

JOSEPH KATZ
BIRTH DATE: SEPTEMBER, 1909
INTERVIEW DATE: JANUARY 16TH, 1994
AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 85
RUNNING TIME: 38:18
INTERVIEWER: KATE MOORE
RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME AS ABOVE
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: AMANDA CARELLA
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: SAME AS ABOVE

AUSTRIA, 1914
AGE: 6

SHIP: KAISER AND WILHELM
PORT: HAMBURG
RESIDENCES:
 AUSTRIA, MIELITZ
 UNITED STATES, MANHATTAN, NY
 UNITED STATES, BROOKLYN, NY
 UNITED STATES, SANTA MONICA, CA

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE:

MOORE: Good afternoon, this is Kate Moore for the National Parks Service. Today is the 16th of January, 1994, and I'm in Santa Monica, California, at the home of Joseph Katz, who came from Austria in 1914, when he was four and a half years old. Uh, why don't you begin by giving us your full name and date of birth please?

KATZ: Well, Joseph Katz. My date of birth is September 1st, 1909. Actually, my – I have no birth certificate, but I found out I was born on the 17th, 'cause I was born on the Jewish holiday –

MOORE: Mm-hmm –

KATZ: -- And I looked it up in the calendar, but I've used September – I know I was born the month of September, so I use the first for convenience.

MOORE: Where were you born?

KATZ: In a town named Mieleetz. M-m-I-E-L-E-T-Z. Uh, Austria. It was near the Polish border.

MOORE: Mm-hmm. And what size town was that?

KATZ: That I don't know.

MOORE: Do you remember what the town looked like? Do you have any recollection?

KATZ: The only thing I remember, we lived in a house that was a wood house, and we – had to walk up about five steps. There was a glass-enclosed porch. There was no paved street around there – it was dirt ro – dirt. And it wasn't planted, and I remember chickens running around.

MOORE: Do you remember the major industry? Did they talk about in your family?

KATZ: [interposed] No.

MOORE: What was your father's name?

KATZ: Calman. C-A-L-M-A-N.

MOORE: And what was his occupation?

KATZ: He made – uh – hats, yar – you know, hats for –

MOORE: [interposed] Yarmulkes?

KATZ: -- Yarmulkes, and he also made hats for cantors, like these –you know, fancy –

MOORE: Yes.

KATZ: For very famed, eh – like Rosenblatt, and K-Koussivitzk, I don't know whether you know them –

MOORE: Can you not spell Kusovitzky?

KATZ: K-O-U-S-S-I-V-I-T—they were famed, world-renowned cantors.

MOORE: And what about your father's, uh – what did he look like?

KATZ: Well, he was a man about five five, and he was built wide, and um – you know, I have no pictures of him.

MOORE: Light hair, dark hair?

KATZ: Dark. Dark.

MOORE: Color eyes?

KATZ: Brown, I guess.

MOORE: What about his personality and temperament? How would you describe him?

KATZ: He was a very easy-going man, very religious man, Observed the Sabbath, very strict. My parents were very strict.

MOORE: And is there a story – uh –

KATZ: Uh – makes noise –

MOORE: That's all right. Is there a story about your father you associate with childhood?

KATZ: No, not much. You see the – uh – one reason is there were seven of us, and um, my mother was a very outgoing person and she went to America first. She was like, the strong one in the family, to establish a foot here. In those days people – well, those days, people were poor – everyone was poor. And they used to be borders, most likely she had a place to sleep and she worked and then about a --- see, I don't remember my mother much.

MOORE: Yeah.

KATZ: Then my father went – came here a little later, maybe I was two, three – I'm just guessing. So I don't remember much of them.

MOORE: What was your mother's name, by the way?

KATZ: Mm – Celia. C-E-L-I-A-.

MOORE: And what was her maiden name?

KATZ: Herman, H-E-R-M-A-N.

MOORE: And, uh – what was her occupation?

KATZ: She was a housewife, but she also worked as a seamstress when she came here.

MOORE: And what did she look like? Do you remember?

KATZ: She was a small woman,, about maybe a little bit five foot two, and – what would you want to say? Like brown hair, brown eyes?

MOORE: And do you know anything about her personality and temperament?

KATZ: Very strict. And tough. (Laughs). Couldn't get her way with her – she was very sharp. If you made a remark about her, she'd come right back – right back – very fast. She was a -- so I –I never had much contact with my parents. 'Cause I didn't know my parents 'til I was maybe four and a half when they – when they let me out of – no, five and a half when they left me out of jail. (Laughs)

MOORE: What do you mean, jail?

