

KM-032

MAURICE KARZ (MOSES, MOISHE KARZANOVSKY)

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RUSSIA, 1920

AGE 1

PASSAGE ON "THE ROTTERDAM"

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Mr. Karz is the brother of Sam Karz, KM-30, and Mary Holtz, KM-31. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of Oral History, 3/10/1995.

MOORE: Good evening. This is Kate Moore for the National Park Service. Today is the 24th of January, 1994, and I'm in San Diego, California at the home of Maurice Karz, who came from Russia in December of 1920 when he was six months old. And why don't you begin by giving us your full name and date of birth, please?

KARZ: My full name is Maurice Karz. I used to be Karznovsky. And the name was actually Moses. My mother used to call me Moishe. I was named after my

grandfather on my father's side.

MOORE: And how do you spell Karzanovsky?

KARZ: Karznovsky is K-A-R-Z-N-O-V-S-K-Y [sic], I think. And I was born September 24, 1919. I do believe I was a year old, maybe a little bit more, before I left because my mother says that in Minsk I was walking, so I couldn't have been six months old, I don't think.

MOORE: And what size town was Minsk at the time of your birth?

KARZ: I do believe Minsk was a city of approximately three hundred or three hundred and fifty thousand people.

MOORE: And did your parents tell you what the town looked like?

KARZ: Uh, the town was mostly flat land. They had the, was it the Dnepr River that wandered through the town. My father used to like to go swimming in the river, and they said they did a lot of fishing, so that's what they mentioned.

MOORE: What was the major industry that your parents told you exactly?

KARZ: Uh, there was, there was a lot of wooded area, and they used to, at a certain time of the year they chopped trees down and float them on the rivers and export lumber to Germany, et cetera. And also this was a town, to a certain extent there was some agriculture. There was cattle, I think dairies, the beet sugar. There was flour mills, various types of, there wasn't any heavy industry, I don't believe, at the time.

MOORE: What was your father's name?

KARZ: His name was Leon, or they used to call him Lebe in Yiddish.

MOORE: How do you spell that, in Yiddish?

KARZ: Lebe? That's L-E-B-E.

MOORE: And what did he look like?

KARZ: He had a sort of red beard, and he was pretty distinguished looking. He had a light complexion and blue eyes, and that's about the way he looked.

MOORE: And what about his personality and temperament? How would you describe it?

KARZ: He liked people, and people usually liked him. He wasn't much of a diplomat, though, because he was pretty ( he laughs ), he was pretty, how shall I say?

When he was working, say he had a contract in a synagogue, and a lot of the times there's a certain amount of groupings, like there is in every religion.

And he was very independent, okay. And he didn't connive or anything. He said it the way it was, if you liked it, take it. If you don't like it, but he was a great salesman besides. He was a man who could, he grew up with the textile trade, and I've seen him take a bolt of cloth, throw it in the air, and measure it while still in the air, by the meter, by the yard, and by the time it came down he'd already measured it and he'd cut it, and with one sweep he'd tear it at the place he was supposed to, and he was a good salesman. He could really convince people in that respect.

MOORE: And what was your mother's name?

KARZ: Her name was Rebeka. She spelled it with a K. And the maiden name was Greenberg. We called her, well, people called her, the Jewish people used to call her Rivka.

MOORE: And what was her occupation?

KARZ: When she was five years old she was making doll dresses for her friends. She'd cut them out and sew them. By the time she was thirteen, when she was thirteen years old, she started a factory. She did the designing, the cutting, and she had two or three women who did the sewing. And she was a very, a woman who was never afraid. Things flew. When she did something it went, was fast. And the governor of that province of Minsk, the gubernia. He used to send his coach with the coachmen, pick her up. She'd dress up, like she'd look like she was eighteen, nineteen and she was thirteen, fourteen. And she'd go to the governor's palace and make, check the sizes of the children, and make uniforms for them, and also if they were having a special party, she'd make costumes for them. She used to tell me about that quite often.

MOORE: How do you spell this governor's name, would you think?

KARZ: I have no idea what the governor's name was.

MOORE: Your said Igor, you used the word, when she went to

the governor.

KARZ: Oh, the gubernia is the government.

MOORE: Oh, the gubernia.

KARZ: Yeah, gubernia. And the, actually she had four sisters and one brother. She was the middle sister. And she provided the dowry for two of her sisters and for her brother. Her brother's name was Velvo, which is William. Okay. And each of them, she gave, of course, she didn't get married until she was twenty-six. My father was, I think, two or three years younger than her. She gave each of her two sisters and the brother, for a dowry, of two thousand rubles, which in those days was a large sum of money. The ruble, at that time, was on par with a dollar. And ( he clears his throat ) she was always busy doing something. She, I don't know how, but she knew how to do many things. She knew how to make wine. She knew how to make vishnik [ph]. You know, vishnik [ph] is a, like a brandy. I don't know where she learned these things, but she knew a lot of things. She was a very bright woman.

MOORE: What did your mother look like?

KARZ: Mother was, I'd say, about, in her bare feet, roughly at about five foot two or three, and when she came to America on the ship, she weighed, she used to tell me she weighed something like ninety-five pounds. Later on she put on some weight, and my father, my mother and I, when I was eighteen years old, we all three weighed a hundred and fifty-five pounds. So that will give you an idea.

MOORE: And her personality and temperament, anything else you'd like to say?

