and it was Cunard Liner and we were, my mother with the four younger children went down, was in the hold of the ship almost, and the two boys, the older boys who were fourteen and fifteen, they were sent to another spot, I don't remember seeing them too much on the trip over, but the four younger ones, we were very sick all the time on board ship.

APPLEBOME: What were you sick with?

MOROZOFF: Seasickness. And we, when we would go down to where we were supposed to sleep we couldn't stand the smell of the garlic because we weren't used to that type of cookery, you see, the English cookery was completely different and these were mostly Eastern European people, Jews and I'm sure there must have been some gentiles going to America, steerage, I don't know.

APPLEBOME: Did you talk with any other immigrants or did you meet any of them?

MOROZOFF: No, I talked mostly with some of the children and got one of the sailors to get us what I, we called, a skip rope, and finally when, we were two weeks aboard ship, and finally when I guess, the weather settled, he brought the rope and I was jumping skip rope with some of the children aboard ship and it was two weeks. It was a wicked two weeks.

APPLEBOME: Do you remember eating any food?

MOROZOFF: No, no, no. I remember--

APPLEBOME: How was your mother doing?

MOROZOFF: My mother, my older sister who was four years older than myself, eleven, she was extremely ill and they brought her up on deck and laid her on the bench and my mother stopped and talked to some of the stewards, and she had no money to give them, so the bar mitzvah gifts from the two older boys who had been bar mitzvahed in London, and gradually she gave away all the boys' gifts in order to get us food and one, some food that I remember she got was Fin and Haddy and, you know, we ate like the English, perhaps in

England they'd eat, 150 years, you know, so, I remember eating the Fin and haddy and thinking that I had never tasted anything so good because by that time we were getting over you know, some of the seasickness. And outside of that I remember eating, none of us ate very much food, we weren't fit for it, you know, and then eventually that ordeal was over and we landed in New York and I remember my mother looking up and seeing the Statue of Liberty on Bedloe's Island, you know, and my said, she was real Cockney, you know, we were all Cockneys, we were born within the sound of Bow Bells, my grandmother too, and I remember my mother saying, "oh, she's beautiful," and it was really, and then I heard someone say, "that must be your father," and I looked, hardly remembered him, you see, and my mother called us and she said, "Here's daddy," and we looked at him and we didn't pay too much attention, the younger ones and I heard him tell my mother that if he had become a citizen while he was in America he would have got us off the boat, we wouldn't, well I don't know exactly if we wouldn't had to go through Ellis Island, I think that was compulsory in those days. They were looking for trachoma, you know, it was very prevalent then and I remember the boat landing and waiting out turn to get off, checking us off, and then I remembered Ellis Island and the stench and the crowding and I remembered them pushing my younger brother aside. I wish I had the picture my daughter was supposed to bring. And they pushed my older sister aside, my younger brother had an ulcer on his side and he was blind in one eye, and the older sister had a ringworm, they thought it was a ringworm which was very catching and they pushed her aside and I heard my mother say, "If they go back, we all go back," 'cause that's what they would do if they sent you, they wouldn't let you land, but eventually we came through and how my father got on board ship was he had one of his Irish drinking companions was in Immigration. He got my father on board ship so my father could see us, you know. Its the old story, "Its not what you know, its whom you know." And--

APPLEBOME: So what else happened on Ellis Island? What do you remember?

MOROZOFF: Well, it was, what I remember on Ellis Island is the crowds and the smell and the pushing, being pushed around, hundreds and hundreds of people, you know, and I went back the bicentennial year a few years ago, with a friend, and the, the tour took us and we stopped at the Americana and we were going for a trip around, is it the east River where Bedloe Island and Ellis Island were?

APPLEBOME: The Hudson River.

MOROZOFF: The Hudson River. When I saw Ellis Island, it was closed of course and I said to my friend, I said, "Leave me alone," and I just sat there and I sobbed 'cause I missed my, I guess I missed my grandmother. I was named for her and she always favored me, you know, and her name was Kitty also, and I was always a child that was introspective and much of a loner, I was a middle child, and I read a lot and I still do and it wasn't easy.

APPLEBOME: So, on Ellis Island, your brother and sister had been pushed off to the side?

MOROZOFF: Yeah, but then they were allowed through, they saw that it was nothing catching, you know, as I said, they were looking mostly for trachoma.

APPLEBOME: So how long were you on Ellis Island in total?

MOROZOFF: Not too long, I think maybe two or three or four days, I don't really remember that, you know.

APPLEBOME: Oh, you were held overnight?

MOROZOFF: Oh, yes, definitely, yeah.

APPLEBOME: Where did you sleep?

