

Interviewed by Lucille Brown
Miami Beach, Florida
1974.

Born Sidney Kazenowsky in 1903, Mr. Kay had an Orthodox upbringing and was involved in the Zionist youth movement throughout his childhood. Disappointing his father, who was hoping he'd become a doctor or a lawyer, Sidney became a dance instructor. His dance studio was a commercial success and very popular in Lodz in the 1930s.

Lucille Brown: Sidney Kay. And where were you born?

SK: I was born in [Lodz, Poland](#), an industrial city which is known in the whole world as a city of textiles and all different things.

LB: In what year?

SK: 1903

LB: Okay, you were born in Lodz, and I have a [little map here, the Kingdom of Poland](#). And Lodz had another name, didn't it?

SK: No.

LB: Was that not Lublin?

SK: No, Lublin is a well known city which has nothing to do with Lodz and it's pretty far.

LB: Where would Lodz be on the map?

SK: You see, it will be here. Here is Warsaw. Here is Lodz and here is Lublin.

LB: Aha!

SK: Warsaw is the capital, Lodz is the second city which population and the growth. Lublin is far and closer to the Russian part already. It was not under Russia, but it was closer by. Lodz was more close to Germany.

LB: If you talked about Lodz, had the Haskalah - the Enlightenment- reached you by the time you were a young boy?

SK: Oh sure. Yes.

LB: How large was your immediate family?

SK: It was six. Four children: two brothers - I and my brother, and two sisters and my father and mother.

LB: And you lived in a house? In an apartment?

SK: Yes, in an apartment together with parents. My father was [a tailor](#).

LB: Did people work for him or did he do his own tailoring?

SK: No, he worked for people but he hired people who worked with him together. This was not like here. In the whole Europe a tailor worked in his apartment where he lived. And most of the time was in the big kitchen. It happened very often that the kitchen, in the cities of Europe, even in France or Belgium, the kitchen was sometimes bigger. There was no living room.

LB: Can you tell me about that? Because I never heard this before. How did the tailoring business work out then? Did your father get a contract or an order from somebody else?

SK: No. He got private customers. Most of the time, it was unusual to buy suits. Middle class people didn't buy suits because it was only for the lower section of people who worked in magasins.

LB: Magasin... it's the French word for shop or store.

SK: Yes. What's a magazine called? If I'd say magazine you'd think it was to read, right?

LB: Right.

SK: Magasin. Now the tailor got his customers and one recommended the other. If the customer was satisfied ... everything was custom made. So anybody, even people who were not in the middle class, but more or less if he made a decent living he went to a tailor. So there were categories in tailoring. There were tailors... Let's say, my father was not a bad tailor but when I grew up and I established myself, I was married and I was pretty well-off, so I went to a higher class of tailor than my father was and he took three times as much as my father took for a suit or for a manteau (coat).

LB: Did your father work in the kitchen?

SK: Yes.

LB: He cut, he measured, he stitched?

SK: The measuring was in the other room. You know, when the customer came you didn't make it in the kitchen. So, he invited him to the next room; to the living - bedroom. Sweet girl, when I tell you this, there is no stories in it. There is no show-offs. Because the most of the people, when they get an interview they would like to hide some aspects of their life which wouldn't fulfill right now their situation.

LB: No, I don't want that.

SK: The majority do that. And if you took such interviews, and I'm sure... if I would know those people, they didn't tell you one tenth of a percent the truth.

LB: But now you tell me the truth.

SK: I'm telling you.

LB: So we go into the living-bedroom.

SK: But in the same token, my grandfather was in [Petrikev](#) and he was a tailor; he was a very rich man. You understand what it happens? He was in a smaller town. And he was also a tailor, but he was very known, and he worked only for Orthodox people. He made the long jibbitzes. They were called jibbitzes and it was like an oschdeir. You know what an oschdeir is? How you call here an oschdeir?

Julia Kay (his wife): A [dowry](#).

SK: A dowry, you know, when you get married your mother made your dowry and everything. So it was. And there was no places to spend money so my grandfather accumulated money, and then he lent money. He became a little [Shylock](#).

LB: He was a money lender.

SK: And then, yes, he bought a house. He was an owner of a house and his name was Klein Pinchusel which was known. Anybody, everybody in the city of Petrikev knew Klein Pinchusel.

If you came to the railroad station in Petrikev and you went down to take a [fiacre](#), you know, a...

LB: A horse drawn cab, right.

SK: Yes, a horse cab. And if you would say “Kazenowsky” he would look at you and say, “Listen, there is no such Kazenowsky among the Jews”. But if you would say “Klein Pinchusel”, he would say, “Why didn’t you say right away?” He would take you to the ... before the First World War, was Vikovska. And when Poland was established it was Pilsudskego for the name of the great leader. I hope you heard about [Pilsudski](#).

LB: I certainly have.

SK: Yes, so it was the street was called. As a matter of fact, in his house used to live the grandson of the Rabbi of Raddishchev which was important. He didn’t pay rent and this is beautiful and...

LB: But wait. I understand, but we’re getting out of sequence. Let’s go back to your father. Finish telling us how he went about making a suit.

SK: He’d measure the person in the living-bedroom because this was a bedroom and a living room at the same time. He’d take the measurement and then he took the work on the big table in the kitchen. It was a big kitchen - there was nothing else to do in the kitchen but to prepare food. Mother prepared food. And the other part, she haven’t got nothing to do in the kitchen so over there was the vashtat. Vashtat means the place of the workmanship.

LB: From what language is that?

SK: It is from German, the werkstadt, ein werstadt.

LB: I thought Polish was more like Russian.

SK: It is, it is a [Slavic language](#). But certain words were taken from the German because, you see, Poland was occupied by [Prussia](#), so then they took some. Werkstadt they made vashtat.