KATZ: Well, Ellis Island was sort of a jail.

MOORE: Oh, I see (laughs).

KATZ: I was a kid there. The only thing that kept me busy, I used to have a ball, I was a good ball player – and I had a ball, and throw it against the building and catch it. That's how –

MOORE: Wait, wait – let's back up a bit. What about your brothers and sisters. How many did you have?

KATZ: Well, I had three brothers – one is still alive, and he was ninety-three yesterday. But one died when he was young, and one died when he was about eighty. And I had –

MOORE: What were their names?

KATZ: Well, my eldest brother was Sam, the next – no the – the oldest was Jacob – no Sam was the oldest, then Jacob – he died when he was in his teens. And my brother George whose ninety-three now. And then you want to know about my sisters?

MOORE: Mm-hmm.

KATZ: Well, I had a sister that came – my sister took care of me. Her name was Rifka. And I came on a boat with Rifka, George, Shirley, Rose, and me. There's five of us came. My parents were already here. And, uh –

MOORE: Yeah –

KATZ: Then – then two were born here.

MOORE: So you were the youngest before you – when you came?

KATZ: Yeah, the youngest. I was born on the other – in – in Europe

MOORE: In Europe, right. Describe your house as you remember it. What do you remember about that house you lived in in Austria?

KATZ: Not very well, it must have been meager, must have just been a place to – maybe a couple of beds and a place to eat, a table, and so forth and so on. That’s all I really remember.

MOORE: Do you remember how it was lit? What type of lights?

KATZ: Must have been gas light or something, I’m just guessing.

MOORE: What about heat? Do you remember any heat or fire burner –

KATZ: [interposed] It was a coal burner. It was a – oven. When we came here, I don’t know whether you know much about 1914, here in Al – I lived in Manhattan, in Lower East Side. And, uh – we had – we lived on the fourth floor, in the rear house; the toilets were downstairs in the backyard, then we had a little bit more means, we moved to another place that we had – all – all heated by coal-burners. That was the –

MOORE: [interposed] Mm-hmm – we’ll get to that in a moment. We’re gonna walk you right through, from childhood all the way up.

KATZ: [interposed] Yeah. Okay.

MOORE: So, do you remember how you went to the bathroom in your old house when you were a child?

KATZ: Well, at – in – at --

MOORE: [interposed] Was there plumbing?

KATZ: No. The only water we had in the house was cold water. At nighttime, you wanted to urinate, we had pots.

MOORE: In Austria.

KATZ: In here.

MOORE: No, I’m talking about back in Austria –

KATZ: [interposed] I don’t remember.

MOORE: You don’t remember that?

KATZ: No, of course.

MOORE: Okay, we have to say – did you keep any ani – have any animals when you were a child, did you have – did have a garden?

KATZ: [interposed] No. Oh yeah, a cat once in a while.

MOORE: (Laughs) Okay. And this is in Austria now, right?

KATZ: No, no, here.

MOORE: No, le –we're still in Austria.

KATZ: Austria, I don't remember.

MOORE: Okay. Do you remember having a garden in Austria?

KATZ: No. I know we had dirt – they might have planted, but I don't know.

MOORE: Okay. Now, in Austria – who did the cooking in the family?

KATZ: My sister.

MOORE: Rifka.

KATZ: Rifka.

MOORE: What was your favorite food when you were small?

KATZ: Well, we ate soup mainly.

MOORE: Did you have anything special you liked to eat?

KATZ: No, I liked soup. I never liked meat. It had to be very, very, extremely dry. If there's a sa – even to today, if there's a slight trace of fat, I can't ta – I wouldn't eat it.

MOORE: Do you remember what the kitchen looked like in that house in Austria?

KATZ: No.

MOORE: Do you remember any mealtimes?

KATZ: I guess we ate something in the morning, maybe a – middle of the day. I know back – not there, very well.

MOORE: Okay. Were any other family members living nearby in Austria?

KATZ: No. Oh yeah, we must have had a lot of cousins in the area.

MOORE: Do you remember any of them?

KATZ: No.

MOORE: All right, um, do you have any anecdotes about your sister, when she took care of you?

KATZ: Not very well. She was – I understand sh – I don't remember much of her. She was a very good person. She died soon as she came here –

MOORE: Oh!