KARZ: She was a woman who people, she liked to arrange weddings. It was supposed to be a good deed. And she arranged quite a few of them. She was a very bright woman. Well, people would come to her for advice, surprisingly, and she'd like to listen, and as she would talk and, by the way, her eyes were blue. Her brothers and sisters all had brown eyes. She was the only one that had blue eyes. My father had blue eyes, too.

MOORE: Name all your brothers and sisters in order of their births.

KARZ: My mother lost her first son. At that time they had dysentery and they didn't know how to stop it. She lost two children that way. The next in line was Mary, my sister, Mary, now Holtz, but and then came Sam Karz, and then came, after Sam came Rose, who lives in San Francisco. After Rose came Sol, who has passed away, who also was a very good singer. He had a good voice. And then came a little, a beautiful little blonde-haired girl about, they were about two years apart, the children. And this little girl, actually, was my mother's favorite. She really missed her. She also died. She was about two years old, from the same thing that the first son had died. She was a bright little girl and she was, my mother was pretty broken up about it. So she went to what they call a (Yiddish), that's supposed to be a very intelligent Jewish man, for advice. People used to go to people for advice. And he told her, she used to tell me this story all the time, he said, "You will have a son, and this son will live to be a hundred years old." So I have to live to be a hundred. Otherwise my mother's going to be a liar. Okay. What else?

MOORE: ( she laughs ) What about your house? What do you know about your house back in, what did they tell you?

KARZ: My mother said they had a house. There was this uncle of, well, it was, it wasn't actually an uncle. Her younger sister had married the, also Leon, another Leon, from a very wealthy family. His father was a man who was put in charge. This was before the First World War, of course. In charge of various miles of forest with villages that belonged to some noble or some big shot, and he handled all the business arrangements. And he was a, he was a short man, but they told me he was very strong. He could take a coin and bend it with his hands. So he had a reputation. And his son, Leon, or Lebe, married my mother's sister, and they owned a number of houses or apartments. We lived in one of them. And I understand they had indoor plumbing. When my mother was a little girl she said they had a goat that used to give milk, a nanny goat. And before the Passover this goat, a few weeks before the Passover, five or six weeks, seven weeks, she'd have some kids, and for the Passover feast they always had a young kid, roast kid, to eat for the holiday. She used to tell me

these stories. ( he laughs ) And then they also had a cow. She said she had a cow without horns for milk. And this is about the family when she was a child. She says that also they used to go to a dacha. You know what a dacha is? That's a country place for vacation in the summer. When she was about five or six years old, she says she remembers in this dacha, they had a pharmacist, and they used to rent the place, and they'd drink fresh milk and stuff. And in this town they had a pogrom. You know what a pogrom is? They came in, from the czar's time, they sent in the Cossacks or somebody to divert the people's attention, and the pharmacist was a friend of the family, he told my grandmother and my mother, who was there, to go hide in his attic above the pharmacy, because there were Jewish people living there, and most of the Jewish men were religious, so they had beards, because the religion says that if you want to get technical that you're not supposed to shave, so you let the beard grow. And she says she looked through a crack in the roof there and watched these guys come in and they were hitting people with their swords, and cutting off the beards. It was, you know, bad. If you saw Fiddler on the Roof, you have kind of

an idea. Okay?

MOORE: So the house itself that you had was from the uncle,  
then?

KARZ: Yeah, they rented it from the uncle, yes.

MOORE: And . . .

KARZ: At that particular time my father, after he got  
married my mother put up the dowry and they opened a  
yardage store, and this was what he was doing at the  
time. But he was practicing singing also. I  
understand he had an Italian voice teacher, okay.

MOORE: In Minsk.

KARZ: In Minsk. And also he sang at the, in the synagogue.

MOORE: What do you know about your grandparents at all?

KARZ: I know that on my father's side they lived, they came  
from, it was the Ukraine in Mogilev, it was the town  
of Mogilev. I was named after that grandfather. And  
his first wife passed away, and they left, first they  
had, I think, about six children with the first wife,  
and then he had more with the second wife. And I  
think they were, altogether must have been close to

ten, eleven children. Being there were so many kids, the second wife didn't want too many children from the first wife, and he had to leave when he was twelve years old, and he went to live with his older brother, Rachmiel, who, which was a very interesting story.

They married him off when he was seventeen years old.

He always spoke, he was a slim, well-dressed man all the time. A very gentle, you know, old-fashioned gentleman, even when he was young. But he spoke with a, he was born with sort of a speech impediment. He spoke with sort of a whisper. And he married him off to a lady who was about twenty-four, and she was blind in one eye, and he hadn't met her till they were married. And she had (?). He had five children with her. And from five children there was a doctor, a lawyer who ran for the senate from Arizona, and a plumber, and a nurse. So they were pretty, the children were pretty good. They moved to Sender, not Sender. The family moved to the States before we did. They went to Rochester, New York. This was on my father's side.

MOORE: And those were the ones that actually used the contact when you came to this country.

KARZ: Yes. On my father's side his brothers and sisters had already come to the States.

MOORE: What about back . . .

KARZ: Before the war, by the way.

MOORE: What did you ever hear about your, the departure of your family and the reason they left Russia?