LB: All right, let’s finish the suit.

SK: So then the man came three times to try. Three times because this was made-to-order, custom made. And he took the suit out.

LB: Nobody else worked on the suit but your father?

SK: My father and two helpers. He had two helpers. Without helpers you couldn’t make a living.

LB: Where did the helpers work? Did they sew for him or cut or what?

SK: They sewed. No, no, my father cut and he also sewed and they sewed and everybody got his part. Because a suit is divided in four or five parts. There are the two sleeves and the back and the collar. You understand? And everybody, in order to put this together, you got to prepare it.

LB: So it’s almost like what happened here in the [Garment Workers’ Union](#) where you got a certain portion you worked on that then it went to the next worker and they worked on that, and so on...

SK: Yes, yes.

LB: It’s not piecework, it’s...

SK: No, it's not because over there, everyone who learned this trade knew from A to Z.

LB: They could make the whole thing.

SK: They could yes. Let's say a young man who was 13, 14 years old when he started, by 19 years he could be the tailor himself. And if he was able and willing to work, he could by 19, 20 years old, open his own atelier.

LB: So Lodz at this time was part of the [Austro-Hungarian Empire](#)?

SK: No, no, the Prussian.

LB: Of the Germanic States?

SK: Lucille here we have Lodz, right? Now you see this city Kalisz is laying on the border between [Posen](#), and after Posen goes Germany. Posen was taken by the Germans and Germanized.

LB: When?

SK: In 1775 when the Americans took over and became a country, a republic.

LB: So when did Lodz become part of Prussia? Was that when they split up the kingdom of Poland in three parts?

SK: When they [split in three, yes](#).

LB: Was that in 1789? It was before the [French Revolution](#)?

SK: Yes, almost in the same time. Because 1794 Napoleon already started. Napoleon came through a little later, 1794. But Napoleon started already then he went through Poland. [Matter of fact that he established a Constitution in Poland](#). And his motto was in Polish, "Kazda obywatel jezuruwne voblitchu pravaru". "Every citizen has the right in order of law, has the same rights." This established Codex Napoleona, the [Code of Napoleon](#).

LB: When you were born you were Prussian citizens?

SK: No, Russian. Prussian was here. Poles in Kalish. I was Russian. Lodz, you see, here. This is the part, here. I will show you if you have it on the map. You see, this is Prussia. Here is Posen. It was Posnan. According to the legend, the three brothers recognized each other and it was called "posnatche" means "recognize" and there was the name Posnan, and this was Posen.

LB: All right, so you were then under Russian rule in 1903 when you were born?

SK: Yes.

LB: And you lived in an apartment and your father was a tailor and there were six people in your family?

SK: Yes.

LB: What kind of an apartment/? Was it a building with other apartments in it?

SK: It was, yes. This was a huge building with a lot of apartments. Brick. It was a very big house.

LB: And Lodz was a big city of about how many people?

SK: 650,000.

LB: It was in the Pale (of Settlement)?

SK: Yes, sure it was limited. In Russia was especially the capital cities like Moscow, Petrograd, they were restricted to Jews, except to ones here and there. Like, if you would say [Feuchtwanger wrote "Jud Suss"](#) how we got the language, how we got this rotten jargon? From the Jew who went out from the ghetto; there were not many. They, "the Jud Suss" who was privileged who lend money. So those Jews who could go out of the ghetto in Germany, they brought back this language.

LB: Which language are you talking about is a rotten language? Yiddish?

SK: Sure and I speak a pretty well, Yiddish. And I love Yiddish as a matter of fact, you see that. I am reading only "[Forward](#)". And I don't read no English language because I'd rather have ... How you say in Brooklyn a girdle?

LB: A girdle?

SK: Goidle. And how is a girl? Goil.

LB: I understand what you're saying. The "argot" you're saying.

SK: Yes. So that's what they made from the German language. They built it up their own like from *werkshtadt - washtat*... So the people who went out they brought back this language.

LB: Do you consider that Yiddish had a life of its own? A literature of its own?

SK: It's not a rotten language, it's the most beautiful language as a grammatic, as a stylistic.

LB: You live in the apartment house and your father's a tailor and you went to school?

SK: Yes.

LB: Were you the oldest child?

SK: The oldest child and the oldest son. We are two brothers and two sisters.

LB: Where did you go to school?

SK: I didn't go to *cheder*. I went right away to a Hebrew school. It was a preparation school for gymnasium, for high school.

LB: Public or Russian?

SK: No, no, no for a regular gymnasium.

LB: Gymnasium in Europe is the high school.

SK: Yes, yes, and where I learned also Hebrew and everything.

LB: What else did you learn?

SK: As a young fellow; I was only six years old when I started to go to the school named Eisenburg. Were two brothers and they led a very fine school where -it's not even nice to say- a better class of children... how to tell you? They're permitted or received. A better class not from the very poor who couldn't afford it because this was not a public school out of the city, but this was a private school where I started.

LB: So your father paid to have you go?

SK: Sure.

LB: And what did you learn there?

SK: I learned secular education and Hebrew.

LB: What did you learn in your secular education?

SK: The language in Russian, Arithmetic, World History. But you don't start being six years old learning... I'm talking about what was the program from one class to another, you understand, by promotion. But the start was like Chumash and Russian. And then Tanach, the [Pesukim](#) and the [Nevi'im](#). So this I learned by 3 years.

LB: In what language did they teach you arithmetic, in Russian?

SK: Russian language.

LB: And all the teachers were Jewish?

