

KM-69/KOVALOVSKY

KM-69

ANTHONY KOVALOVSKY

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INTERVIEWER: KATE MOORE

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CZECHOSLOVAKIA, 1920

AGE 13

SHIP NAME NOT RECALLED

MOORE: Good afternoon, this is Kate Moore for the National Park Service and today is the 18th of July, 1994 and I'm in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania at the home of Anthony Kovalovsky, who came from Czechoslovakia to the United States in 1920 when he was three years (Mr. Kovalovsky laughs) thirteen, sorry, thirteen years old.

KOVALOVSKY: Yeah, that's better.

MOORE: Thirteen, okay. So why don't you begin by giving us your full name and date of birth, please.

KOVALOVSKY: Well, my full name is Anthony, well, you could say, say it Anthony Kovalovsky.

MOORE: And can you spell Kovalovsky?

KOVALOVSKY: What?

MOORE: Your last name. Can you spell it?

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KOVALOVSKY: Oh, that name Kovalovsky?

MOORE: MmHm.

KOVALOVSKY: I'll tell you what to do. We'll cut it.

Maybe it sounds too, too much English. First we go down my name. First we start with 'ova' put a 'k' on the front, it's 'kova'. And, uh, my, uh, the other half will be KovaLOVsky, Lovsky, think about the 'lov', Lovsky. (he laughs)

MOORE: Okay, and where were you born?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, I was born in Czechoslovakia...

MOORE: What was the town's name?

KOVALOVSKY: The town's name, uh, Skalika.

MOORE: Skalika. Could you spell that?

KOVALOVSKY: Yeah. S-, S-K-A-L-I-, Skali, K-I.

Skalika.

MOORE: That's not, that's okay.

KOVALOVSKY: I want, give me, you have my (?)?

MOORE: Yeah, okay And what's your birth date? Tell me your birth date. When were you born?

KOVALOVSKY: Okay, here, here's my city name.

MOORE: Okay, so you're writing it out here, S-K-A-L

KOVALOVSKY: Skali, Skalik, ka. Skalika.

MOORE: Right. S-K-A-L-I-K-A.

KOVALOVSKY: Yeah, Skalika.

MOORE: Okay, good. Now what's your birth date, then?

KOVALOVSKY: My birthday, (he drops something) oops, pardon me. I was born May the twenty, 1907.

MOORE: Okay, and you said Skalika was the town, how big was Skalika?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, it must, now it about only, it has about, I don't know how many. Uh, two thou-, I don't know actually

MOORE: Okay, um...

KOVALOVSKY: Oh, no, wait a minute. It must've had maybe five, I don't know about five million people or whatever.

MOORE: And what was the major industry in that town?

KOVALOVSKY: Ah, there was I suppose a lot of agriculture.

MOORE: Agriculture?

KOVALOVSKY: Yeah. But my mother, she was working in a factory. And they, she was making little boxes like for, for, put something in. Anything. All kinds of little boxes.

MOORE: MmHm. Now what was your father's name?

KOVALOVSKY: Paul.

MOORE: Paul?

KOVALOVSKY: Paul Kovalovsky.

MOORE: All right. And what was his occupation?

KOVALOVSKY: Oh he was, he was just working, you know.
He was the family laborer.

MOORE: A laborer. And what did your father look like?

KOVALOVSKY: (he laughs) How would I...

MOORE: How would you describe him to someone who hasn't
seen him?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, uh, he...

MOORE: How tall was he about?

KOVALOVSKY: About, he was, about my, my size.

MOORE: How tall are you?

KOVALOVSKY: Oh... five... maybe five six inches.

MOORE: What color hair did your dad have?

KOVALOVSKY: Probably like me. (he laughs) I don't know.

MOORE: Okay, what about his personality? How would you
describe his personality?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, my father personality, eh, he like to
praise himself too much, you know. But as me, I
don't care much about praising myself. Many
times he tells everybody how smart he is and it
wasn't true. (he laughs)

MOORE: And is there a story about your father that you
remember at all from your childhood?

KOVALOVSKY: No, I don't, uh, I don't remember him that

much my, my father. He, he was, I was born in 1907 and he, he, he leave, eh, earlier to America.

MOORE: MmHm...