KARZ: Well, according to my mother's tale, at the time of the Revolution, you know, in 1917 they disposed of the czar. The Bolsheviks had taken control of the country. There was, the Germans that had come through Minsk, they took Minsk. And she said at the time of the Germans, the First World War, the Germans didn't bother anybody. Whatever they bought they paid for. They treated the people decently at that particular time. When, in the beginning there was a Kerensky regime that lasted maybe a year that was overthrown by the Bolsheviks. The Kerensky regime wanted to keep up the war against the Germans. When Lenin came through, the Germans let him through on a sealed train from Switzerland, you know about that story. They came through, and they took over the power, they chased out the Kerensky regime. So the war, I'd say, had already

ended in 1918, but the war between the Bolsheviks and the Poles kept on for another few years, and so the Poles chased the Bolsheviks, the Red Army, out of Minsk on the front. And every time there was a switch from one army to the other, they destroyed everything they could. They took away all the food. They took away all the horses. They plundered the stores where, uh, so there was no food. There was very little of anything. What, so when the Bolsheviks, under the Red Army, forced the Poles out of Minsk, the Poles didn't leave too much either, and people were actually starving in the street. My father was pretty, he was, he decided to do something, he went and did it. So what he would do, he would go out on the countryside, and he'd get a load of potatoes from a farmer, and he'd pay for it with whatever money that, you know how many different monies there were? There were Kerensky money, there was the Czarist money, there was the Bolshevik money, there was foreign money, pounds and dollars or whatever, or francs. And so people were, the only way they could keep alive is by trading, you know, trading something. You wanted a piece of cloth for a suit, you traded something else for it. Because nobody knew what money to use. So what he would do,

he'd go out and he'd trade. One time he picked up some silver or gold plates from some place that had been raided, and he exchanged them, say, for sugar, or saccharine. My mother sewed him up a coat with pockets all through it and he put saccharine in there.

Because later on there was no sugar either. And she said, "When he walked by you, your lips would get sweet." From the saccharine, yes. And, so this is what he'd do. He'd go to different places and find what was short, like, matches. No matches. So he'd bring the matches, and he'd trade matches for something else. Now, the last trip he made, he went with a nephew on the train. And I don't know where they went, but he had unloaded some merchandise, and he had something of the nature of close to a hundred and twenty thousand dollars in his suitcase. And this was in foreign currency, not in local currency. So my mother had been trying to get him to okay to leave Russia. It was my mother, that insisted that they leave. My father didn't want to leave. He was doing pretty good. But when the doctor came to deliver me, she said, she had made rolls on a white bread, she had white flour that he'd gotten somewhere, a sack of flour, and when the doctor came and he looked at that

his eyes popped out. He says, "I haven't seen white bread for the last year-and-a-half." He couldn't believe it. Everything was, you know, black bread. So this was supposed to be the last trip. They put the suitcase under the benches there, and as they came, and every ten viorst [ph], like ten miles, there was a train station. He looked out and he saw the train was coming to the station. There was lined up Communist troops on the station side. They were going to search the train. Life meant very little. If they saw somebody with nice, clean hands who was dressed very nice, they'd go, "Commissar, take them out and shoot them. He's an enemy of the State." So he says to his nephew, "Let's get in the other train, car. Let's leave that there. If they find it, there's going to be problems." So they went in the next car. They came through and they found the suitcase. They saw it. So they jumped off on the opposite side of the train, and it was snowing. It was cold. It was about, I don't know, seventy-five miles from home. He walked home. My mother said when he came he was like a skeleton. His feet were bleeding, he was scared to death, you know. Cold, and walking, oh, it was tough. She says, "We're leaving now." He says, "Okay." So

they hired this man with an old horse, because if he was a good horse they would have confiscated it a long time ago. He was an old horse, so they, this man was a Jewish man with a horse and wagon, but he was a little nuts, because instead of asking for foreign money or asking for the other currency, you know what he asked for? My mother was always telling me. He wanted the czar's money. The czar's already been dead for two or three years, but he thought the royalty would come back, the czar's family would take over the country again, so he wanted the czar's money. So they paid him the czar's money, which was worthless.

Anyhow, she says, she cooked up, she baked, like, hard tack that would stay, you know, for the trip. And she took her feather pillows and her feather comforters and all this stuff because it was cold on the trip, you know, it's cold. Bundled everybody up, and they snuck out of town. And it took them approximately a week of travel to get to where the Polish lines were.

And they went through areas where there had been battles and things, but they, they were very fortunate, she says. After they got out of town they were on the way, two young fellows with big coats attached themselves. They came over, they said,

"Where you going?" We said, "We're going this way."  
He says, "Well, we're Commissars from the Russian Army. Okay?" And every time the military patrol from the Bolsheviks would stop them, because there were patrols, yet. It wasn't just empty. She said when they stopped them, these guys showed papers that they were on inspection, and that they were government officials, so they let them, they let us through. They said, "The family's giving us coverage, see?" They gave them food, and at night they covered themselves up with the, you know, because it was cold. When they came to the Polish lines, the Polish troops were going to shoot everybody. But these guys, these two guys started speaking perfect Polish to them. They told the Polish soldiers, "Bring me your commanding officer right away." They said, "We're Captain So-and-so and Captain So-and-so from the Polish Army." And she says a colonel came over, and they cut open their coat and they brought out papers that they were both Polish, uh, spies. They'd been checking on the Russian, on the Communist troops there. And they said, they told him, they said, "These people gave us food, and they gave us shelter," and they said, "They want to go to Warsaw, so let them