SK: Jewish, yes. And they were called Litvaks. They were Litvaks, from Vilna which were the most..., well in my opinion the Russian Jews are the best Jews in the world. I mean, this mine opinion which I went through in my wide practice which what I met with people. So I have mine opinion. There is known that the Russian Jews are very hospitable and very good and even they used to say they are “Russicher” because the Russians are called *chazerim* (pigs) . But then the people who live over there adopting the same epithet. Like, let’s say the people in my city, Lodz, was an industrial city and was called the Lodz *gonavim* (crooks)... So everyone who was a poor, poor fellow was called a Lodzegonif. Why? Because they were business people and in business in that time there, you got an opinion that everybody’s a *gonif* (crook). So all- right this is defame, which it goes after nations and people and individuals. Everybody has his burden on his shoulder, which he doesn’t know it even.

LB: So you learned in Russian and you learned in Hebrew.

SK: In Russian because Polish was not permitted.

LB: So how did you learn Polish?

SK: It was Polish I learned home from the maid. You see, in Poland, except the very, very poor couldn’t afford a maid home. But the one, more or less, had a maid and she was a Polack from the village, a peasant. She didn’t speak no other language than Polish. And my mother was a progressive lady. Every son, except [Mr. Philip Roth](#), loves his mother. Philip Roth hates his mother, but what can you do? He doesn’t hate his mother, this is money, it’s only money.

LB: Well, Philip Roth is not our problem right now.

SK: No, he’s not involved here. Anyway, I don’t think that he thinks that as he wrote. Now it comes to another part of Jewish, you see, because his mother is a Rumanian, but father was a Polish Jew. But you know what [Portnoy](#) means. *Portnoy* is a tailor in Russian.

LB: Is that right? I didn’t know that.

SK: You have a Russian mother and she didn’t tell you? In the Russian “*portnoy*” is a tailor, and probably you know, everyone who got the name Portnoy was a tailor. Because when they gave the names on the markets - when they assembled all the people they looked at him, he said, “Do you want to... your name will be so and so. What you doing?” He said, “Portnoy. Budish portnoy.” Yes. So I mean, this is history again about something else.

LB: So you went to this school from six until when?

SK: Until eight; 3 years almost and then I went to a gymnasium. To the first class.

LB: Who ran the gymnasium?

SK: A Russian gymnasium. It was called Gymnasium Alexandrovna.

LB: In 1911?

SK: Yes.

LB: And it was run by the Russian government?

SK: By a Russian director. It was the government but they had Alexandrov was the director.

LB: In 1911 Nicholas was already on the throne.

SK: Oh yes, sure he was. Nicholas was on the throne. As a matter of fact, it was 300 years of the existence of the Romanovs. And it was one of the greatest feasts made in the streets of Polish cities. When I was a little child there were food in the streets on the big market on the big place. The middle of the city was a big place and there were tables with everything for nothing. And it was 300 years of the Romanovs.

LB: What did you learn in the gymnas? That was strictly in Russian then?

SK: Yes. But you see, here comes the conspiracy to teach Polish. The teacher who taught calligraphy, he was a Polack. As he taught calligraphy, in the same time he taught also Polish. But can you imagine that we being children, 8, 9, 10, 11 years old, we were so conspired that we didn't reveal that this man is teaching Polish because if suddenly the door opened and the director came in to make an inspection, the books were hidden inside the pulpit. It is called pulpit also in English, I hope. No?

LB: I know what you mean, it's the desk that lifts up.

SK: The desk. And it was really something which is hard to believe but I'm not talking out of my finger. I went through it. I'm not telling you stories just to show...

LB: So you learned Polish in the gymnas, too?

SK: Yes, yes. Then in home my mother spoke Polish and my father spoke Polish pretty well.

LB: So you spoke Polish, you spoke Russian...

SK: And then we learned German also.

LB: And you also studied Hebrew. You could read Hebrew.

SK: Oh yes, yes.

LB: Did you speak Yiddish at home?

SK: Very, very little. No, we understood because mother and father spoke Yiddish so obviously it came through...

LB: You sort of acquired it.

SK: By ear.

LB: But you eventually learned to read and write Yiddish?

SK: No, I never learned Yiddish - not to read and not to write, but alphabet is the same what in Hebrew.

LB: But you can read the Yiddish newspaper.

SK: I'm reading so fluently. I don't think there are many Jews, even journalists, who read better in Yiddish than I do.

LB: So you just picked up the reading?

SK: Yes.

LB: *Kanst schreiben Yiddish?* (Can you write Yiddish?)

SK: *Ich schreib a guten Yiddish und ich lez a sehr guten Yiddish.* (I write a good Yiddish and I read a good Yiddish)

LB: Where did you learn to write Yiddish?

SK: From the alphabet, from Hebrew.

LB: But the script is different from the print.

SK: No, the print is the same. Is the same orthography.

LB: So it's something that you just picked up, actually?

SK: Yes.

LB: So here you have Yiddish, Hebrew, Russian, Polish. When did you learn German?

SK: German we learned a little later on, after the First World War. In 1915 we went from Lodz to Petrikev.

LB: Where is Petrikev?

SK: It wouldn't be on the map.

L B: Well, just about where is it? Here's Lodz.

SK: Yes, Lodz, you see Petrikev would be here.

LB: In 1915 you went there. That was where your grandfather was.

SK: Yes, and he had a house and it wasn't so restricted as it was in the Second World War. And he was a wealthy man. Food was restricted. You got to stay in line a whole night from 2:00 at the morning when they opened the bakery and you got coupons. You couldn't get more. But for money you always get. So because my grandfather was a wealthy man, so he could buy, like smuggled... The bakery, he got his own - a peasant delivered to him farina - flour. It was not controlled by the government. When the Russians left Poland, Lodz was under the Germans and Petrikev was under the Austrian occupation. It was a lot easier because the Austrians were not so strict. They were not so ... how to say? You see, sometimes I am missing very many words and I shouldn't.

LB: Say it in another language, maybe I'll pick it up.