KATZ: Because they say – (pause) she got sick because they wanted to send me back.

MOORE: [interposed] Oh, so she was so upset.

KATZ: She took it – Yeah.

MOORE: And were you the clo – who was your closest family member at that time, was it her?

KATZ: I guess it was her.

MOORE: And so she was very close to you. Um, what was religious life like in Austria, do you remember?

KATZ: Well – well we're Jewish, and very strict. My parents were.

MOORE: Did you keep kosher at home?

KATZ: Oh, yes. Definitely.

MOORE: And did you go to temp – synagogue—

KATZ: [interposed] Synagogue, yeah. My par –my father did. My family did, 'cause I was too young.

MOORE: All right, do you remember them going to synagogue?

KATZ: No.

MOORE: Um, did you know of any – did your family experience in Austria any religious persecution?

KATZ: Oh yes, that's one reason why they came here.

MOORE: What do you know that happened?

KATZ: Well, I know around Easter time, there used to be pogroms – they used to get these Polish Cossacks – they used to ride with their horses, and just – with their swords they would kill people.

MOORE: And did you –

KATZ: That's the reason ma –most of the Jewish people came to this country. To get away from the – around Easter time was a very bad time.

MOORE: Um, did anything specific ever happen to any family member?

KATZ: No, no.

MOORE: Did your family ever have to hide?

KATZ: That I don't know.

MOORE: What about holiday celebrations? Do you remember any in Austria?

KATZ: [interposed] Oh, yes, we observed all the like, Passover and Rosh Hashana which is our new year. And all the – all the Jewish holidays we observed.

MOORE: Mm-hm. Do you remember any specific one when you're – before—before you came here?

KATZ: No. No.

MOORE: Did you go to school at all in Austria?

KATZ: No.

MOORE: Okay. What did you do as a small boy – do you remember – for an entertainment in Austria?

KATZ: That I don't know. I was maybe four, I guess what any four year old would do.

MOORE: Okay. Now, do you remember coming to America?

KATZ: Yes.

MOORE: Do you remember who decided – you said your mother decided?

KATZ: Well, my mother came here maybe when I was one or two –my father maybe when I was three. And then we came. They came here to – accumulate some money. So my mother came first, then my father, and then we – the rest of the family came. One of my brothers, Sam, the eldest couldn't come because he was in the army. They wouldn't release him.

MOORE: But he eventually came?

KATZ: Yeah, eventually he came. He came – (pause) maybe about 1930? Something like that.

MOORE: Um, did your mother know anyone in America already?

KATZ: Oh, yeah. We had a lot of – uh – relatives, cousins.

MOORE: Did anyone pay for her voyage here?

KATZ: That I don't know.

MOORE: Um, do you remember saying goodbye to your mother?

KATZ: No.

MOORE: Do you remember saying goodbye to your father?

KATZ: No.

MOORE: Do you remember leaving Austria on the boat?

KATZ: That I remember. That has a vivid recollection.

MOORE: Tell us anything you remember about –getting ready to leave—

KATZ: [interposed] What I know: we went to Hamburg, and then we went on a boat. The next thing I remember we – uh – I woke up one morning and – I – I was asleep – and the rest – there was no one there, and we were all the way down in the hold of the ship, all the way down. And I remember climbing upstairs, until, I finally – after climbing quite a bit of stairs – I saw a porthole, where I could see the waves.

MOORE: So you were – you traveled –you left from which port, Hambur –

KATZ: [interposed] Hamburg.

MOORE: Do you remember getting to Hamburg on some sort of transportation?

KATZ: No, how we got there, I don't know.

MOORE: Do you remember the night before you left, did they give you a party? Or anybody hugging you, saying goodbye?

KATZ: [interposed] No. No.

MOORE: No. Okay. So you remember being alone on the boat and waking up.

KATZ: Yeah.

MOORE: And trying to see where you were?

KATZ: And then I went up and learned that my brothers – my brothers and sisters –

MOORE: [interposed] Mm-hmm – I'm just going to ask you so you don't put your hand in front of your mouth 'cause –it's all right.

KATZ: [interposed] Oh, okay.

MOORE: Um, do you remember taking anything special with you, any toys or anything?

KATZ: No.

MOORE: No. And when you're on – all right, so you remember that point on the boat when you went up and looked at the waves. What else do you remember on the boat? Anything?

KATZ: That's about it.