on the troop train." The troop train was, my mother says, was broken windows, an old car, you know, these old cars. And they sat, they sat down, she says, they had, on the end they had two benches, one across from the other. And she says there was a broken window there. And my brother Sam, he didn't mention these, he always carried the round, the little hammers and some little nails. So she took it and cut open the sheet, because the snow was coming in through the window. And they, my brother tacked it up over the window so the snow wouldn't come in. Mother was always telling me the soldiers were sleeping on her feet. Her feet, at least kept them warm. But she says the, what do you call it, being on them stopped the circulation, so it was bothering her. But she said when they got into Warsaw, there was, they had everything in Poland. And they, first they went to a hotel, and she says that my father went out, and he got lost. ( he laughs ) It took half the day. ( a telephone rings ) So he got lost, and finally he found his way back. As I said, they bought new clothes for all of us, and they were waiting for the papers to come from the States. Of course, they didn't have airplanes, so it had to go by ship, and it

took a while. But until the travel documents came, I do believe they took a train from Warsaw that went through Germany into Holland, and there was where they took the ship. It was in Amsterdam where they took the, the ship was the Rotterdam, as I understand it. And it was, it was stormy, she said. No one got sick, and we came across, and in Ellis Island I apparently had either smallpox or measles or something that they put me in quarantine. That's when I remembered that the guy in the white jacket took me away from my mother. In the meantime, they passed through, and they went to live that week with her cousin, who had a stationary store in New York.

MOORE: Wait a minute. Back up a little bit. Your family passed through, and they kept a baby alone?

KARZ: Yeah. They kept me in quarantine until I was cured.

MOORE: And where was your mother, then?

KARZ: My mother went with my father and the rest of the family to the cousins who were waiting.

MOORE: And they didn't allow your mother to stay?

KARZ: No. She came back after, they came back and picked me

up, as I understand it. And so that's what happened there. And then the Fishkins [ph] were the cousins, and from there they went to New York, to Rochester, where all of my father's family were. He had, his brothers, his older brothers, one was a plumber. One, they came, we came before the First World War. So Philip, the oldest, he had become in the war industry, he was a tool and die maker, and that's what the whole family was. When they got there, my mother thought that she would go to work in a factory, because Rochester was the center of ready-made men's suits. There were a lot of suit factories. And practically, all of them are Jewish, because the tailors came and they got all this business. So she went with my father to a factory, and the guy said, "Let me see what you can do." And he watched what she was doing with those machines, but he usually says, "You don't have to work for me." He asked her what she had done before. He says, "I've got boxes of remnants, wool remnants and stuff." He says, "You can make your own stuff and sell it, you know?" So for seven dollars, they came, by the way, their total capital at that time was twenty-five dollars.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

MOORE: Your parents.

KARZ: My parents, that's all the money they had, twenty-five dollars. That they had, when they came to America, in Rochester. So they had, she said they had rented two or three rooms in somebody's house where we were sleeping. And this, I think the second or third day after they got there, this is what they did. So she says for seven dollars she bought two or three big boxes of remnants, and they hired a man for fifty cents, he took it on a horse and wagon, and they went back to where they were staying, and she put the stuff in the room, and she bought two Singer sewing machines, pedal machines. They were, I think, if I'm not mistaken, they were something like twenty, twenty-five dollars a machine at that time. And you put a dollar down, at fifty cents a week, and this is what she bought. Of course, she bought thread and the rest of the stuff. And she set to work by herself. She cut it up, and she, things flew in her hands. I watched her. She worked really fast. She made something like three or four dozen in different sizes,

of those little sailor-type suits with a crossed deal here and a thing in the back, ( he gestures ) and the short pants. And my father and my sister Mary, they took these, they were in boxes, and they went to the stores, and they sold them for twenty-four dollars a dozen. So before you know it they had almost seventy-five dollars from the, from what they sold. She started working. Pretty soon she, within six months they bought a big house for about, I think the house was about thirty-five hundred dollars at the time. It had a nice basement. It was, I remember, five big pear trees, terrific pear trees in the backyard. And my father's younger brother, Alexander, that had gotten there sooner, he was a big coal dealer. He used to, you know, he had a coal yard. And they'd bring the coal and they'd dump it into a chute into the basement. So she had three or four women doing the sewing, and she did the cutting, and they also made capes for girls, you know, like fancy capes that they made, and they were doing quite well there, until the style went out. In the meantime, when there was, my father was a salesman. He would go out and do the selling. And we went, for the holidays he'd take a contract, say he'd sing for the holidays for three or

four or five hundred dollars, whatever it was at that time. And when the, when the style went out for these, they went for long pants, and the rest of the stuff. In the mean time he'd gone to Boston and he'd gotten a job for I think a two-year contract to sing in this congregation. So we moved to Boston, and we lived there for two, I think about two, two-and-a-half years. In the meantime also he got a letter, the brothers and the whole family had moved to California, to Los Angeles, about that time, before, before even they moved to Boston. And his older brother wrote to him. Except for Alexander, Sender, he stayed in Rochester. His son became an attorney. His daughter married a doctor. And so the brother wrote to him that they needed a cantor in the biggest orthodox synagogue in Los Angeles. So my father took the train to Los Angeles, and he got the contract. But you know what kind of contract he gave? He says, "I want three months vacation every summer. ( he laughs ) I want to sing only every other week because I have to protect my voice." And they agreed, because he had a terrific voice. All the top cantors used to have concerts with him. So we moved to California. They had sold our house, the other house there, because

they still owed money on it, I guess. But we came to Los Angeles and I think for about a week or two we stayed with my uncle, and then they rented a flat, okay. And it was across the street from a park, and he was, he was making five hundred dollars a year more than the rabbi, and this was supposed to be the top rabbi. The rabbi couldn't stand it. He had his clique, and there was always some friction there. So . . .

MOORE: What's the first thing that you remember, though? When you came here as a year-old, what's the first thing that you remember? Which house do you first remember well?