KOVALOVSKY: Well, we had problem with the Hungarians. They, they don't give us no school and then when they, ah, they want to make me somebody else, ah, what I am not. And we don't like it. But anyhow, when the First World War come, when the First World War, I, ah, I remember that. I happened to be at, there's a river, Moravian river. It's close in to the Danube and I happened, happened to be, there was a forest up there and, eh, I hear a noise, I see shooting. I said, "What the hell, what's going on, now?" (he laughs) It was in the forest. So I run around. It was, it was not far from where I was. And, eh, what I see, I come to the place where they were shooting. Well, what did I see? I see machine guns. And there was my people. They come to liberize us from the Huns. So that was it. We kicked the Huns out. And, uh, it was, and I, when I was a boy, I go among the soldiers because they were mine, (he laughs) they were our

liberators from the Huns. And then the, they were, they had twelve guns. Well, I see that captain give, give them hell. They weren't, they were not shooting right. (he laughs)

MOORE: Well, can you back up a bit from this story now about your childhood days, because you were thirteen when you came here. Tell me a little bit about your house that you lived in in the town. How big was that house that you lived in?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, it was house...

MOORE: Or apartment, I mean I don't know how you, how did you live? What was the place that you lived in in your small town? In your town.

KOVALOVSKY: Where we lived was not small. It was pretty big.

MOORE: The town or the house?

KOVALOVSKY: Oh, you mean, you want to know about the house.

MOORE: MmHm...

KOVALOVSKY: The house was a duplex. And in the middle, we have one side there was family and another side was family.

MOORE: And how many rooms were in your side of the family? How many rooms?

KOVALOVSKY: Each one, each one have just one room. One big room.

MOORE: And, did you have brothers and sisters?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, I've just got a sister. My sister Margaret.

MOORE: And is she older or younger?

KOVALOVSKY: Younger.

MOORE: Okay, how much younger is she than you?

KOVALOVSKY: Two years.

MOORE: Now, back to identifying your, now, you have a sister. And your mother's maiden name was what? Do you remember?

KOVALOVSKY: My mother's maiden name, I think it was Betsy. Elizabeth.

MOORE: Elizabeth was her first name and what was her name before she got married, do you remember?

KOVALOVSKY: (he laughs) I forgot.

MOORE: That's okay. That's all right. All right, so, you didn't describe your mother, what she looked like. How, what did your mother look like?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, you can, can look, look at her picture...

MOORE: Yeah, but for the tape, for the tape how could you say she looked? How tall was she? Her eye

color? Hair color?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, (he laughs) I make a noise. Okay, I guess greenish a little bit like you got (he laughs).

MOORE: So she had bluish-green eyes, your mother?

KOVALOVSKY: (he laughs) I really don't, I really...

MOORE: That's all right, we can go on to a different question. Okay, what about the house, back to the house you lived with your sister and your mother, the duplex.

KOVALOVSKY: Yes.

MOORE: Did you, how did you heat the house?

KOVALOVSKY: How did we keep it?

MOORE: Heat.

KOVALOVSKY: Oh, well, we have, there was one big, we have big room and we have to, we sleep, there was only, there was only my grandmother and me and my sister and then we have a kitchen...

MOORE: Did your mother live with you, too?

KOVALOVSKY: No, my, my, my mother, she was already in America.

MOORE: So your father and mother left for America and you lived with your grandmother?

KOVALOVSKY: Yeah.

MOORE: Whose mother was she?

KOVALOVSKY: Oh, oh, she...

MOORE: Which grandmother, your mother's mother or your father's mother?

KOVALOVSKY: Oh, now wait a minute. Oh, she was, she was our, our mother. My grandmother...

MOORE: Became your mother, right...

KOVALOVSKY: No, now wait a minute, that was my grandmother.

MOORE: Right. And whose mother was your grandmother? Was she your father's mother or was she your mother's mother?

KOVALOVSKY: She was my mother's mother.

MOORE: Your mother's mother. Okay. So, you stayed with her and did she do the cooking?

KOVALOVSKY: Yes.

MOORE: And, did she do the cleaning?

KOVALOVSKY: Yeah.

MOORE: So she took care of the whole household?

KOVALOVSKY: Yes.

MOORE: What was your favorite food as a child?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, we have (?) potatoes and then we have, we have in the middle of the house, well, there was two door, like one side and another side and

there was a little, little, like from this wall over there, part of the, of that, eh, that, eh, the hall. Well, anyhow, we have a mill and when we want to do anything we grind it.