MOORE: How about eating?

KATZ: Well, I don't remember any particular meals. I don't remember any particular meals.

MOORE: Do you remember the boat being – the trip being smooth or rough --?

KATZ: No, that I don't know.

MOORE: Was anyone sick?

KATZ: Uh –

MOORE: Were you sick?

KATZ: No, I don't know.

MOORE: Okay. Um, what was the name of the ship, do you know?

KATZ: The Kaiser and Wilhelm.

MOORE: The Kaiser-Wilhelm. And do you know the day that you took off?

KATZ: We landed here April 14th, in 1914. When we took off, I don't know. I have a log of the – my niece got a – ma – got a copy of the log.

MOORE: All right, do you remember arriving or seeing land for the first time?

KATZ: No, the only thing is I remember being in Ellis Island.

MOORE: Do you remember the Statue of Liberty?

KATZ: Oh, yes.

MOORE: What happened – then?

KATZ: That's the first thing you see.

MOORE: And so you remember that?

KATZ: Yeah.

MOORE: And what was the atmosphere on boat then? Do you rem—what do you remember about that?

KATZ: I really don't know.

MOORE: But you remember the image?

KATZ: Oh yeah. I remember seeing the statue.

MOORE: And what were your brothers and sisters doing then?

KATZ: I really don't know.

MOORE: Um, now, do you remember how the boat got to Ellis Island? Did you go on another boat?

KATZ: No we went –

MOORE: You came right into Ellis?

KATZ: Oh, I think – I really don't know. Most likely they put us on a smaller boat.

MOORE: But you don't remember.

KATZ: No.

MOORE: Okay, so – what do you remember about Ellis Island? Tell me everything you remember, walk me through it.

KATZ: Well, when we came to Ellis Island, they examined us, and uh – I have two –the reason they wanted to send me back, I have no nail here, no nail here. That's why the stupid doctors –

MOORE: [interposed] On your thumb – on your left hand thumb, and on your right hand – uh – middle finger.

KATZ: [interposed] Yeah. Middle. They told me – they told me – when they tell you to – the exam to hold your hands this way and they sai–

MOORE: [interposed] What – hold your hands straight out, with your palms up.

KATZ: Yeah, and they said, I did this. But if I did this, I think the doctor, what they knew in those days would turn my hands over, to see anyway. And for that reason, they wanted to send me back.

MOORE: Because of your nails.

KATZ: Yeah.

MOORE: Now, did you speak any English before you came?

KATZ: No, I speak Yiddish only.

MOORE: You spoke Yiddish only. Okay, hold on. And did your brothers or sisters speak any English?

KATZ: No. No.

MOORE: All right, did you know why they wanted to send you back?

KATZ: Yeah, on account of the two nails.

MOORE: They told you then?

KATZ: Yeah.

MOORE: They pointed to them?

KATZ: Yeah. That's what my family tells me.

MOORE: And so, what happened then? You --?

KATZ: Well they – uh – held me for a while there, and then some of my relatives here, I understand, they went to see some congressman or something, they finally agreed, "Let him stay in quarantine and see what happens."

MOORE: Okay, so wait a minute. You were with your brothers and sisters, and you were medically examined. You remember the examination?

KATZ: No.

MOORE: You don't remember that.

KATZ: [interposed] No.

MOORE: Do you remember them separating you from your brothers and sisters?

KATZ: No, I don't really. All I know is that they kept me there. They went.

MOORE: And they – your brothers and sisters went on ahead.

KATZ: [interposed] Went. They let 'em in.

MOORE: [interposed] And you were alone?

KATZ: [interposed] Yeah.

MOORE: Do you remember how you felt?

KATZ: No, I really don't.

MOORE: Mm-hmm. So you were – do you remember where you were kept? Do you remember what it looked like?

KATZ: [interposed] Well, it was like – like in a dorm. It was beds here and there?

MOORE: Bunk beds?

KATZ: No, not bunk beds, separate beds.

MOORE: Separate beds.

KATZ: In a – I didn't know any better – I didn't see my parents much when I was a child – when I was very young. And, uh – I know I was kept there, while I kept there they – I had tonsillectomy, they didn't do a good job, because they had to do it twice more subsequent years.

MOORE: Oh.

KATZ: They didn't know much in those days.

MOORE: Did you remember other children there?

KATZ: Oh yeah. I used to play with some of the kids.

MOORE: Did you – what did you speak when you played with them?