KARZ: I remember the house we had in Rochester. Yeah. There was a picket fence in the front, and there was a big tree in the center there, and then there was a house. The steps going up were on the right side. And there was, the first house next to a building where they had a, was it a bowling alley or a bar right there? I think there were Polish guys in there. And it had a big yard in the back. And I used to walk on that picket fence. I'd walk, I used to like to climb on things. And I remember when my father

first took me to school. It was No. 9 Street School, and I had a problem. I was rather independent. The teacher and I got in a fight or something, she locked me up in a little closet they had that she closed me, put me in the closet. There was a light on, but I didn't mind because they had chocolate bars in there.

( he laughs ) I ate some chocolate bars. That was my first, my first school, and then I'll never forget I was a little kid and my brothers were going, there was a hill. They were taking a sled to go up the hill, and slide down. And I crossed the street, which I wasn't supposed to do. And on the other side, I didn't want them to see me. I was sneaking up after them. But there was sort of a driveway and a building here, ( he gestures ) and they were pushing this wagon, horse and wagon, out, and they kind of closed off the sidewalk. I said, "Well, I'll go under." And I crawled underneath. I'd go through. And they moved the wagon, it went across both of my legs, and they had to carry me home because I couldn't walk.

( he laughs ) I remember that. And I also remember in Rochester it was my birthday. I think my folks had gone to New York to attend, to go to a concert. And so my sister was in charge, my older sister Mary. It

was my birthday, so they got me all dressed up and they gave me a birthday party. I remember that.

MOORE: What birthday was that?

KARZ: I don't remember. But I do remember that I think one of my uncles or somebody gave me a dollar, a whole dollar. It didn't seem like much to me, a piece of paper. So what I did, I think I went over to one of the stores and I got a dollar's worth of pennies, and I put them in my pocket. My mother used to make my clothes. And this store, it had sort of a, they had some steps, and it was a wooden platform, and you went in, it was like a grocery store. I remember that it was about that high off the ground ( he gestures ) on the end, and I used to jump off of there all the time. So here I jumped, and all the pennies, they went flying all over the place. ( Ms. Moore laughs ) Then I remember there was an old Jewish man with a beard. He was a junk man with a white horse and a wagon, and he was a pleasant old man with a beard. And I used to call him and Zaida, Grandfather. And he let me sit on the, on the bench there with the horse. That was great, going with the horse and things.

MOORE: Did your parents ever talk to you about what they felt about their decision to leave Russia?

KARZ: Oh, my mother used to, she was so happy to be here she used to say, "This is the golden land. Look at the people here. If you want to work, you can always do something." She says, "In the old country, if you're a shoemaker, your kids were shoemakers. You had no chance. If you were a tailor, these guys, you know, they were hardly making a living." She says, "The poor people over there," she says, "what do they have to eat? Herring and potatoes." She said, "Herring used to cost a penny." You know, a kopeck. They used to have half-kopecks. She used to tell me, they used to pay a maid by the year, pay a maid by the year. Seven rubles a year. Everything was, you know, money was scarce, but . . .

MOORE: What about the language and the culture? Did she ever regret leaving that coming here?

KARZ: Not at all. Really, she didn't regret it. All she regretted was that she didn't have her sisters and brother in the family with her, because she didn't have, you know, she had cousins here. She had an

uncle who had come here before in Boston who had a store, and some guy came in and robbed him and shot and killed him. She had brothers and sisters, real close ones, you know she didn't have. But . . .

MOORE: So was that, basically what she missed was family.

KARZ: Yeah, she missed the family, but other than that she was very happy to be in the States, she says, yeah.

MOORE: What about her adjustment language-wise? Did your parents, how did your parents learn English?

KARZ: Well, very simple. They lived in a Jewish neighborhood. The, everything where, everybody talked Yiddish. In the house we talked more Yiddish, my sister says Russian. We didn't really speak, very little Russian. My father spoke good Russian. My mother spoke sort-of, sort-of Russian, because she lived in a Jewish neighborhood and a Jewish atmosphere. But she used to write very nice letters in Yiddish. She wrote, she was very, she used to read and write and say her prayers. Instead of in Hebrew she had the prayers in Yiddish, her prayer books. But I learned all my Yiddish from them. We always spoke Yiddish.

MOORE: And how about English, then? How did she learn English?

KARZ: Well, she listened to people. If somebody came in and said something in English she would answer. ( he clears his throat ) But she couldn't carry on a conversation in English, no.

MOORE: At the end of her life could she?

KARZ: No, not even at the end of her life. She understood everything, but she, her conversation in English was limited.

MOORE: And your father?

KARZ: My father spoke pretty good, yeah. He used to speak, when I was in the service in Texas, he used to like to write me letters. You wouldn't believe, he'd write them in the alphabet, but it was in Yiddish. They'd have to decipher it, but it was fun.

MOORE: And . . .

KARZ: He was a very likable man, he really was, to people. You know, we'd have company over, and afterwards he'd sing songs, and he liked to tell jokes.

MOORE: And did any family members ever go back to Russia afterwards, once they came here?

KARZ: None, no one went back.

MOORE: Did your mother or father ever tell a story about the boat, about seeing land for the first time?

KARZ: Uh, not really. She said the trip was very rough. But there was a big ship, and that's about all. She didn't say too much about that at all.

MOORE: What about the course of your life? Your occupation, and that you were the youngest of this whole family, and probably the one born most, whose most of life was in this country.