MOORE: Who's we?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, us.

MOORE: All three of you?

KOVALOVSKY: Yeah. Sure, we were a smart family.

MOORE: Did you help your grandmother with cooking?

KOVALOVSKY: No, I don't. She do everything.

MOORE: She does everything...

KOVALOVSKY: She, she was pretty handy. She can do anything. (he laughs)

MOORE: And did you, how did you light the house? What type of lighting did you have?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, we have, ah, in our town we don't have no electric-, -icity so we have kerosene lamp.

MOORE: Kerosene lamps. And what about water? Where did you get your water?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, I'm not sure you will understand. That place where I live, it was a main road. It, it goes back to Poland.

MOORE: Oh, I see.

KOVALOVSKY: I live on the main road.

MOORE: Is that inside town or outside town?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, the town's, no, it was, I, it was inside the city. Yeah. And I was talking about that, uh, the mill. It was just sticking out a little bit. That, that hall out where we have the doors so the cold air don't come in, see. But we have that space for the mill grind and it's come pretty handy. (he laughs) We bring her stuff and my grandmother shake it up and then she grind it and she got meal. (he laughs)

MOORE: And did you keep animals at all?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, yeah, when grandmother was a little younger we keep pigs.

MOORE: Pigs. Did you keep any other animals at all?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, we have, uh, geese. (he laughs)

MOORE: Geese, too. When you ate your food, I'm trying to think of something now, oh, what about plumbing in the house?

KOVALOVSKY: Plumbing, well, we have toilet in the yard, yard, yeah.

MOORE: An outhouse, yeah. And what about the water? Where did you get it? You were telling me it was on the main road so...

KOVALOVSKY: Right across my, our street. Our street

across, you take a bucket of water or what
whatever you want. You had to pump it.

MOORE: Who were you closest to in you family? What
family member did you feel closest to?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, what, with closest I was? My
grandmother family.

MOORE: Your grandmother's family, yeah.

KOVALOVSKY: Because Grandmother raised me .(he laughs)

MOORE: Now what was religious life like back in
Czechoslovakia?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, the people are mostly Catholic, Roman
Catholic. And...

MOORE: Were you Catholic?

KOVALOVSKY: Yeah, but I am not very much, uh, going to,
I'm not for church too much.

MOORE: Was your grandmother for church very much?

KOVALOVSKY: She was, yeah.

MOORE: And did you go to church with your grandmother?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, we, I go, I go myself. (he laughs)
But she always tell me to go to church.

MOORE: How close was the church to your house?

KOVALOVSKY: It wasn't very far.

MOORE: What type of church was it? It was a Catholic
church but how, how did it look? Was it a big

church or a small one?

KOVALOVSKY: It was a Franciscan, Fran-, Fran-, St. Francis church. And we have a village not far from our city. They don't have no church. And these people come all, all, all of them to our city to church. (he laughs) Like a soldier they march. It wasn't too far. And, well, we call them Moravians because these people they live in Moravia and it was a borderline. Well, they speak a little bit like a Czech, but we, us, we are fluent. We are just a little bit difference and...

MOORE: Now, did you say prayers at night before you went to bed?

KOVALOVSKY: Oh yes, sometimes we have to do.

MOORE: How about when you ate, did you say grace?

KOVALOVSKY: Yeah, my grandmother teach, make us, she always teach us grace before. (he laughs)

MOORE: Now did you suffer any persecution, any religious persecution, before you came to this country?

KOVALOVSKY: No, we were all Catholics. (he laughs) Well, there was Lutherans, yeah, there was Lutherans and they had a church, too.

MOORE: What about holiday celebrations? What was you

favorite holiday?

KOVALOVSKY: What?

MOORE: What was your favorite holiday?

KOVALOVSKY: Favorite holiday? Oh, Christmas, Christmas.

MOORE: Why?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, Christmas is the main holiday for the
Christian people. (he laughs)

MOORE: And what did you do on Christmas that you liked?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, I like, well they celebrate. We have
a, Grandmother, she baked something good, you
know, like she bake egg bake, we call them
'kulachi', they call them Christmas cakes.

MOORE: Mm Hm...