KATZ: I guess Yiddish, it might have been.

MOORE: Wha –did they speak Yiddish too, do you know?

KATZ: I don't –really don't remember. But I think I was alone most of the time. Eh – but what kept me occupied, I loved to –throw a ball against the building and catch it. And that kept me busy. And I thought I would be a professional ball player.

MOORE: (Laughs)

KATZ: I played high school baseball (laughs), and um – but that – that was a sailor [ph] I was athletically inclined all the time. I always liked anything athletics – running, playing ball. That's what kept me busy.

MOORE: Um, do you remember any fear or any sadness or anything?

KATZ: Well, there's one kid I mighta got in a little complaint to his mother. And –oh – and they tell me they're gonna put me in the rat cellar. And I was afraid of that. (Laughs)

MOORE: What – where was this?

KATZ: (Laughs) In Ellis Island?

MOORE: You got in trouble?

KATZ: Well, the mother complained that I was – maybe I hit – I don't think I hit the kid, I'm not a violent person. And he said something, his mother complained, he says, "Oh, we'll put you down in the cellar, there's rats there." (Laughs)

MOORE: (Laughs) And do you remember anything more – uh, what the doctors – remember having the tonsillectomy, do you remember that?

KATZ: Yeah, I remember them putting me in the – in the – I think it was an ambulance, and the a little riding; I remember the surgery, I remember them putting the – the mask over my face. And then the next morning I couldn't swallow. The typical thing. And they gave me bread and butter. And I put the butter on – I wasn't smart enough to hold the brea – the knife at an angle, I went this and this, so tha –'til I finally got smart. (Laughs) Tilted the, uh –that's about all I remember there. But, I remember there being snow, and I remember warmth. So, but – uh – when my niece got me the papers, I guess I was there close to a year, nine, ten months.

MOORE: And what were your family – wha –how did your family react to this then?

KATZ: Well, the only one that came to visit me was my father, occasionally.

MOORE: And do you remember that?

KATZ: Yeah.

MOORE: You remember your dad coming to see you?

KATZ: Yeah, he used to come, he brought me the ball. And he was not athletically inclined, and he bounced it and showed me how – (laughs) the ball bounces.

MOORE: Did you talk to him much.

KATZ: I guess I did.

MOORE: Your brothers and sisters did not come?

KATZ: [interposed] No, my mother, brothers and sisters never came.

MOORE: And um – before – back up a bit – before you had your medical examination, do you remember going into a great hall? Or lots of people, or anything? Was it crowded?

KATZ: I don't know, most likely I did come into a great big space.

MOORE: You don't know remember anything as such?

KATZ: No.

MOORE: Okay. Okay, let's go back. So do you remember the day you were let out?

KATZ: No, that I don't know.

MOORE: You don't remember someone coming and finally getting you and leaving?

KATZ: [interposed] No. No, that I don't know –but I know the next thing – I was taken to a house, the first place we lived in was the Lower East Side of Manhattan. On um – Essex Street near Delancey.

MOORE: Mm-hmm.

KATZ: Just a few doors – I remember the – I remember there was a linoleum store downstairs,

MOORE: Mm-hmm.

KATZ: -- In the front building. And, uh –

MOORE: Do you remember anything new you saw for the first time?

KATZ: Not necessarily. I know, I uh – I remember the house we lived in. Way upstairs. We used to play in the street, and some old man came by and he asked me if I was Jewish, do you got to Hebrew school, I said no. So, I was – I went to Hebrew school before I went to Elementary school.

MOORE: He – he got you into Hebrew school, the old man.

KATZ: Yeah, yeah. He saw my parents, and he – And he says, "Does he go?" etc, and they – so finally I went there, and they taught you how to read.

MOORE: How old were you?

KATZ: I must have been five, five and a half. That was before I started public school.

MOORE: So, you went to Hebrew school when you lived on which street?

KATZ: Essex.

MOORE: Essex. Okay, at four – fiv – five years old, right after –

KATZ: Yeah, five.

MOORE: And did you learn – when did you start learning English?

KATZ: I guess soon as I went to school.

MOORE: In Kindergarten?

KATZ: No, I went – right away, one A. We had no Kindergarten at that school.

MOORE: Yeah. Okay, which school did you go to?

KATZ: It was P.S. 130.

MOORE: P.S. 130. And do you remember the other children's reaction to you when you didn't know English?