KARZ: Yes. I went to work, I studied aeronautical engineering in San Francisco. I didn't finish. The war came along. And I went to work for Locke Heed. I worked on the first P-38's, the experimental. I worked on the Hudson bombers, the Constellation, the B-17's fabrication. And then I, after a couple of years of that, I quit, and I volunteered, I went into the air force as a specialist, but they never used my specialty, so I became a physical training instructor.

And then I went through, I became a, I went through physical training instructor school in Florida. I was in pretty good shape. As a matter of fact, when I was stationed in Las Vegas teaching, everybody had to have eight hours of parachute instruction. I was an instructor. I only worked two hours a day, ten hours a week. That was my job. So I was up in the gym all the time, and I had about eighty or ninety thousand people on the field that had a physical fitness contest as to who can do the most push-ups, and who can do the most sit-ups, who can do climbing up a rope the fastest and run and different things. Then I became the number one. I got a silver bracelet for it. I was in good shape. I did a lot of weight lifting. As a matter of fact, when I was seventeen, I was Pacific Coast Novice Champion.

MOORE: In?

KARZ: Weight lifting. Yeah. Uh, what else?

MOORE: What about your family? Did you have a family? Did you . . .

KARZ: Oh, yeah. I, I went to Mexico, no, no. That's later. Uh, when I was, I was still in the service. I had

gotten, I went home, they were sending me from one field to another. I had a seventeen day delay in route. ( a telephone rings ) Oh, not again. ( break in tape ) . . . home in Los Angeles, see, I saved up some money when I was working for Locke Heed. So my folks had been in Los Angeles, my two sisters got married, to, first to one brother, and then the, there was an opening in the synagogue in Oakland. My father went over there and gave them a sample, and they hired him there. And my sister Mary was living there with her husband, so we moved to Oakland, and there my sister Rose married Harry, the younger brother. And I liked Oakland. I used to go down to the estuary. ( sound of a telephone off the hook ) Let that . . . ( break in tape )

MOORE: You went down to the estuary.

KARZ: My brother-in-laws had two stores in Oakland. One was on 7th and Broadway, and one was on 9th and Broadway, men's haberdashery stores. And as you walked down the end of Broadway, there was an estuary. You know what an estuary is, that goes into, into the bay. And the, what they call the five cent ferry used to come in there, and you'd go across to San Francisco on the five

cent ferry. Meantime, this estuary had all these big sailing ships that were in, they weren't using them any more. Maybe it was about thirty of these big, three, four mast sailing ships that were just sitting there. And it was just beautiful to see these ships, and look at them. You know, a little kid. So I would, on a Sunday I would take my lunch and go across to San Francisco and have my lunch there on a ferry, and then take the ferry back. That was my excursion.

I did it quite often. It was a nice trip. So then, of course, during the Depression my brother-in-laws moved their business over to San Francisco. What had happened with them, they had invested fairly heavily in stocks, both of them. I think Max, the oldest one, lost about a hundred and twenty thousand, and Harry lost maybe nineteen thousand dollars, there was. But they were lucky, the merchandise in the store was all paid for, otherwise they would have been in trouble. So they lost practically all their savings. So we moved around up and back from San Francisco back to Los Angeles and then we went up to Portland and to Seattle. We spent maybe six months in each town where our father was singing. We came back. There was even a period when there were, when we went to Omaha,

Nebraska. He had a contract there for a couple of years. We came back. So I was in the service. I gave my mother my savings, and she bought two houses across the street. Oh, they had finally decided, we had a little store in San Francisco back in 1934, '35, '36, those years, the Depression years, we had a general merchandise store. They started with five hundred dollars from my brother Sol that he saved up, and the whole family worked in that store. At first they made a living, but things got tough, so they sold out what they had. And I think they ended up with about twenty-five hundred dollars cash. They went to Los Angeles, and they bought this fifteen-room hotel.

It was a, the people who owned this had died, and this was up for taxes, okay. So this real estate man who was a friend of my father's bought it for, they bought it, a fifty room hotel with a cottage in the back and two old houses on another street. It was like an estate sale. They put the twenty-five hundred dollars or so down, and they were paying it out at eighty dollars a month or something. The people, it was in a Jewish neighborhood in East Los Angles, in Boyle Heights. But my mother said, "I don't want to travel around any more. I just want a place to live

and, you know, without any, too much headaches." And so they used to run the hotel there, and most of the people were mostly, they lived there, Jewish guys who were working. So that's what happened there. Then I gave, when I went in the service I gave my mother my savings, and she bought two houses across the street, so they got a little income from that. And then I was in the, I was stationed in the air force base in Laredo, then I went to Texas and different parts of the country. First I was a physical training instructor, then I was a parachute line instructor. Then I went into, I became a gunner. Oh, I tried out for cadets to become a pilot. From the beginning I couldn't make it. My eyes were 20/30, and you had to have 20/20 vision. But while I was in Texas they came out with a new directive. They would take a 20/30 with a waiver that you were okay in every other respect. So they accepted me. I took the test. There were thirty-four of us, and only two of us passed. So I was accepted. So here I'm waiting for orders to be sent to Santa Ana here for, starting cadet training. And then came another directive. They got, they got too many cadets, and they're not losing as many planes and stuff as they thought they

would lose. They washed back fifteen thousand of us, but they gave us a chance to go wherever we wanted. So I went to, there was a school in Las Vegas, so I went to Las Vegas where I stayed eight months. And at the end of the eight months I put in for the last class of B-17's to go to Europe, because then they started B-29's which were flying over to Japan. They were all flights, fifteen, sixteen hours, and if you got shot down, you got shot down over water, your chances were pretty poor. So the, I came home for this, for this leave, and I met my first wife, who was named Rebecca. My mother said, "Don't marry Rebecca. That's not good luck." And she was right.