KOVALOVSKY: And, uh, what kind, what kind of stove we
have, well, we have, it was about, it was like
this. There was a oven on the back like and then
there was two of them holes you could put pot up
on. You put fire under it. (he laughs) But we
call it transport. (he laughs) That, that stove,
yeah, we call it transport.

MOORE: Well, did you go to school in Czechoslovakia?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, when we have these gangsters
Hungarians they don't let us do speak our
language, and I, I hate that. I just hate it.

MOORE: All right, hold on. So...

KOVALOVSKY: So...

MOORE: You didn't have school?

KOVALOVSKY: No wait a minute. After we chased the Hungarians out then we start putting our language up there.

MOORE: Mm Hm...

KOVALOVSKY: Then I, then I have to learn (he laughs) well, it was not too much to, to put it in our language. And so I was very much pleased that I could speak my mother language.

MOORE: And when was that, when did that happen? What year, about?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, the, the year when we the first World War. Was that, I think it was 19-, what was it, 1918? The First World War stop about 1918 and that's when we kicked the Hungarians out and, uh, we get the, we get the teachers from the Czechs. They come down because they were, they have the same language almost like us, we can.

MOORE: Well, did you know any English prior to coming to the United States?

KOVALOVSKY: Any what?

MOORE: English.

KOVALOVSKY: What, they come to United States?

MOORE: No, did you know any English before you came here?

KOVALOVSKY: No, I didn't know.

MOORE: Now, tell me how you came here? Now, your parents left in what year? How old were you when your parents left for the United States?

KOVALOVSKY: Go and see, go and see, there's my picture. Go ahead.

MOORE: No, no. How big were you about? How old were you when your parents left?

KOVALOVSKY: I was about five years old.

MOORE: Five years old. And did you hear from them during the First World War?

KOVALOVSKY: Oh, yeah, they, yeah, they would write us and sometimes they would send us money. We sure need it.

MOORE: Did you, did you experience hunger when you were a child? Were you ever hungry?

KOVALOVSKY: No, we don't have too much to eat but we were always, we always have a, potatoes, cabbages, and then we kill a pig. (he laughs) So we eat some of it. We have a few pieces of, what do you call this, ground, dry stuff, you

know, whatever you wanted. Cabbages, mostly potatoes. Potatoes grow pretty good. (he laughs)

And I used to be, it was nice, it was pretty happy, I was pretty happy. I was pretty happy up there. I miss my parents. (he laughs) And I, I don't like the Hungarians, that's when I...

MOORE: Well, how did you come to the United States? When did you come? How did you finally come? After the war, obviously, in 1921, or was it 1920, sorry, you came. So you waited until after the war was over...

KOVALOVSKY: Yes.

MOORE: Now, how, who financed? How did you come here? Who paid for it?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, my father. My father was working in a coal mine. There was a lot of coal here.

MOORE: In Pittsburgh? He came to Pittsburgh. He was working in the coal mines?

KOVALOVSKY: Yes, and then he got, I don't know, he was working in a coal mine and sometimes they shooting, you know, to break the coal and a big hunk of coal must have hit my father and broke his rib so he was a little crippled. And he, well, he gave us a ship ticket.

MOORE: Gave who? Your sister, you and your grandmother?

KOVALOVSKY: No, my grandmother never come to America.

Only who was our, our, escort that, eh, Rudolph.

MOORE: Your cousin Rudolph?

KOVALOVSKY: Yeah, he, he guide us over here.

MOORE: Now, why didn't your grandmother come?

KOVALOVSKY: She was too old.

MOORE: Did she want to come?

KOVALOVSKY: I don't know. She don't say. (he laughs)

MOORE: Okay, so you came and your cousin Rudolph. What was Rudolph doing for work?

KOVALOVSKY: He was a barber.

MOORE: He was a barber. Where?

KOVALOVSKY: Over there.

MOORE: So Rudolph..

KOVALOVSKY: Now, wait a minute, Rudolph they used to live in Austria, in Vienna. And then, see, they seem to be having a hard time. So they come to my city (laughing) they think it was more food. But there was a little bit more food we got. Almost anybody could get a piece of land and they work on it.

MOORE: Now, do you remember packing to leave for the United States? Getting ready to go?

KOVALOVSKY: Yeah.

MOORE: What did you take with you?

