Transcript:

Herman Kaplan

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Interviewer: This is Judy Sachs and I'm interviewing Herman Kaplan who was a refugee. Why don't you tell me where you're from and a little bit about your background?

Herman Kaplan: Judy, I'm from Lithuania. I came to the United States in 1940. That was soon after the outbreak of the war. We came over as a family of five, my parents and three children, and I'm the oldest.

Interviewer: Where exactly were you born?

Herman Kaplan: Okay. I was born in a city called Alytus, Lithuania. In Yiddish, it's called Alite (sp), and it's approximately 50 kilometers from Kovno. Everybody knows Kovno, and everybody now knows Lithuania. It was relatively unknown before. And we tried to come to the United States for a number of years because the clouds of war were gathering in Europe and we tried for three years to get an American visa to come over here. Finally, after three years of waiting and considerable effort, we received the American visa and we proceeded to leave Lithuania in April of 1940. We were supposed to sail on a Swedish ship, but just a few days before we're supposed to leave, Germany invaded Denmark and Norway and the coast was mined and we couldn't leave. So, we were still in Lithuania. At that point, there was no place to go. The only way at that time, was a possibility, was to go to Italy and get a boat from Italy. In order to get to Italy from Lithuania, you had to go through Germany, and to get a permit to go to Germany for a Jew in 1940, at the outbreak of the war, was virtually unheard of. We, through considerable effort and some personal context, were able to get a transit visa for three days to go through Germany. The Lithuanian passport was not labeled as a Jewish passport as it was in Germany and, as a matter of fact, the Lithuanian government officially was relatively friendly to the Jews. The President of Lithuania at that time, Antanas Smetona, was actually friendly to the Jews although many of the

Lithuanian people were anti-Semitic. And during the German occupation of Lithuania, many of the Lithuanians were collaborators with the Nazis in giving the Jews a lot of trouble. Anyway, we got our visas to go through Germany and we came to Germany by train from Kovno, came to Memel, what is in Lithuanian called Klaipėda, and there we crossed the German border. It's interesting that the conductor on the train, who was an older gentleman, was very helpful to us. He helped us with our baggage and he showed us where to get off and all that, and we came to Berlin, and had to spend a night in Berlin. He wanted to know if we wanted to go to a hotel, and we thanked him, but we thought we would remain in the station. And the next morning, we got a train from Berlin and finally got to Italy. It's interesting that the German people on the train suspected that we were Jews. I recall I was 14 years old and I remember very well when an older lady commented that we were Juden, but the German individuals on the train didn't bother us at all. They were polite and nice to us, and there were a number of, quite a few of military people, soldiers, on the train. Having gotten to Italy, we had no problem getting in because if you had a German visa, the Italians let you in. We came to Genoa and we tried to get on an Italian ship to go to the United States. Well, shortly before the ship was supposed to leave, Italy entered the war. So, we couldn't sail for the United States. There was an American freight ship that took some passengers, but they took only American citizens. We weren't American citizens so we couldn't get on. So, we were stuck in Italy and there we were. We were in Genoa. In the meanwhile, our American visas expired. Now, we were getting ready to leave in April and we had the visas for a while whatever, and the visas expired. In order to renew them, we had to go to Naples where the American consul was. So, we went by train from Genoa to Naples. The American consul was very nice to us. He renewed our visas and we could have just as well stayed in Naples, but we already knew some people in Genoa were in the same boat, and we returned to Genoa. As a side comment, we might say that the Italians didn't bother us. I do remember that we were checked on by Italian security people. They must have been secret police. They came to the place where we stayed. They checked our papers, and they didn't bother us at all. However, there were some people who were waiting for places to go, and overnight, they would disappear, and nobody knew where they went. And those people who disappeared were Jews from Germany, who were taken at a later time. And while we were waiting in Genoa with nothing to do, France capitulated, and so there was created an air route by way of Rome, Barcelona, Madrid, and Lisbon. So, we went to Rome, and I don't know how long we waited to get tickets on the plane. Planes were very small, went about once a day, and it took a long time to get on the plane, to get tickets, get reservations. As an interesting side story on that, we used to have nothing else to do and we'd made virtually daily trips to the airline office to see about where we stood and length we could get on. There

was a certain place there where a lady was doing certain sewing and she was seen in the window from the street. My mother struck up a conversation with her and they sort of became friendly, so that every day she made contact with her, then they talked. It turns out that I think it was a sister who was married to a Jew and her boyfriend was a pilot in the plane company. So, she was a little helpful in getting us on the plane early. So we went to Barcelona. We either went directly to Madrid or stayed in Barcelona, two, three days. I don't recall now. But we spent a few days in Spain, and I recal that one time on a Friday evening, we went to services, and the services took place in a private home, no windows, and at one point, the wife of the elder knocked on the door to tell us not to be so loud. Not that she didn't want the noise, it's just that she didn't want to draw attention that a service, a Jewish service was taking place. From Madrid, we flew to Lisbon, and in Lisbon, we waited for ship. It was a Greek ship called Nea Hellas which brought us to New York. We started out in April and arrived in New York City on September 12, 1940.