( he laughs ) She was really right. So, anyhow, we got engaged. I went to, I was stationed in Laredo, and they were closing down the field, and I got permission to go to, next to Mexico City. There was a seventeen day delay in the new regulation that said with the CO's permission I could go to Mexico City. I got married in Mexico City. I was still in the army. And after that when I got out, they bounced me around a few places, and I went to live in Mexico. I had three children with my first wife.

MOORE: What are their names?

KARZ: The oldest is Aviva. That's her picture over there. I'll show you later. Aviva, and Florie, and Victor. And now they've got children of their own, except for Florie. She doesn't have any children. One of them lives in Utah, and two live in California. They're, all three have been divorced. So after I got divorced from Rebecca, I went to work in San Jose. By that time my father had passed away, and my mother sold the, she had some property. My brother sold his, he had taken over the hotel. He got married to a girl from Mexico, too. And we moved to San Jose, California. And then I went into business for myself. I was managing stores, and then I went into a sporting goods and army surplus store in Watsonville, where I was for a number of years. It was a good business. We were very busy seven months of the year, because we used to get in something like ten to twelve thousand Mexican workers, and that's where I learned my Spanish pretty good. And so during the off season, during the winter, when there was no, there was an agricultural city with nothing doing, I drove down to Mexico City to see my aunt and uncle and my cousins on

my mother's side, by the way. So there I met my second wife, who was another Rebecca, who was born in Istanbul in Turkey and had come to Mexico when she was an infant. And she lived in El Paso, too, so she spoke good English, and she was a widow who had three sons. The oldest son, Roberto (?) is now a professor of medicine at UCLA. He is a gastroenterologist and liver specialist, and he's one of the top doctors, he's got (?) from the presidents and the governors in Beverly Hills. He was five years president of the American Cancer Society, Latin Branch. He raised a lot of money for them. He's the doctor of Julio Iglesias, of all the big shots, they go to him. He's fabulous. He's saved a lot of lives. He's tremendous. He makes a speech, and I tell you, he's terrific. He graduated medical school in Mexico at twenty-one years of age. I'm very proud of this guy. He's up there. See him ( he gestures to a photograph ) when he was inaugurated in the American College of Physicians. And so I lived in Mexico City, I sold my business to my partner in Watsonville, moved to Mexico City. We started, I knew nothing about making jewelry, but we started a factory. My wife's family were making jewelry, were into the jewelry

business. She's a, my ex-wife, Rebecca, the second one, a terrific salesgirl. She knows how to sell. So I started a factory with her. I started with two employees, then three more. I hijacked the people from other places. My manager of the factory was getting twenty-two dollars a month. Listen to this, after he had something like twenty-five years of experience. He knew how to make everything. I gave him twenty-five, and he came to work for me. That's where I got my employees. We started with just a few.

We started making, he started making, I told him I wanted children's rings, making them in silver, made about sixty-five models with different kinds of rings, little hearts and little clovers and little genuine little semi-precious stones, and little pearls, and coral, whatever, you know. And I was the only one in Mexico to make that in fourteen carat gold. We were buying three hundred grams of gold a week. You couldn't make too much with that, but everywhere I went they bought. They were (?). To break into a business when you're new is kind of tough, but that was the open door. And we ended up with fifty-eight employees. We were two years running the number one exporter of gold jewelry to Europe, and do you know

who bought? Czechoslovakia. We had interesting experiences. I was going to be the partner of the President Samosa of Nicaragua. They had built a factory making jewelry. They had nobody to run it. They checked out that we had a very excellent reputation. They offered us a trip, and we were there twice. I was in his home, I was in his bunker, Samosa. They offered us a half a million dollars start-up capital, against then we had twelve thousand dollars a month for six months. We could bring in anything we wanted, according to the law, duty-free for ten years, and we don't have to pay any taxes until ten years. We had twenty-five employees. Beautiful, diplomatic passports. The food was very good in Managua, Nicaragua. And then he says, "We don't have anybody to leave our factory to. We got a nice business going here. Who are we going to leave it to? You know, you can't, you've got stones, you've got gold, you've got silver. You can't, you just can't walk away from it." You know? So we had a signed contract from Nicaragua. The bank actually that handled, that the president of Nicaragua had, was handling the situation, but he, he was there, too. So we didn't go. I guess it was a good deal we didn't

go, because a year later they blew him up with a bazooka, so that's what happened. It was interesting.

We went to Prague, we went to Belgium, we were going to do some importing. And remember when the price of gold went sky high? My workers in the shop were sitting around reading comic books, and we had to pay them the minimum wage whether they worked or not because our system, when I first started I paid wages, and the production wasn't very good. I said, "We're going to do something about this." So we put them on piecework. Every model, we started up with one model and ended up with seven, seven thousand models of women's rings, of men's rings, of children's rings, of earrings and all kinds of jewelry. Our goal was fourteen net, and we made jewelry for the King Ranch, for the head of Interpol, for people from the American Embassy. We had a good reputation. I used to take care of the shop and do all the selling for the stores, and Becky used to run the office, where she had a lot of customers had come in from out of the country, et cetera. And even got her into the group of Women Impresarios of the President, Presidency. There were thirty-five women who were all business, and they'd have breakfast with the president or some

big shot at one of the clubs, some minister. And it was a nice living, in Mexico we had a very nice house.