KOVALOVSKY: Oh, my mother says she wants some walnut (he laughs) so I, we find a little bag and my God I carried those walnuts from Czechoslovakia, bring it over here. (he laughs)

MOORE: Did they arrive here? Did you get them here?

KOVALOVSKY: Yeah, They were good. (he laughs)

MOORE: All right, so you packed walnuts and what was your grandmother who raised you and you were close to her, what was her reaction? Your grandmother, when you left, what was her reaction?

KOVALOVSKY: When I left, I don't know because I left. I don't see her no more.

MOORE: Was she, did she, I mean, did she want you to go?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, yeah, sure, we have to go to our parents. (he laughs)

MOORE: Yeah, and how did she feel? Was she alone afterwards?

KOVALOVSKY: Yeah, she was alone afterwards. She was, she was good grandmother. I love her.

MOORE: What do you remember about leaving? How did you get to the port? What do you remember about

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leaving home then?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, I always long for my gran-, for my parents. (he laughs) And I was happy to see my parents.

MOORE: Now, you left home and where did you go from home first when you were on your way to the United States?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, first, when we left our house there was a rail link, you know, because the trains stop over to my city. So, we go on a train and we went to a, what they call it, ah, the city Antwerp.

MOORE: You went to Belgium.

KOVALOVSKY: Belgium, yeah. And we find a hotel up there. It was American hotel and it cost, I think, one dollar we have to pay them, you know. And we have, our...

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

MOORE: We're talking about Antwerp, now.

KOVALOVSKY: Yes, we had, ah, from Vienna we come down and then they, they guide us to an American

hotel. It was close to, it was close to the, what they call the English Channel. I used to walk around and I look at the England from the, from the (?) side (he laughs) and I could see England. I could see the ports porches with people out there. (he laughs)

MOORE: So, you left from Antwerp. Do you remember the name of the boat that you left on?

KOVALOVSKY: No, I don't. I forgot. (he laughs)

MOORE: And you stayed overnight in hotel, now when did, what month and year was this?

KOVALOVSKY: Oh...

MOORE: Here you have written down it was August, 1920.

KOVALOVSKY: Something like that, yeah, it was getting colder already. August is.

MOORE: It's written here on your application. You wrote this, you filled that in. Now, what type of accommodations did you have on the ship?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, everybody have a, I was in, I was below the deck, I remember, yeah. I could see the, the water just come about half of the, they have a little window up there to look around. And I look and the, the waves hitting it all the time. And they come, I come on the deck. One

thing is we got plenty of food, though.

MOORE: And were you in third class, second class or first class?

KOVALOVSKY: Oh, I guess we were probably third class because we don't have much money.

MOORE: Were you, now, you were traveling with your sister and your cousin. Where were they in relation to you in the accommodations? Where did they sleep? Were you together or were you separate?

KOVALOVSKY: Now wait a minute. I want to get a clear picture of it. This must be a troop ship. There was a lot of beds in there (he laughs) because the war just about to ended. So, and my little sister, she was sick all the time. She got, ah, it was all the time the ship go all the time up and down, up and down, you know, rocking. She was vomiting all the time and she was always thirsty. I just had to bring her water (he laughs) but I was feeling very good. I run around the ship a little and look around. And the captain must have liked me. He always give me either apple or orange or something. (he laughs) But I was dressed like a American. I, I

have a pants. Short pants with stockings. I used to wear stockings. But my father, he bought me shoes and them shoes were a little bit small. (he laughs) And then comes a time that we have to move for America. Well, the woman up there, he, she, he, she has to examine us, you know. They are very particular the United States son't want any, they would ensure that they're not sick or...

MOORE: Did you have a medical examination before you got...

KOVALOVSKY: Over there, yeah.

MOORE: Over there you had one?

KOVALOVSKY: On the ship.

MOORE: On the ship. Did you have one at Ellis Island?

KOVALOVSKY: Oh, yeah.

MOORE: Okay, all right, so had an, you had an examination on the ship? And what did they check?

KOVALOVSKY: What?

MOORE: What did they check?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, they, they, it was no too much of a thing. They just look you over, see if you walk a little bit and you know. (Ms. Moore laughs)

Doctor was, people go in a row like, there was a big row of people up there and doctors come and look.