SK: "*Zey haben nisht geven azoi shtreng.*" They were not so cruel. They weren't so cruel as the Germans when they occupied the second time. During the First world War because...

LB: So you're saying the First World War they were much nicer than they were in the Second World War.

SK: This is nothing to compare. In the Second World War they were all [barbars](#).

LB: But they were not so in the First World War?

SK: No, no. They were intruders themselves. [Erich Maria Remarque](#) wrote All Quiet on the Western Front when German soldiers ate rats... I don't know if you read it. They ate the rats. And the bulletins came and there's no news on the western front.

LB: In the First World War, when the Austrians and the Germans occupied this section, they were kinder to the Jews than the Russians?

SK: Yes, sure! The Austrians were even kinder than the Germans. They were very strict, the Germans in the part where they occupied. If somebody did something not as the law was providing you could go to jail for a year and two. And sometimes they made five years. And they didn't stay in five years. But, you know, the sentence was. That's why there was a big smuggling from people in Lodz to the part which were occupied by the Austrians. So they were more tolerant, more liberal and the life was much easier. So, then I went over there to the gymnasium in Petrikev. I continued from Lodz because...

LB: So you were no longer in a Russian gymnase then?

SK: No they were liquidated, oh yes. You see, in 1914 the War start. I mean, the Russians left already in 1914 because the Germans defeated them and they...

LB: First the Russians pushed in and then they were pushed back.

SK: So then the Russian gymnasiums stopped already existing and started to be Polish because the Germans allowed Polish language to be established as a direct language in the schools, in all schools starting with public school. So then we started to learn also German in the Polish gymnasium, because of the border. War or not, for good or bad, the next border to Poland is German and the next border is Russia. So Russian we didn't learn anymore, but German we started to learn. So the languages were Hebrew when I started, but I forgot the whole language because it's more than fifty-five years that I am not practicing Hebrew. But here and there, as I said. I ask you if you are speaking Hebrew.

LB: No.

SK: So you said no, which I am a little bit disappointed.

LB: I'm sorry. (laughs) I'm learning it.

SK: Would be very nice if you would speak Hebrew.

LB: Yes, I'm sure it would.

SK: I mean, I anticipate from a lady as you are among your education, to know Hebrew.

LB: I expect that I will. You say you had a maid in your home. What did your mother do? What was her role in the family?

SK: The role to bring up her children. We were four children two years different from each other. So let's say, when I was six, my next brother was 4, my sister Manya was 2, and Karola was 1. When I was 7 Karola was 1.

LB: Did your mother cook?

SK: Yes, she cooked because those maids only prepared or they kept clean. And don't forget that it was a lot to keep clean because my father worked in the apartment.

LB: And who made your clothing and your sisters' clothing and your mother's clothing?

SK: My mother, her clothing was also made by a seamstress. Couldn't afford very elegant, but a seamstress ... I don't remember a time when we bought any clothes.

LB: So your mother didn't clean but she cooked.

SK: She prepared, she cooked, and everything.

LB: She oversaw the general upbringing.

SK: Yes.

LB: Did she teach you anything? Was her role that of a teacher at all?

SK: Yes, yes. My mother exceptionally, my dear lady... was also our teacher; our good bringing up mother. If I would be able to make 5 million dollars and to be a writer like Philip

Roth, because this is a blessing... You see, writing in mine opinion is a blessing. You cannot learn to write, you have to born with it. I was born with the blessing that I am able to music and my father didn't send me to school. If he would found out that I am inclined to music and I that I had good ear to pick up... but later when I was 12, 13 years old and mine uncle had a dance studio, a big one. I went to the piano with one finger I start,... you know that the first melody, I, a little Jewish fellow starts? [Hatikvah](#)... with one finger. And then whenever I sat down, I started with 2 and then with one hand. And when I got occasionally - I don't know how it was - I took a violin, I start to play the same Hatikvah.

LB: You say you were a little Jewish fellow. You are the first person I've spoken to where Yiddish was not spoken in the home and yet you say you were Jewish. Did your parents speak Yiddish?

SK: Yes, my parents spoke Yiddish. My grandfather and grandmother, they spoke Jewish and I learned. When I was 10, 11, then I spoke already Yiddish because the environment was...

LB: But your parents did not speak Yiddish to you?

SK: Not specially.

LB: It was not considered the language of the home.

SK: No, no and it was a typical Jewish family home.

LB: You're the first one I've met. Each person is so different.

SK: It was a typical Jewish home.

LB: Would you consider that you were middle class?

SK: One class lower than middle.

LB: Lower middle class.

SK: I couldn't go to a school where you paid.

LB: Where was your mother born?

SK: My mother was born in a small town, [Rokicina](#) where mine grandfather was a landowner.

LB: Was this under Russian...?

SK: Russian. And he owned land. As a matter of fact, later on, when they moved from there to city of Lodz, he became a *padreinchik*. I mean the man who was a contractor with the government.

LB: And what did he contract for?

SK: Building. He was a building contractor. And he was a very wealthy man. And he was not a Trade Unionist like my grandfather from Petrikev was a tailor. So he was not. He was a man of Hebrew education, Talmud, you know, because the old people from the small villages learned more than the people from little towns, from small towns. Because, over there small towns they started trades while in villages they didn't .

LB: In your parental family did your mother light the candles on Friday night?

SK: Yes, yes. It was a Jewish home.

LB: Did your father go to shul?

SK: My father went to shul and I went with him for many years when I became so called liberated. Even when I was liberated already, in my mind, I still got to respect... And I weren't married yet, I still got to respect. And as long I ate home by my father's table, I got to fulfill his commandments. And, as well, the Ten Commandments. And the most important commandment was the fifth which is the most important commandment than all of them which is not necessary any more. This is mine individual opinion: there is not necessary no more commandment than the fifth: "Respect your father and mother". So why? Because if you respect your father and mother you wouldn't steal, you wouldn't kill. Because if you steal and somebody comes and tells your father or mother, "You know, your son, Shlomo, is a gonif." Then father and mother are almost dying.