MOROZOFF: There were bunks, there were all you know, bunks and my oldest daughter took her granddaughter on the bicentennial too, separately from my friend and myself, and when they got to New York they also took the tour of Ellis Island and the guide there said, "was anyone here that had a grandmother that came through Ellis Island?" And my great-granddaughter raised her hand, she was so, he said, "Would you come up here and tell us about your great-grandmother?" and she got a big bang out of that. Now she has a baby so I have a great-great-grandson.

APPLEBOME: Oh boy. Were you served any meals while you were there?

MOROZOFF: No, no.

APPLEBOME: What, in three or four days you must have had something?

MOROZOFF: I don't know if we were on that long, maybe it was overnight or two nights, but no food.

APPLEBOME: Do you remember if your mother was worried?

MOROZOFF: Oh, my mother, I don't know how she even survived it, I really don't know because she wasn't, as I look back on childhood, she wasn't a brave woman. I'm sure if she knew what she was going to go through she would never, never have left

England. Although, when she finally got to America and we got settled, my father got a flat on Park Avenue and 108th Street, which you probably, the Harlem of the old days, it wasn't too bad, but the only bad thing in the building was that we were on the I guess the fifth floor and they were Irish Catholics. We were the only Jews in the building and of course we had two strikes against us, being British and Jewish. So, it was the old anti-Semitism, but then when they realized that we were just poor and just the same as they were, they were wonderful, just wonderful to us because, you know, we weren't religious people anyway, you know.

APPLEBOME: When you got off of Ellis Island, your father had met you now?

MOROZOFF: Oh, yeah.

APPLEBOME: Did he stay with you over--

MOROZOFF: Oh no, no, no, he wasn't allowed.

APPLEBOME: So where did he take you when you came off, what do you remember about your first day?

MOROZOFF: Ah, the first day we went to his sister's home and she right off the bat she didn't like my mother. That was the first time she had met her.

APPLEBOME: Where did your sister live?

MOROZOFF: They lived in Harlem, on 108th Street, but my dad had got this

flat on Park Avenue and the new York Central was in the so-called living almost, you know, where and my mother, we went to his sister's home. His sister was very, very Americanized and my God she had a piano. We were awe-struck, all of us. And my mother, as I say, was a real Cockney and wasn't backward in saying what she thought in her own manner and they didn't get along, so we didn't stay there too long. My father, as I said, got this flat and I remember when my daddy came home one evening she said to my father, "Joe, I found the nicest little cupboard in the kitchen and I put shelfpaper on the shelves and I put the crockery in there," and my father said, "That's nice," "Let me show you," it was the dumbwaiter and it was no, it was gone (they laugh) and that's the truth, it was gone, she didn't know. She did everything an immigrant woman would do, she wanted to post a letter and she rang the fire alarm, you know, and she was a character, especially if she wasn't your mother, she would have been a great character, but being my mother I was ashamed sometimes, you know, anyway.

APPLEBOME: What were some of the other blunders she committed?

MOROZOFF: Oh, off-hand I can't think of them, as I said--

APPLEBOME: Did she go to work?

MOROZOFF: No, no, no, with six children and then she got pregnant with the seventh.

APPLEBOME: You were enrolled in schools when you got to the United States?

MOROZOFF: In Harlem, I went to P.S. 72 on 106th Street and Lexington Avenue and I remember that was beautiful, I loved it, I loved school, I loved it.

APPLEBOME: Did the children treat you differently because you were an immigrant?

MOROZOFF: I only know that when I got up speak, I would blush, and they would laugh the way I spoke, you know, and but they were mostly immigrant children in the classroom. I guess English, there weren't to many of us, you see.

APPLEBOME: And what were some of the things you would do as a child in Harlem?

MOROZOFF: Well, in Harlem, we played on the stoop and I followed the organ for miles, and was warned not to, but I always did when the organ came with the monkey, you know, danced to the music. But mostly played stoop ball on the brownstone fronts in Harlem and Harlem was really lovely in those days. We moved from that Park Avenue flat, it wasn't too much long, I don't know how long we lived there, maybe a year or two and we moved into one of those brownstone fronts, you know, and it was a better place to live and went to school and loved school.

APPLEBOME: How did it compare with what you had expected?

MOROZOFF: Well, I think at that, at seven years old, your imagination doesn't go off on a tangent, you just take it day by day, as it comes. But I know I loved Harlem and I loved it when I finally got a pair of roller skates, I loved going roller skating and I loved central Park and I was sort of, had to take care of the two younger children because my mother had this other baby and my mother would give me the lunch and she would say, "Now I don't want to see you 'til your father comes home," that was three little children, you see. And I took care of those two little boys, my two younger brothers. Oh and Esther, she was in the baby carriage, uh-huh yeah, because once I dumped her down the stairs going to summer school, she fell out of the carriage and someone told

my mother, that was murder.