The entrance hall was all black marble. There were five bathrooms. We had three, we had a cook and two maids. And there was parties every weekend, a lot of socializing. We had a condo in Acapulco. I had a sailboat in Acapulco. We had a weekend house in Cuernavaca. It was nice. But Mexico got too big, and too much smog. It was bad after a while, so I, we're still friends, but I can't live in Mexico. I told her. When I married her I told her I'd stay in New Mexico for five years. I stayed eighteen.

END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

MOORE: When you look back on your life, you're an immigrant who had to sneak out of your home country . . .

KARZ: Yeah.

MOORE: And came here.

KARZ: Yeah.

MOORE: As a small babe, a baby. Your beginning wasn't that good. You were quarantined for a while, or you kept

being detained, let's say. When you look back over your life, do you have any regrets about what happened?

KARZ: Really not, whatsoever, really. It's a lot of experiences I went through, good, bad and indifferent. And, to tell you the truth, I consider myself very fortunate, okay, that I don't have to ask my children to support me, that thank God I have enough money, even though I've lost a lot of money in my life, I have enough money to live fairly comfortable. I'm not rich, and I'm not poor.

MOORE: And how do you feel having, about your parents' decision to immigrate to this country?

KARZ: I think they saved my life and their own life, because I'm sure we would have been dead a long time ago. My father had, you know, it's a half-brother, but considering from the same father, under Jewish law it's like a full brother, his youngest brother, there's a picture of him here, he was a motion picture director and a sculptor in Moscow. One of the Karzanovskies is listed in the Russian scientific book of Who's Who. He discovered two new elements. Then

in Los Angeles there must be thirty Karzes in the phone book. There's doctors, there's lawyers, from the family. And they've become quite prominent. My, on my mother's side, you're not familiar with Tijuana?

I guess not. Well, Tijuana is a city now, a million and a half people. It's bigger than San Diego. It's right on the border here. And I have cousins, my mother's nephew, my mother's sister's son, who came to, we helped him come in 1929, that uncle that owned that property, we wrote to him to get out. And he got, see, Lebe, he was, he went to, he was one of these fellows that got along with everybody. He was a big man, and his house, he had a big house that they let him keep. He set up a club there for the commissars, and they never, when people didn't have what to eat, they used to bring the commissars. He had sugar, he had flour, he had whatever they needed because it was their club. He ran it. They also gave him the concession in the railroad station for sandwiches, sort of, and tea, and like a little kiosk, Lebe. So, in '29, see, Lenin started in NEP. You know what the NEP was? New Economic Policy. Things had gotten so bad after the Revolution, things, there was no production. So they had a, the NEP, so that

people could have their own shoe stores, you know, make shoes. Small industries could go along, the government wouldn't bother them. And the farmers could produce and sell, so things started coming back up, and things getting better. We wrote to him to get out, so we sent him the papers, and legally they left.

They sold their house, somebody bought it, and they were coming to the States, I think in Lithuania, when they went to the American consulate. At that time the law said a farmer could come into the States, but, so he said he was a farmer. So they asked him a question, "How do you grow potatoes?" He had made the mistake by saying, "From seed." But if he said, "From seed potatoes," just add the word "seed potatoes," he would have passed through, but because he said just the seed, you know how you grow potatoes, you cut off the eyes and you bury them. So he couldn't come to the States, he and his three children and my aunt. So the next best thing was Mexico, because he saw Mexico was next to California, so they went to Mexico. That's how they got started in Mexico. They came to Mexico with nine thousand dollars, though.

MOORE: Were any of your family that stayed in Russia, did any

of them die from any sort of unnatural death?

KARZ: Well, my, at that time my mother had a nephew, from one of her sisters, I guess it was, that they lived out in the country somewhere, and he came into town there, this village after the Communists had taken the place over. He came in with a horse and wagon, and in the village square he sees a lot of men there standing around lined up. So he got off, and he went over to see what was happening. The Communists had set up a machine gun against these guys, and they killed everybody. They just machine-gunned these guys, and he was killed, a nineteen-year-old kid. So that's one thing.

MOORE: So you're really relatively happy you came to this country.

KARZ: Are you kidding? ( they laugh ) Relatively happy.  
Ha!

MOORE: I didn't want to load the question too much.

KARZ: Listen, I was, I went to, I took the cruise with the group to, the five hundredth anniversary of the Inquisition. So all these Sephardic Jews from the

United States, from Mexico, this whole group of us, were on the Star Princess, this big ship that we caught in Italy, where the water is. What do you call it, on the Adriatic, the city, uh, Venice, Venice. And there we caught the ship and we went to the Greek Islands. We were in Turkey. We were in Odessa. We were in Yalta. We were where they had the Yalta meeting. And we watched the way these people were living. We don't appreciate the United States until you go to other countries. Let me tell you something. Have you been traveling out of the United States? Where?

MOORE: Yes. I've been to most of western Europe and some eastern.

KARZ: Ah. So you know what I'm talking about. And after eighteen years in Mexico, and also in Nicaragua and a couple of other countries, it's good to be in the United States. With all the problems they have here, it's still a better place to live.

MOORE: Well, I'd like to thank you on behalf of the Ellis Island Oral History Project for helping us and giving us your information, and we will send you a copy, as

we said, your whole family.

KARZ: Thank you.

MOORE: And this is Kate Moore signing off from San Diego,  
California on the 24th of January 1994 for the Ellis  
Island Oral History Project.