LB: So your father went to shul every Friday?

SK: Friday and Saturday and the Holidays. I was Bar Mitzvah and could read the Torah. If I meet people here who knows more in Talmud than I, I don't feel comfortable because I don't want nobody to know more than I do. You see, nobody, almost nobody- and you can tell your professor - can beat Sidney Kay in any aspect of anything! And if you want, I can prove it. This aspect means literature, international literature.

LB: How did you dress?

SK: I once worked in a hotel here in United States, a Fifth Avenue hotel where I started as a busboy because I couldn't do nothing else. Then I became promoted to a waiter, which was a great promotion. And in the Fifth Avenue hotel used to come the N.Y.U. which is nearby, and I was in Room Service, waiting. And there were, almost every day, luncheons. And when we served the tables, there were students, and during serving, I got acquainted with them even with my poor English, but they appreciate. And I asked these students, every day, other questions of general education and knowledge; 95% nobody knew the answer. One day, a professor approached me. He said, "Listen Sidney, I heard that you are testing our students and they are failing. Maybe you are going to do it with me." You know, I'm a very easy man, I like to joke. I said, "Professor, why should you spoil your luncheon?" So he said, "Don't worry about luncheon. You just ask me the question." I said, "How well are you in general literature?" He said, "Sure, I'm pretty well." I don't remember if this was his specialty. So I said, "You know, there is a very great writer which is almost in the same category with one of the greatest writers in American, Jack London... and his name is Joseph Conrad." So I said, "Sure, now tell me if you want to be stuck, Professor. But if you answer me, then I bow to you. What was his original name?"

LB: He was Polish...

SK: And I said, "He was from Poland." "You know, Sidney, I am almost - no - I am stuck and I am scared to go home because my wife is Polish and she's also a professor." So I told him, "His name was Jusef Konrachevski." He said, "Alright, Sidney, you've caught me." So this was really years which I worked very hard. I was not born to be a waiter or to wait on anybody, not even a king, and not on a professor, because there are many parvenues...

LB: Do you know French?

SK: *Moi, je parle français, oui.*

LB: Where did you learn French?

SK: *En ecole.*

LB: You have Hebrew, Yiddish, Russian, German, Polish and French. That's six languages.

SK: Yes, in school I started to learn French in Poland.

LB: And then you learned English here, that's seven. Is there one I haven't picked up?

SK: Uh, no. but I was a year in Sweden after the War, because my wife was taken to Sweden by [Graf Bernadotte](#) and within one year when we left Sweden I had a farewell speech in Swedish. The proprietor of this was invited because we were very respected, and he was crying because I made in the Swedish language. I made this speech with the amount of vocabulary which I knew. But I spoke. And if you are a little able you make it this you know. And he begged me. He said, "Mr. Kazenowsky, you will get from me everything. Stay with us. Because it is such honor after one year, you make a speech in Swedish." He didn't know that I manipulated words vocabulary which was easy for me. But I spoke.

LB: I want to know how you dressed and did your father have a beard?

SK: No beard.

LB: He was clean shaven?

SK: Yes, just once, a short time he let grow a little beard with a moustache.

LB: But that's different. He wasn't one of the Jews...

SK: No, no, it was not a beard.

LB: And you didn't wear payis?

SK: No, you couldn't in this school. It was a progressive school. It was a school of Haskalah. They were [Litvakers](#), Eisenburg.

LB: They were Mitnagdim.

SK: If you meet a man from Lodz brought up in a good environment, even my father... It's a saying, "tailors and shoemakers are not people". There was such saying. But in the first place, there is such distance between tailors and shoemakers that people cannot imagine. There were many tailor's people with high school education and were many Talmudists who couldn't go in business and had to learn a trade. After the cheder they couldn't go in business so go to be a clerk, and they paid so little in shops and in the stores in Poland that a clerk who started in the beginning he hadn't got a yen, almost nothing, worked like a horse. While practicing a trade like tailoring he started to earn something after four weeks.

LB: You went to a progressive school There were Hasidim in your section or not?

SK: In Lodz we had many Hasidim.

LB: What did your father think of the Hasidim?

SK: My father? I mean he was progressive but he didn't... Nobody thought any bad about Hasidim in our town. There was a great respect for Hasidim. Somebody's faith and belief were respected, except the goyim, the Polakim who made the pogroms. So, that's why we are Jews. Even the most progressive Jew - he could go his own way, he could think as he did, like the [Vilna Gaon](#) and the Hasidim. Their founder was Baal Shem Tov.

LB: What kind of a shul did your father go to? Was it an Orthodox shul?

SK: It was a "*Dutscheshulotsky*. It was called "German Temple". It was called but it was not German. They called it because the progressive Jews and the rich Jews and the upper middle and a little lower middle class attended this synagogue. It was progressive where the chazan was nice dressed and stood and he didn't, you know, move his...

LB: *Shokol* (shaking)

SK: *Shokol*. I tell you about "*shokoling*". You see, (gets up)

LB: No sit. "*Ich veis. Ich shokol oichet.*" I know. I shake also.

SK: Your father's not *shokoling*.

LB: My father's very quiet, that's why.

SK: So that's it. This was Eisenburg, mine teachers were like as your father. We didn't *shokol*, we didn't scream. It's not necessary. But the difference is that those Hasidim, in business, I'm sorry to say, but I have to say it, were unscrupulous. Crooks. You see why a progressive Jew didn't put his [tsitsit and kapot](#) on top of everything which wasn't necessary. You understand? It didn't make a Jew to wear outside the suit. You could wear it and I wore it. I and my brother we wear it until very, very late. So did my father.