APPLEBOME: What did your mother do?

MOROZOFF: What did she do, she just screamed, "What did you do to my baby?", not, you know, how old, I was nine older than my younger sister, I was nine when she was born, not what happened to me, but what happened to my baby, because she came up, faced was scratched, I thought she was dead almost when I picked her up, you know. Yeah, we grew up fast in those days, oh yes.

APPLEBOME: Tell me now about the work your father did in the United States.

MOROZOFF: Cigar maker and he worked for a factory called the Starlight brothers and he made Havana cigars and he was very proud of his trade and there was no money, 1907 was a terrible, terrible panic. McKinley had been shot, and I think Teddy Roosevelt was President and it was absolutely no money and my father would today be called, I suppose, black marketing, but he didn't have five dollars for a federal tax so he could make cigars at home, he couldn't make cigars at home without a federal tax. So in the cigar factories they were allowed a certain bit of tobacco to make cigars for themselves. Well, he would hoard that and bring it home and make cigars and he would take the cigars in packets down to Fulton Market and barter it for fish, so we were really great fish eaters, well all the English are, more or less, and we had a marvelous diet and didn't know it, you know. And we were healthy children, always with rosy cheeks, you know, and it was, and I look back and I quote Bernard Shaw that, Poverty is the greatest illness of all." I said that to a friend on the phone the other day and she said, "What about cancer?" I said, "Poverty is worse." I really mean that because poverty is, does things, psychological things to one. I've never gotten over it, that's why I went in the Peace Corps. I went in

the Poverty Program in 1965, I was sixty-five years old.

APPLEBOME: Tell me a little about your father's involvement in the Labor Movement.

MOROZOFF: Well, as I said, he had helped organize the Cigar Maker's Union in London, helped organize it in New York and of course Samuel Gompers had worked with him, what they called the bench in London and in New York and between them, with some other men, they helped organize the American Federation of Labor. But this daughter that was supposed to come, she has a picture of my daddy in Atlantic City at the Convention with Samuel Gompers, I don't know what happened to her, she didn't even call me, I wanted to, you know, I thought you enjoy seeing the picture.

APPLEBOME: Did you ever meet Samuel Gompers?

MOROZOFF: No, no.

APPLEBOME: What did your father say about the Labor involvement?

MOROZOFF: Well, my father was what he called a Fabian Socialist, very few boys had ever heard of the fabian Movement in Britain and he, he inculcated in me more so than the other children, I don't know why, this feeling of poverty that's been with me all my life. You think I'm living in a condo, "Oh what the hell is she complaining about?" Well my daughter bought me the condo, I'm not being apologetic about it, but my daughter bought this for me and I've never gotten over the poverty of my early childhood, never.

APPLEBOME: Okay, we'll take a break now. This is the end of side one of tape one of the interview with Mrs. Kitty Morozoff.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

APPLEBOME: This is side two of tape one of the interview with Mrs. Kitty Morozoff.

MOROZOFF: Well, I can bring us up until when they graduated grammar school.

APPLEBOME: First, could we talk for a minute about, because you talk of poverty. What was life really like being poor, was it that you didn't have food to eat or you didn't have a place to stay?

MOROZOFF: No, we always had a roof over our heads, it was clean, my mother was a very good manager in the kitchen, you know, in the kitchen feeding the children and as I said, my dad bartered the cigars for fish so we were mostly had fish and then it was, oh then, of course, the two older boys already, thirteen and fourteen and fifteen, they got jobs in America through a cousin.

APPLEBOME: Doing what kind of work?

MOROZOFF: In an electrical shop, in Manhattan somewhere and the few dollars that they brought home, in those days, which was very small, my mother would, you know, we

were never hungry in America, never, no. We had left that behind and I only remember my mother saying, "I never want to see that bloody England again as long as I live," and she never did. My dad went back once, but she would never go, she hated the thought of it, so, you know, it must have been rough. And uh, it was schooldays and, of course I wanted roller skates and that was out of the question because there was no money for roller skates, you know, or toys or anything like that.

APPLEBOME: In the United States, did you have any pocket money?

MOROZOFF: No, no.

APPLEBOME: So you didn't get to go to the movies or ever buy a sweet?

MOROZOFF: Mother, well, mother would take us on a Saturday and she would take the four younger children, five of us when Esther came, uh, for a quarter we would go to the Star Theater on Lexington Avenue near 107th Street an there was vaudeville and a movie. She loved the movies, it was an escape for my mother. She had Maurice Costello's picture in the bedroom, on the wall, she loved the movies. A real escape from the terrible, hard life.

APPLEBOME: The apartment that you lived in, did you share the room with your brothers and sisters?

MOROZOFF: I slept with a sister and I think, one brother. It was a railroad flat, if you know what they were, in the old days.