MOORE: Now, you had, the food on the boat, you said.
How was that?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, the food, it was not too bad, but when I got to Castle Garden they got fish by God and I don't like that, them fish. (he laughs)

MOORE: Do you remember anything on the boat different at all than before?

KOVALOVSKY: Now, on that boat at 3 o'clock all the men, most of the men, they open up their door and they give, they sell liquor. (he laughs) You could drink anything you want to if you got the money.
But I was little. I don't drink. (he laughs)
But one good thing about it. I learned how to eat herrings, you know. The men, they play cards, they go, they were more on the front. They were mostly in the middle of that boat so we don't rock so much. (he laughs) Then, then they'd change money, you know, if you wanted money. Everybody had a different kind of money.
(he laughs)

MOORE: And do you remember seeing land for the first

time?

KOVALOVSKY: Land?

MOORE: The Statue of Liberty? Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

KOVALOVSKY: Yeah, I see it but it was just before that Castle Garden up there...

MOORE: You mean Ellis Island?

KOVALOVSKY: Yeah.

MOORE: Do you remember the reaction of the people on board? Was there any kind of reaction? Did it mean anything to you? The Statue of Liberty; did it mean anything?

KOVALOVSKY: No. To me it was just an ordinary statue. Well, we understand it's supposed to be liberty, you know. (he laughs) One thing about the Slavic, the language. (he adjusts his microphone) Wherever we don't, we don't have no trouble with languages. It seems to be, we seem to understand other Slavic people, you know. Of course, you got Russian, Polish and Serbians around all the time and we always find somebody to speak with (he laughs) our language. That's pretty good. But nobody can speak any English. (he laughs)

MOORE: Well, when you got to Ellis Island, how did you

get from the boat to Ellis Island? Do you remember?

KOVALOVSKY: How did I get to the boat?

MOORE: No, how did you get to Ellis Island from the boat?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, we got, there was a small boat take us up there.

MOORE: And what were the conditions on that boat? How many people did they put on that boat at one time?

KOVALOVSKY: Oh, I would say about maybe twenty or something.

MOORE: Now what do you remember about Ellis Island?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, we, we don't, our people called it Castle Garden (he clears his throat) and we didn't know what it was, the meaning of it, you know? And when I come over here then I understand better that was Castle Garden...

MOORE: And what happened on Castle Garden? What were your impressions? What did it look like?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, you, you got, ah, there was a lot of people up there. And I find a lot of Slavic people up there so I could speak with them a little bit. And they give me a bed. It was a

mesh. I, it was like a, the bed was, like one of those, they call it, you hang on a tree or...

MOORE: Hammock...

KOVALOVSKY: Hammock, yeah, hammock and by God, it was mesh and there was no, nothing on it. So I had to sleep like that, on a hammock. (he laughs)

MOORE: For how long did you stay at Ellis Island?

KOVALOVSKY: Oh, about five or six days or something.

MOORE: And what was the food like?

KOVALOVSKY: The food, I don't like it very much.

MOORE: Why not? What was it like?

KOVALOVSKY: It was fish. But it was made, they was, uh, use steam to cook it. (he laughs) There was a funny thing about it. There was on the next table there was a row of Jews. Well, I thought maybe they, they have something better than I have. But it was not any better than we have on the table. And I come and sit with them. (he laughs) But it was not any better so...

MOORE: And did you have a medical examination at Ellis Island?

KOVALOVSKY: Yeah, they come, the doctors come and look at us.

MOORE: Now, what language did they talk to you in?

KOVALOVSKY: Who?

MOORE: The doctors and the officials at Ellis Island.

KOVALOVSKY: Well, I couldn't understand English and I don't know. They just look at us. They might tell us a few, few words but you can't understand.

MOORE: Now, do you remember having to sit and wait?

KOVALOVSKY: What?

MOORE: Why were you detained? For, why did you stay three or... five or six days, you said. Why did you stay that long at Ellis Island?

KOVALOVSKY: I don't know why, why they keep us so long. We were anxious to go away. (he laughs)

MOORE: And you don't know the reason why you were kept?

KOVALOVSKY: Mm, no, I don't know why. Maybe they want some information from us.

MOORE: Mm Hm...

KOVALOVSKY: But they, they do that with everybody.

MOORE: And, Is there any, are there any stories about Ellis Island that you remember? Any story at all that you remember about that place?