LB: Your service was conducted in what language?

SK: In Hebrew, *loshen koidesh* (holy tongue).

LB: It was all in Hebrew?

SK: *Loshen koidesh*. As the Torah is written, everything the same.

LB: I go to synagogue in what they call the Reform Synagogue and the service is mostly in English and there's some Hebrew- more and more as time goes on. But there were many German shuls where the service was in German?

SK: Yes,... no. The Germans (Jews) are not considered among Jews as really, truly Jews. They were very easy to assimilate and they did. Even we have now very good German Jews in Israel but haven't them got here... because the Germans here will still discriminate against a Russian, a Polish and another Jew. It is something where they adapted too much ... and I am an open minded man and on mine tip of the tongue is laying the words of - how to say it? - To scold. Not only to scold- more than scold. But I'm holding back because why should I make more enemies than I made friends? Because I am like that. I am.

LB: You mean to scold the German Jews?

SK: Jews that they don't pretend. You see, in the time 50 years ago - I'm talking about in the nineteen twenties. In Yom Kippur or Rosh Hashanah, the German Jews they went to the synagogue with their *karet*. With a horse and a carriage.

LB: Yeah, in Russian it's a [*droszky*](#).

SK: In Polish, *droszka*. So they went in on Yom Kippur. So they stood, they took off their hats, but they are very, so-called for them they are religious, and some of them they wouldn't even touch, I think, which is not kosher. But on the other hand, to me they are condemned Jews. If there wouldn't be a Second World War not one German Jew would ever emigrate to Israel. I'm sorry to say it, and even I can be spit in my face by Germans. They would say "you are a scoundrel Mr. Kay". But there is during the [first Aliyah](#) was the Russian Jews who went to (Palestine) with what you are building houses, like the Jews in Egypt, they worked.

LB: To build the bricks.

SK: Yes.

LB: Now you're on the subject of the '20s and the Aliyah. Which city were you in? In your grandfather's city?

SK: In 1918 I was in Petrikev. And I was in gymnasium over there but then was started to build the movement of [Zionists](#). And I belonged to it. I belonged to the [Tarbut](#) and then to the B'nai Tzion - means Sons of Zion. The Tarbut belonged to the adults and because I was 13, 14, 15 years old, then I belonged to the young - B'nai Zion. As a matter of fact, for two years I was the vice-president of our organization, being only 14 and 15 years old.

LB: Whom did you read at that time?

SK: [Ahad Ha'am](#). [Mendele Moykher Sforim](#). But the most I read Polish books. I am very well read in Polish literature. I am very well read in the [belles-lettres](#) of the world.

LB: I'm talking about Zionism now, I want to know how did this Zionism get to you?

SK: I was born in it. My father was a Zionist in his way. He didn't belong to the party but he was a Zionist. You know, he belonged to this, "[If I forget you, Jerusalem, my right hand should...](#)"

LB: Right, right, "I should lose the cunning of my right hand."

SK: Yes. This was his motto, his idea. But he didn't belong because there wasn't time. My father hadn't got time to attend to this. This section belonged already people who were wealthier than my father was.

LB: They didn't have to work so hard. But you were young. How old were you at that time?

SK: 1915, '16, '17, I was 11, 12, 13, 14 years old. I was 14 years old. And we builded the [Maccabee](#) with our own hands. In Poland a Jew would know how to build a building, a little gymnasium like here, "hall of exercise". And we met every day and we played and we spoke Hebrew and that's why I was very fluent in Hebrew. On Hanukkah we played a play, "[Hannah and her Seven Sons](#)", you know in the time of [Antiochus](#). So I played the youngest son. And the next year, 1916, I played Antiochus. And you will be surprised that I almost remember until now the role in Hebrew that I played that time as Antiochus. But this is not important to put this here.

LB: No, what I want to know is you had all your friends were in the ...

SK: Yes, all my friends... there was a better class of Petrikev... because my grandfather, Klein Pinchuselwas a very wealthy man and so his grandson couldn't... I mean, in the first place I was brought up fine with a strictly... my other was very disciplined, she kept us with great respect for people, for everyone. I belonged to this organization - to the Hebrew organization and in 1918 when the first Polish government established there was then the first [Sejm](#). Sejm - was like the Congress. So we started to work to get the Jewish people from Petrikev to vote for the Zionist movement and to have representatives in the Congress in the Polish Sejm. We run through the streets and to the houses and to people to get them to vote for Zionistical representatives.

LB: My father brought this up and he grew up in a small shtetl. He was not allowed to play with certain children in the shtetl. Not that he wasn't allowed, it's just he knew that it wasn't done.

SK: Sure, that they shouldn't. That's what I did.

LB: And those were all Jews.

SK: All Jews, but we couldn't mingle.

LB: Who were these children?

Sk: Very poor children.

LB: And you knew you couldn't play with them?

SK: No, because those poor children were brought up without any attention by parents because they couldn't afford to, do you understand?

LB: I understand.

SK: They were very, very poor so those children were brought up in the streets so we couldn't mingle with them.

LB: You had none of them for a friend?

SK: No, never had one of them.

LB: So you never knew what they thought about, themselves?

SK: No, but then because of this organization... Maccabee, so I was like a counselor and they were very poor so they used to come to Maccabee, let's say groups 12, 14, 15, 16 and we went to a kilometer away on the peripheries of the city. And we got for them milk and bread because they haven't got enough home. This was the Austrian occupation. This was the teens between 1914 and 1918.

LB: Before the War was over.

SK: Yes, '14 to the end of '18 when the War stopped. America defeated those cockroaches so we went back to Lodz and I started again.

LB: And then you were Polish?