APPLEBOME: And you went through, I guess it was elementary school and then what happened?

MOROZOFF: I had to go to work 'cause my father was from the school of, being

conditioned by England, of apprenticeship to a trade. They never thought of a higher education for the children which was amazing because both of them were quite well-read, which was unusual for their generation. In England there was no compulsory schooling during the Victorian Era and they were both from the Victorian Era, you see, because we were raided that way. We didn't sit down to eat before my daddy came home from work. And, uh, we were to be seen and not heard, so that was the upbringing. And--

APPLEBOME: What were you apprenticed in?

MOROZOFF: Uh, a milliner. I was a milliner and I was thirteen and a half when I graduated grammar school and I couldn't get my working papers 'til I was fourteen and I got a job in a factory and when they would come around to see if there were any minors, they'd hide me under the table. I wasn't far from fourteen but so, and--

APPLEBOME: Where was the factory?

MOROZOFF: Thirty-eighth Street off Fifth Avenue. And I brought my whole shop down on strike when I was seventeen years old. We had lock-outs. You see, there were, the First World War intervened and my oldest brother went and that was very bad, there was mourning in the house. He went to France, he was with the heavy field artillery, but he came back fortunately. And uh, life went on and I,learned my trade and every penny that we could bring home was needed because there were so many younger children, you see, and it was rough for subway.

APPLEBOME: Can you tell me about the walk-out that you were involved in?

MOROZOFF: Well, it was, I brought the whole shop down on strike, on thirty-eighth Street and I was chairwoman and we picketed, naturally, we came down and we

picketed. Well, some girls worked upstairs in another, it was the brother of the man we worked for and a lot of those girls didn't come out on strike, that was another shop in the same building, and when they came out I yelled, "Scab." Well the Pinkertons were there, they were, they were in uniform and they, a couple of the other girls yelled, "Scab," and they arrested us and they brought the patrol wagon and they put us in the patrol wagon, took us to the station house and put us in cells. They treated us as if we were like prostitutes, you know. We knew what a prostitute was in those days, I was not even fourteen, no I was seventeen, I beg your pardon. And, uh, right away the word went downtown to the head of the Union and they came dashing out to get us. They had finger printed us. Well, they had let us go and told us we had to appear in court on the, I think, I don't know, I think that was Saturday and Sunday. And my oldest brother was a hat-blocker, so he had been an apprentice too, and he heard that I had been arrested and he came right over to see where I, 'cause he worked downtown there, around fourteenth street in those days and I said to him, "What am I going to say to Daddy?" 'cause my father warned me, "You come out on strike, you never cross a picket line, but you don't, no violence," and to tell him I was arrested, I thought, you know, he'd kill me. So, but my brother, my brother Jack said, "Don't worry, I'll come with you to court, we'll tell Daddy in the morning," which we did and the finger prints were all destroyed and the record was destroyed of the arrest, the Union did that for us and we were out on strike, I think fifteen weeks, with no money coming in. It was pretty bad. My oldest brother on strike and I was on strike and my dad was on strike. It was the time of lockouts. There was, you know, a concerted movement to break the unions, as I feel they're trying to break the middle class today. As I said before, I think that, and they did never realize it was the unions that built the middle class in this country. I don't mean the Jimmy Hoffas and the Fitzsimmons, you know, these are people like my father, they're hard working and wanted to lift themselves up by their bootstraps, so called.

APPLEBOME: Did he ever find out that you were arrested?

MOROZOFF: Oh yes, oh yes. Oh he was a very strict father.

APPLEBOME: What did he say when he found out?

MOROZOFF: Well, you see, when we got to America, he didn't drink anymore. He got away from England and the drinking which is almost, what should I say, chronic in England, maybe its the climate, I wouldn't know. Anyway, oh, he was a devoted father, in his way, if you know what I mean, and he said, "Now I told you not--" well, but I think he always felt something for me that was different, you know, from the other children, I don't know what it was and I had the same feeling for him. And it wasn't incest (she laughs) anyway 'cause everything is psychological today, you know, I love the pop psychology, and I'm just crazy about it. I call it "Instant Analysis" as soon as you open your mouth, you know? Well, what are you going to do? A little bit of knowledge goes a long way doesn't it?

APPLEBOME: So, all things considered, are you glad that your family came over?

MOROZOFF: I think its the only sensible thing that they ever did. I love America. That's why I went into the Peace Corps. I figured this great country could be much greater if we would get rid of the, anyway, I don't want it on tape.

APPLEBOME: Okay, thank you very much.

MOROZOFF: Oh, I enjoyed it. I hope you can use it.

APPLEBOME: This is the end of side two of tape one of the interview with Mrs. Kitty Morozoff. This is the end of Interview Number 150.