KOVALOVSKY: No, I don't, I don't remember.

MOORE: Now, how did, what happened after five or six days? How did you get out?

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KOVALOVSKY: Well, we get on a boat. It take us on the shore. From there on, then we take a train.

MOORE: And who escorted you to the train? Did you go by yourself or your cousin or how did you get...

KOVALOVSKY: Yeah, well they, my cousin was our escort. So, we followed him.

MOORE: Now, you went then to Pittsburgh? Where did you go from Ellis Island? To where? To here?

KOVALOVSKY: To here? No, we, we live in a different place than here.

MOORE: Where did you live then?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, there's this street they call Benwood Avenue...

MOORE: What's it called?

KOVALOVSKY: That street that we come to first they call it Benwood Avenue.

MOORE: Benwood Avenue?

KOVALOVSKY: Yes.

MOORE: Here in Pittsburgh?

KOVALOVSKY: No, McKees Rocks.

MOORE: McKees Rocks, sorry. Okay, McKees Rocks. And you came to McKees Rocks then first...

KOVALOVSKY: Yeah...

MOORE: Okay, Benwood Avenue. What type of place was

that? Who did it, who did it belong to?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, it belonged to, part of it belonged to Stowe township and part of it belonged to McKees Rocks.

MOORE: But your mother and father had lived there while you were living in Czechoslovakia?

KOVALOVSKY: No. They buy the house a little bit earlier before we come. There's another big hill, and so we stay up there. There's something with my father, he wasn't a, he was not a guy that's a handy guy. Yeah, I was a little better. I could almost fix anything, you know, for me. (he laughs) And, he, was not there. Well, I guess everybody's different. Some, some boys or girls they could learn, learn fast. Other people, you know, they, they learn slow.

MOORE: Well, how big was that house that your parents bought? How big of a house? How many rooms?

KOVALOVSKY: Oh, well, wait a minute, oh, there was about five, five rooms or something like that.

MOORE: Now, did your cousin come to live with you, too?

KOVALOVSKY: Yeah.

MOORE: So, Rudolph came to live with you? So, in that house you had your mother, your father, your sister, you and Rudolph? Now, what type of heating did the house have?

KOVALOVSKY: What type what?

MOORE: Heating.

KOVALOVSKY: Heating?

MOORE: Heating. Heat.

KOVALOVSKY: Heat. Well, we eat like any other American. We buy food in the store.

MOORE: No, no, heat.

KOVALOVSKY: Oh, heat.

MOORE: Yeah.

KOVALOVSKY: Well, at that time, at that time when I come here people used coal because there was a lot of coal here. This house here, when I bought it, there was a, right over here was a chimney here. And I, I take it out. And that house, this kitchen, it, it was, it sink down. That chimney must, that whole (?) was

built out of wood. That wood was cross and they built that chimney on the top, on the top of it. And it broke down and you couldn't even close the door.

But I, people, people were living here.

Well, when I got over here the first thing I do, the first thing I start with in the cellar and then I started little by little with this, with this kitchen. Well I happen to, I happen to do, I have to lift it up. I leveled it.

MOORE: This house you mean?

KOVALOVSKY: Yeah. I have to lift it up. I lift this up.

MOORE: We need to, we need to go back to the other house yet. We don't know much about your old house that your parents lived in. Then we'll get back to this one a little bit. But in, your father was working in the coal mines, right?

KOVALOVSKY: Yeah.

MOORE: And was your mother working?

KOVALOVSKY: No.

MOORE: No.

KOVALOVSKY: She, she take care of the kids.

MOORE: Okay, and did you have more children, brothers
and sisters, here? Did your mother and
father have more children?

KOVALOVSKY: Yes. We have two born in Europe and two in
America, (he laughs) so there was four.

MOORE: So two, who were born here?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, we have, eh, over here was my brother
Frank and the other one was, oh, I
think it was Margaret

MOORE: Now, did you go to school when you came here?

KOVALOVSKY: Yeah.

MOORE: Where did you go to school?

KOVALOVSKY: Up by the Benwood Avenue where I live.

MOORE: And did you have, how did you find school? Was
it difficult not knowing English?

KOVALOVSKY: It was pretty tough on me until I catch it
by little by little, you know. (he
laughs)

MOORE: And did, what grade did you go into?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, they, I guess, I guess I was a little
bit already big for it but they give me

first grade so I catch on the, the words. And then I stay a little bit and then they put me through higher, to higher grade.