SK: Yes, then we were Polish citizens, sure. We were Polish citizens all the time. We weren't Russian citizens, even by the Russians. But we considered ourselves Polish citizens.

LB: What would have been on your passport?

SK: We haven't got passports. I don't remember my father had a passport.

LB: So you met some of these poor boys in this Maccabee Zionist organization?

SK: Yes, and they did belong because they were very young. You know they were 5, 6, 7, 8 years old.

LB: There must have been older boys who were poor.

SK: Yes, but they didn't belong. They got their own life. They were already rascals in the street.

LB: So your society was very stratified?

SK: Yes, yes, yes, it was a defined society. A real defined society. I was not in a society where I could see some people.

LB: When the War broke out you were 11 years old and you were old enough to know and to hear. Where were the sympathies of your parents? And did you have sympathies? Did you want the Russians to win?

SK: No, we didn't. We wanted the Germans to win.

LB: You did?

SK: Oh sure, we did. But it's no doubt.

LB: So you went south to Petrikev? Why there? Wasn't that under Russian domination too?

SK: Sure, but then the Russians weren't anymore there. They got to withdraw, they were defeated.

LB: So you were safe there because you were under Austrian protection?

SK: Austrian, yes, and it was nicer than to be under... and we didn't have to pay for rent because we got an apartment in our grandfather's building. And then food and everything.

LB: Was there no time when you were eligible for military service? By that time you were of an age to enter the army.

SK: Only as a volunteer. You see, 1918 the War ended and I was 15 years old. 1919 started the War between Poland and Ukraine with the Russians, the Bolsheviks. So I was 16 years old. Youngsters, young men were permitted to volunteer. But I was not a volunteer because I was under my father's regime and I got to attend school. So, most of the time in that time, Polacks 16 years old volunteer. But they were assimilated, Jews.

LB: I understand. They felt that if they defeated the Russians then they would be treated better by the Poles; they would be Polish.

SK: Yes. It would be true anyway because Communism didn't give nothing to the world at all.

LB: Were you, at that time, entitled to citizenship in Poland after the First World War?

SK: Yes.

LB: You're back in Lodz, you're Polish definitely now?

SK: Yes, yes.

LB: Were you a citizen as a Jew?

SK: I was not yet because here comes a [curiosum](#) which was not only with my family but with many families. In Poland when the parents were married they were married only by a rabbi - *a khippe kiddishe* - but they didn't got the city hall. And when I got to go to the draft then my father took us to the municipal office and he made the Acts that they are married and they have four children. So this tells until that time we were illegitimate children. Bastards.

LB: The Poles did not recognize the religious ceremony. It had to be a civil ceremony?

SK: Then you got to be a citizen. I wasn't even in the list.

LB: In their rolls, yeah...

SK: In the rolls of the city, I didn't exist. We didn't exist.

LB: In 1903 were there still [Kehilas](#) in Poland - in Lodz?

SK: Sure, it was kehilah. Was always. Those kehilahs were even builded by the Germans during the World War II and they called them [Judenrat](#).

LB: I know... (inaudible)

SK: No, no, don't say that, don't say that. Don't listen to everyone, don't. Because there wouldn't be *judenrats*, those little Jews wouldn't be left because the idea and the purpose of the Germans was to destroy all Jews, so they gave an order: You are going to build a judenrat in 12 hours and you send me the list who, or they appointed. So you got to be. Don't follow Lucille, you and your professor know other Jews who didn't want for nothing when we were in lousy and you ate chickens. And you went to the Copacabana dancing once a month. You see, I am so tolerant and liberal. Not every week, once a month to the Copacabana. And there is dying my family over there. But this is life, *c'est la vie*. What we are doing right now, in this day of Yom Kippur, we should fast three times a week. We Jews shouldn't permit ourselves to eat cake chocolate and nothing as long this War was there. But we did not! We ate, went to Miami Beach, we went to the Las Vegas, etc., etc. And we did all the good things so what did the rich Jew; they give money. They gave money because they have so much they cannot count it. My dear girl, we have here in this building a Jew who cannot count the money. They don't know how to count to thousands, so help me! They are almost millionaires from Canada, from here, from there. And I know them. And I'm meeting them minute to minute. And the worst of the parties, they are show-offs. Is here a fellow who is an ignoramus, a nobody, and he is the chairman of the Cultural Club. Don't laugh! You ask Jack Koenigsburg. He will tell you. And he knows about whom I am talking. And that's why I started with them. The man who is the chairman doesn't know nothing about - *rien de tout* - in French, as you'd say. And he's in the Cultural Club.

LB: It happens with most non-Jews too, you know. It's human nature.

SK: Oh, Lucille, who cares about them? No really, I am a very altruistic man. You see, otherwise I wouldn't survive because I was never pessimistic, you know. I always got that I would survive. I was not the smartest Jew who survived. I was not, because the very great intelligent ones were destroyed in the first days. As soon as the Germans came in they destroyed the intelligentsia because intelligent people can be the leaders. So here and there, survived one. I haven't got a profession. My profession was dancing. You see, I got an Achilles heel. I like dancing.

LB: This is very interesting. We talked about the First World War; you wanted the Germans to win.

SK: Yes, because they are very liberal.

LB: And then you became a Zionist.

SK: No, a Zionist I was born in it. I went to a Hebrew school where it was Zionistically inclined. In Zionistical movements send the children to Hebrew schools, not in chederim. You see, a cheder was the most Orthodox. My father was not an Orthodox. He was Jew, an “*ehrlicher yid*”. A fine man. So I went to the school

LB: Why did you not go to Israel? I know you had to go someplace when it finally came. It didn't occur to you before the 1930s to go to Palestine?