KATZ: [interposed] No, there must have been a lot of kids who – No, I don't, really don't.

MOORE: And did anybody ever call you names at school for being poor?

KATZ: No. No.

MOORE: So basically you adjusted quickly.

KATZ: [interposed] Yeah.

MOORE: Did you continue to speak Yiddish at home?

KATZ: Yes, at home, Yiddish.

MOORE: And did your mother and father ever learn English?

KATZ: Not very well. They – broken English.

MOORE: [interposed] And – Mm-hmm. And did you live in a Yiddish – I mean, a – Jewish neighborhood?

KATZ: [interposed] Yes. Yeah, yeah.

MOORE: And did you always live in a Jewish neighborhood from then on?

KATZ: [interposed] No, most of the time. We had – we had Italian-Polish. Yeah we – no we ha – no that wasn't true what I said about only Jew – we had a mixture. We, um – it was Polish, Italian, Irish – And I liked the Irish kids, so I asked them if I could be Irish. (Laugh)

MOORE: (Laughs)

KATZ: So they sa –(laughs), so they said, “Yeah, come to church with us on Sunday,” so I went to church with them (laughs). When they opened the door and I saw the crucifix, I got scared and I – so I remained Jewish. (Laughs)

MOORE: (Laughs) Um, what about religious life once you got to the States?

KATZ: Well, uh – as I told you –my parents were very religious, they were very strict, never wo – worked Saturday, never light – we would not allowed to light a light, not even allowed to open the refrigerator door, you'd have to unscrew the bulb. Not ride even in the elevator. No, they were very –

MOORE: Religious.

KATZ: [interposed] –Very religious Jews.

MOORE: And they continued to be so in the States?

KATZ: Until they died, yes.

MOORE: And, um – describe your apartment, what you remember of it up there on Essex street?

KATZ: Well, we had small little – small little rooms, there was a kitchen, and the rest were bedroom.

MOORE: Was there – was there – was it – how was it lit?

KATZ: Gas.

MOORE: Gas.

KATZ: Gas.

MOORE: Gas lamps.

KATZ: It was a fixture – uh – ga – then one – a little later, someone came out with a gadget, like a cotton thing, you put it over –it used to be just a flame but then a –uh – somebody invented –

MOORE: [interposed] Filaments—

KATZ: -- Something, maybe filaments, and it would glow. But we had gas – uh – lighting, no electricity.

MOORE: [interposed] What about plumbing?

KATZ: The only plumbing we had in the house was cold water. There were no hot water. And uh – I told you the toilet was downstairs in the back. Later on, when they accumulated some money, we went to an ap – another building [tape skips] apartments on the floor – there was six apartments on the floor, and they – had a –had a toilet on each floor, and each one shared that. But you had to go out in the hall.

MOORE: How many people lived at Essex, at the Essex street apartment when you went there?

KATZ: Well, there's my – my brother, father, mother, me – uh – two sisters – that's six.

MOORE: So – and how was it furnished, the house?

KATZ: Very, very plain. We had beds that were fold up frame be – at nighttime, every place was occupied with beds, you'd open it up and that's where you slept. It's different today.

MOORE: Now what – now, um – how was your house heated? (Clock rings).

KATZ: By the ga – coal stove.

MOORE: A coal stove. This is – in Essex apartment?

KATZ: Essex.

MOORE: Right. Um, wha – did any other family members live nearby?

KATZ: Yeah, we had cousins.

MOORE: In the same neighborhood?

KATZ: Yeah, in the area.

MOORE: Um, and did you get along well with your neighbors, your parents, and everybody?

KATZ: Yes. Yeah.

MOORE: Um, what job did you father have at that time?

KATZ: Well, he always made these yarmulkes, that's all he ever did.

MOORE: He just continued the same line of work in the States?

KATZ: [interposed] Yeah, always.

MOORE: Um, who – who was supporting the family at that time, then?

KATZ: He uh – well, my father. I think my mother went out to work. My eldest brother, whose ninety-three – I gotta get him a lot of credit – he didn't finish elementary school. He had to go to work when he was around twelve, thirteen. And um –and – my father also did fur work. My brother did fur work.

MOORE: Fur?

KATZ: Fur.

MOORE: Yeah.

KATZ: And, uh – when my brother was eighteen, he went in the business and became very successful.

MOORE: In which business? Fur business?