MOORE: Did you ever suffer any bigotry or persecution for being Czechoslovakian here in this country?

KOVALOVSKY: No.

MOORE: Did they make fun of you for being foreign?

KOVALOVSKY: No.

MOORE: Let's go back to that house because we only have a little sketchy impression of it. The house you lived in, how, where, how was the plumbing? Did you have indoor toilets or outdoor?

KOVALOVSKY: Where? In here?

MOORE: In the house, yeah, in McKees Rocks when you came here.

KOVALOVSKY: Well, the, the toilet was outside.

MOORE: Yeah. Where did you get your water?

KOVALOVSKY: With a pump.

MOORE: With a pump. And where was that?

KOVALOVSKY: Right in front of my, our house. And the water was a little bit hard. There

must be coal in there. I..

MOORE: And did you have electricity or was it...

KOVALOVSKY: No we don't have no, they have gas. At that
time they have gaslight, you know...

MOORE: And how did your father get to work every day?
What means of transport did he use?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, he wasn't working because he was
cripple.

MOORE: I see. So he was out of work then because of the
accident.

KOVALOVSKY: Yeah.

MOORE: How much schooling did you go through then? Did
you finish high school?

KOVALOVSKY: Oh, we don't have no high school at that
time. But later they did build a high
school. (he laughs)

MOORE: So how long did you go to school?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, I would say about fourth grade or so.
But I catch up because I like to read.
(he laughs)

MOORE: So, tell me a little bit about you life then,
after school, what was the first job
you got?

KOVALOVSKY: First job? First job I got I, I make

baskets. There was a lady. She was on Benwood Avenue. Her son was like a, He was pretty educated. And she come down for me and said "Tony, we, we're going to give you a job, all right?" So she, she take me over there and give me that job, uh, and show me just how to make these baskets.

MOORE: How long, what was your main occupation during your lifetime? Was basket making your main occupation.

KOVALOVSKY: Basket making was my first occupation.

MOORE: And what happened after that then?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, I have many kids of jobs. Oh, yeah, I, after that there was a, in McKees Rocks, there was a factory and they make, they was making pots. Pots. Pots and pans and I got a job up there and I was helping there. They had what they call, we call it (?). They get sheeting and I, I was putting it in the water and other guy he was putting it into the press and push it down. (he laughs) Then...

MOORE: Was that your main job then later in life?

KOVALOVSKY: No. I, I have other, I have other jobs but this was my first job and this thing. There was a lot of people got their fingers smashed. You know, they don't, they don't take it fast enough and the press goes down. And, my God, if you don't hurry and you leave your fingers out, it is going to smash you.

MOORE: Now, tell me how did you meet your wife. You mentioned that you had three children and your wife. How did you meet them. I'm not going to make this...

KOVALOVSKY: Well, I saw her at a dance. I meet her at the dance. This used to, this used to be happy town, you know. (he laughs) She loved to dance, too.

MOORE: So you met and, was she Czechoslovakian?

KOVALOVSKY: No, she was Polish.

MOORE: Polish, right. And you have three daughters?

KOVALOVSKY: Yes, (gesturing to photographs) look, look at them...

MOORE: What, what did you daughters do for professions? What did they grow up to be?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, they grow up, they grow up over here
in my house.

MOORE: Did your wife work?

KOVALOVSKY: No.

MOORE: When you look back on you life how do you feel
about coming to the United States? Do
you think that it was a good move?

KOVALOVSKY: Well, we don't, we really don't have no
choice too much. (he laughs) Because we
were glad that we could go because it
was not for us very good down there.

MOORE: And do you view yourself as an American now?

KOVALOVSKY: What?

MOORE: Do you think of yourself as an American?

KOVALOVSKY: (laughing) What am I else. I'm American
citizen. My father was an American
citizen so I become one on his citizen
papers.

MOORE: I'd like to thank you on behalf of Ellis Island
for this interview and for helping us
and for giving us the opportunity to
speak with you. (Mr. Kovalovsky laughs)
This is Kate Moore in McKees Rocks,
Pennsylvania, July 18th, 1994 signing

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off for the Ellis Island Oral History
Project. (Mr. Kovalovsky laughs)