SK: (long pause) You see, all my friends from Petrikev, from Maccabee, and Tarbuth and B'nai Zion... after the War they went as an Aliyah to Israel - to Palestine, rather - at that time. But I was under my father's supervision and he wanted me to be a doctor or a lawyer and I didn't become none of those. Because as older I became, I became more individual and I didn't want to be. And maybe that's why I survived because there is very little doctors who are left among Jews after the War... Very little lawyers.

LB: So what did you become?

SK: A dance teacher.

LB: You didn't become a *shneider* (tailor) and you didn't become a doctor and you didn't become a lawyer.

SK: No a *shneider* my father wouldn't let me...

LB: He wouldn't let you be that? It was good enough for him, but not for you. What happened after gymnas? Did you have any more schooling after gymnas?

SK: I started to, I made an application to University as law student, and I start already. Then I dropped it because I got in an environment of... it was called *Zolaytaya Maldyet*; Gold Youth. And the Gold Youth was like playboys, you know, to go dance and this and that. So then I dropped education.

LB: Who supported you during this time?

SK: I worked in an office. So I went to a school to become an accountant. And I finished this. It was a four months course because I had education. So I got a job in an office as a help of the accountant. But I didn't stay long over there.

LB: And at night you went out dancing and partying?

SK: Dancing and parties and nightclubs and beautiful girls. And it was the [life that Riley](#) hadn't got.

LB: (laughing) That's because he didn't live in Poland, Riley.

SK: Yes, believe me, Riley hadn't got it. I would never change with your [Rockefeller](#). Eh, zeh life.

LB: Where did you live all this time? Did you live home or did you have your own place?

SK: Home, yes, yes, home.

LB: And your father didn't say anything?

SK: Oh yes, a lot of things. He said, whatever. You know. He cursed me as not with ordinary cursing, but this and that. And, you know, he didn't cry but it called like crying. And mother cried, you know. But my brother, he didn't go my ways.

LB: He did not?

SK: But he did nothing because then when he finished gymnasium he run out of Poland because of anti-Semitism and he went to Belgium. He didn't want to stay in Poland.

LB: So he got out.

SK: Yes, he got out. He went to Belgium. But this is his story. He is alive, thanks God.

LB: Yes, Thank God. There was so much anti-Semitism, I thought in Poland after the war. Is this true?

SK: Yes, yes, it is very true. But you see, it is so much anti-Semitism here. You have a [Berrigan](#), you know a Berrigan and he's representing the Great Lord Jesus who never existed. This will be on the tape? But I am responsible. He never existed. Never.

LB: But what about Berrigan? He's the priest who was arrested.

SK: Yes and then there's the other one who got to receive now a Gandhi award. What is his name? It is Berrigan. There were two brothers. Before they could give him the award is refusing, a Catholic priest. Said he's not going to give it to him because [he made statements against Israel](#). And so here you are. We didn't suffer enough according to them.

LB: How did you become a dance teacher?

SK: I became because I was a very good dancer, an excellent dancer. So where we used to go, like here, like in New York how you call it? On 7th Avenue, the [Roseland](#). So there were young people and they didn't know how to dance so they came to me and said, "Sidney, Salek" - I was in Polish- "Teach me dancing!" And I took money for it and I made very nice. And then I start to give lessons in private houses. Couples, they gathered together three, four couples - fine, wealthy people and I taught them home with a pattiophone.

LB: You're the first Jewish dancing teacher I've ever met.

SK: Yes, you wouldn't meet another.

LB: There weren't really many, no. So your father must have been really upset. And your mother too.

SK: Very much. But then I became a wealthy man, by dancing.

LB: Is that right?

SK: I opened my own studio, yes. The most elegant in Lodz. If you will meet a Lodzer and you say, "Kazanovsky" he will ask you, "Kazanovsky who had the dance studio?" I became wealthy; very elegant. The most elegant dance studio.

LB: So there was no reason for you to leave Poland and go anywhere?

SK: No, no, no, I didn't. I wouldn't change my life in Poland with Rockefeller because I had a nicer life than he. Believe me, Lucille.

LB: I believe you.

SK: In nightclubs with my wife, mine son being seven years, six years old got a governess, an English governess, Miss Mary from London. She came to Poland. She was his governess. My son learned French already when he was 7 years old.

LB: Were you at any time touched by any of the socialist philosophies that were in the air at the same time? In 1917 you were 14 years old and there was a revolution in Russia...

SK: Yes, I read about it. No I was not attached or touched. I was rather for Czarism than for extreme socialism.

LB: I see, so you were anti socialist right from the beginning?

SK: As anti-Communist. I was Democratic Socialistically inclined. I was not even in the movement when Zionism ... as a Poale Zion. I was a Zionist but not Poale Zionist. Maybe I would become later on. You know when you become older then you see the misery and the worker has to be respected. You understand? I didn't feel even being the child of a hardworking man, home. But he was his own boss, my father. He could stop whenever he wanted to. And he could start in the early morning and stop whenever he wanted. So I was not a child brought up with the discipline of you got to be 8:00 in the morning at work and 12:00 midnight at home and six days a week.

LB: Would you say that your family was political? Were they interested in politics?

SK: They were non-political My father was non-political. Then, later on he became a Folkist - was a new party. Folkist was between Socialist and Zionism, Poale Zionism. But it was Polchiste.

LB: Actually then, you only left Poland as a result...

SK: I was forced to leave.

LB: The rise of Hitler?

SK: Yes

LB: Otherwise you would have stayed there for the rest of your life?

SK: Very end because I was not scared for *pogroms*. In Lodz we have not. There were no *pogroms* in Lodz. There were only incidents where a group of Polacks, you know, hoodlums attacked...

LB: Hooligans.

SK: Yes, hooligans attacked here or there a Jew. But otherwise I wasn't afraid. Nobody would attack Kazenovsky, nobody.