KATZ: [interposed] In the fur business. Extremely. And that's why I'm a great believer in on-the-job training. I'd match him, with anyone with ma – a master's degree. I believe he learned – learned "the three r's," [not understood] paper – read, read. That's an education.

MOORE: Mm. And when you went to school, do you remember any fellow students that were your playmates?

KATZ: Yeah.

MOORE: N- names and --?

KATZ: Well, I know one kid, Kaplan, he was very rich (laughs) –his father owned an automobile agency – but most of us would just – just get by.

MOORE: What about your teachers? Do you remember any teachers that were particularly kind to you or --?

KATZ: Oh yes. I was a very good student, I had a very sharp memory, I could always remember to read something and could repeat it, and I can see the last word was this, and so. I went two years to high school, and then my parents felt that I – then we were financially better off – but my mother felt that since my brother went to work, that I can –I had enough schooling. So, I finished up my high school at night, went two years to City College at night – you don't learn much at night. (Laughs) And that's the extent of my education. But the rest of it I – like the real estate business, I subsequently went – made it my business to I-learn, and to learn – I'm very good at organizing, and I organized the office where we could find things, and you had information at hand, and then I got into my own – own business.

MOORE: Did you experience during this time any bi – bigotry or persecution at all?

KATZ: Well, there was always antisemitism.

MOORE: Where?

KATZ: In the Lower East Side, it was always –

MOORE: [interposed] Like how? How did it manifest?

KATZ: Well, they call you Jew this and Jew that and – I know I played with – what saved me was I was a good athlete, and I played on baseball teams and the – Christian kids accepted me on account of my ability. But there was others who'd say, "Whaddya hang out with him for? He's Jewish."

MOORE: But would they do the same thing if someone was Italian, they'd call him a Dago or something?

KATZ: Some they would. But I think –

MOORE: [interposed] Would the same people be saying the same things?

KATZ: -- No, but I think the Jew got the worst of it.

MOORE: Um, let me think, uh – in your family, who was more religious, your mother or father, in general?

KATZ: Both.

MOORE: They both were.

KATZ: [interposed] Both the same.

MOORE: And, um, did you have a synagogue nearby that you went to?

KATZ: [interposed] Yes, we could walk to it.

MOORE: And do you remember the name of it?

KATZ: One –uh – well, one was the Rivington Street – see you're acquainted with New York, you go to Columbia.

MOORE: Mm-hmm.

KATZ: Rivington Street is two blocks away from Delancey. Delancey, I forget the next name, Rivington. And that was a famous synagogue – you had the great cantors used to come there. My father loved to go to hear the cantors. I didn't. Because the services would start say, at, eight thirty and finish – in the smallest synagogues – and finish in two hours, because the cantor would sing and sing and sing. He'd go back, and we'd wind up two o'clock.

MOORE: In the morning?

KATZ: No, no. In the afternoon. Instead of being out by eleven o'clock.

MOORE: [interposed] Right. What about – um – it was too long for you, being small. Um, do you feel that your family members – well, how do you feel that your family members felt about coming to the United States? Did they think it was a –

KATZ: Oh, I thought it was beneficial.

MOORE: Did everyone in your family feel that way?

KATZ: Oh, yeah.

MOORE: Did anyone ever consider going back?

KATZ: No.

MOORE: Do you know of anyone in your family that tried to go back?

KATZ: No.

MOORE: Did they ever talk about this, about their original decision?

KATZ: No.

MOORE: And so, you feel confident that they thought it was a good decision?

KATZ: [interposed] Oh, they were glad they came here. 'Cause life was here – I guess life here was much better than being over there. I think where we lived, it became Poland, and then it went back to Austria. I me – remember we had a statue of – uh, the Emperor, Franz Josef [alternate: Franz Joseph/Francis Joseph], and they say – we kept that statue, his bust in the house, they say he was an extremely nice person, very compassionate.

MOORE: Mm-hmm. Well – (pause) did you feel that your mother and father adjusted to life in the United States?

KATZ: Oh, yes.

MOORE: And same with all your brothers and sisters?

KATZ: Oh, yeah, they're glad – we're all glad we came here.

MOORE: Did any family tragedy occur once you got to the States? You said your sister --

KATZ: [interposed] No, no. My sister died I think within about a week or two after she came to Ellis Island.

MOORE: And they – what was the reason for her death? They said that it was because she missed you, but –

KATZ: [interposed] I really don't know. They say it was heart – broken, or – then I heard later on someone said she contracted meningitis. But I don't – I'm not really sure.

MOORE: Okay, um. Any other things happen that were tragic? That were related to your stay here in the States?

KATZ: No, no – after we came, we were fairly successful. We, uh—on account of my brother George being such a hard worker, and he made money, in the 19 (sound of airplane), let's see – 1925 we moved to Brooklyn. And we bought a little three-family house. Then things were gettin' a little better.

MOORE: What year was that?

KATZ: That was in 192 – 5.

MOORE: Mm-hmm. What happened during the Depression, then?

KATZ: We – we did fairly well. 'Cause my brothers mainly – well, my sisters were working, and then I was working, we all contributed to the house, so – after about 1924/25, we – we – we were in pretty good straits.

MOORE: Mm-hmm. And describe – briefly describe your life, if you married and now have children, your occupation, what happened to you then? What is your life story in terms of that?

KATZ: Well, I went to work for my brothers, I didn't like it.

MOORE: Work where?

KATZ: In the fur business –

MOORE: [interposed] Mm-hmm.

KATZ: –And I subsequently got into the real-estate business. I married when I was twenty-one, and, uh – and from there on, everything started to go up.

MOORE: And when you married was your wife also Jewish?

KATZ: Yeah.

MOORE: Was she from Austria?

KATZ: No, she was born here?

MOORE: Born here?

KATZ: Her parents were from Russia, also very religious people.

MOORE: Did you speak – what did you speak to her?

KATZ: English.

MOORE: English,

KATZ: Yeah.

MOORE: Did you ever speak Yiddish together?

KATZ: Yeah, I could – yeah, we all speak Yiddish.

MOORE: All right. And, um, then after you were married, did you have children?

KATZ: Yeah, I have three sons, the first one, you know is a physician –

MOORE: Born –?

KATZ: He's born 193 – 2.

MOORE: Mm-hmm.

KATZ: And he was at Columbia. He was a full professor at thirty-eight. He's an anesthesiologist. And he's supposed to – there must be thousands of good ones, but he's supposed to be one of the great ones. And he was chief of staff and UCLA and chairman of the department.

MOORE: Hmm.

KATZ: And he's invented some – gadgets for, um –to prevent overdose of anesthesia. My middle boy was an engineer, he went into public relations. My youngest son is psychologist, and his wife is an associate professor of philosophy in New York.

MOORE: So you're –

KATZ: (Sound of airplane) So, we did rather well – coming from a very – that's what I tell people. It's a wonderful country, if you work hard, you could amount to something.

MOORE: Um, what about, uh – you have any anecdotes about meeting your wife, how you met your wife?

KATZ: Yeah, I met her at a dance. Yeah (laughs) my friend met her at a dance. But he had to go home early, so he said, "Would you take her home?" So, I took her home. (Laughs) And that's how I got to go with her.

MOORE: You took her home, and then you married her? (Laughs)

KATZ: Yeah. (Laughs)

MOORE: Some luck [not understood]

KATZ: We're married sixty-two – it'd be sixty-three years this June.

MOORE: And your wife is alive now?

KATZ: Yeah, she's working.

MOORE: And, um –

KATZ: [interposed] Yeah, she's now partially sided – she started to – get macular degeneration about three years ago. But she still manages, she – (pauses) very tough.

MOORE: When you look back on your life, are you happy you came to the United States?

KATZ: Oh, definitely.

MOORE: And, um – do you have any other anecdotes about your life, you think, that you could add, uh, that would help us – understand your adjustment to this country?

KATZ: Well, I love – being here. Of course you love enjoy seeing what happens in other countries of the world, how fortunate we are to live here. And I cannot see here how young people today get in trouble. I can't see how people started to take drugs! I hate to take an aspirin! And they take drugs – do they know what happens, they read – they read people die, they go crazy. I can't understand 'em~

MOORE: Yeah. We'd like to thank you on behalf of the Ellis Island Oral History Project for helping us and giving us this interview.

KATZ: [interposed] Uh-huh. Well, it was nice talking to you.

MOORE: And, uh, we'll send you a copy of this.

KATZ: Okay.

MOORE: And, it'll probably be in the summertime sometime when you receive it.

KATZ: Okay.

MOORE: And, uh – this is Kate Moore, signing off on the 16th of January, 1994, with Joseph Katz in Santa Monica, California, for the Ellis Island Oral History Project.

[END OF INTERVIEW]