Interviewer: That's one long trip.

Herman Kaplan: It was a long trip.

Interviewer: Let's go back to when you were a child in Lithuania. What kinds of memories do you have growing up there both just memories of your childhood and memories of maybe your Jewish upbringing or anything from that time?

Herman Kaplan: All right. I lived in Lithuania in a small place. Actually, I lived on a farm which was about 3 kilometers from a city called in Lithuanian, [unintelligible 0:09:47.1] known in Yiddish as [unintelligible 0:09:48.9]. That was a small town. The merchants, the stores in the town were predominantly Jewish. I remember there was an apothecary which was non-Jewish-owned and there was some other few non-Jewish-owned stores, but the bulk of the stores there were owned by Jews. It was a nice little community, small, with two synagogues. It had a Jewish school. I was educated in the Jewish school and when it came time to go to high school, I went to the next town, Alytus, the place where I happened to be born, but that's not where we lived, and went to high school there, gymnasium. When we left, I was in my second year gymnasium in Alytus, Lithuania.

Interviewer: What do you remember about the changing times, I mean, as a child? Were you frightened about what was happening in Europe or what do you remember in that? How did you feel?

Herman Kaplan: Well, they were uneasy times. People talked about the war coming. But life, in general, went on at a, I suspect, a normal pace. I remember that, in 1939, Russia made a pact with Lithuania and Russia sent in troops into Lithuania. Lithuania, of course, had no choice, as Russia gave it an ultimatum. But, the troops when they arrived in Lithuania were very friendly. They didn't bother the population. They were very nice. As a matter of fact, the merchants at the time and prospered from the Russian troops because they bought jewelry and they bought items that they couldn't get in Russia, and they enjoyed having to send some back home. And about six months or so, after the Russian troops entered Lithuania as friendly forces, Russia took over the country and installed a puppet government. Fortunately, we were going by then because if we still lived there, I don't think we could have gotten out.

Interviewer: Were there a lot of people you knew who did not get out from your town?

Herman Kaplan: Yes, there were a lot of people who tried to get out and couldn't get out.

Interviewer: Are they relatives or friends?

Herman Kaplan: Yes, I have a number of relatives who perished. They were cousins, aunts, uncles, who eventually perished in the concentration camp.

Interviewer: Do you think your parents had special foresight in realizing you had to work to get out early or as soon as you could?

Herman Kaplan: It didn't take special foresight particularly to try to get out of Lithuania and come to the United States. Everybody who could tried to do that. It was just a matter of luck that we were able to get out. Well, I might

give you some background on how we came, how we got into the United States. My grandparents sponsored us. My grandfather who lived in Poland came to the United States first time by the turn of the century. He left his family in Poland and he came to the United States. He worked a number of places. First, he was in New York and then in other places, and then he returned to Poland. And after a short while, after returning for a short while, he decided that Poland was not for him, that he wants to return to America. So, he did return by himself and he first pedaled, which was the custom of the day, and then in the course of events, his brother-in-law had already been in the United States and he was settled in a place Eudora, Arkansas. Surely didn't go back to New York. And he had a drug store and my grandfather went to Eudora, Arkansas, and he pedaled with a horse and buggy and called on people at home. In those days, not everybody could go to department stores, to the city, and so he stayed there a while, but he realized that he didn't like life in Eudora, Arkansas. So, he says, "Where is there a place nearby that has a sizable Jewish community?" So they told him, "Go to Memphis and go to Beale Street and take a rock and throw a rock on Beale Street and anywhere it drops, you'll find a Jew." So, he did come to Memphis and pedaled in Memphis and then he opened the drug store and then he brought over the rest of the family. Now, my mother was the oldest of five children and she had just gotten married and I don't know the ins and outs, what were the problems with the papers, because she was married or whatever, but she remained with my father in Lithuania and that's where I was born.

Interviewer: You mentioned you grew up on a farm. Is your father a farmer?

Herman Kaplan: My father was a farmer in Lithuania, yes.

Interviewer: So, what did he raise? What did he do?

Herman Kaplan: We had cows, chickens. We had wheat, rye. Those kinds of things. It wasn't a specifically specialized farm, but that was enough to keep him busy.

Interviewer: Were there a lot of Jewish farmers in that area?

Herman Kaplan: In that particular area, there were three Jewish farmers with sizable farms. There were a couple of Polish people with larger farms and then there were quite a few people with small farms in the village who just owned a small tract of land.

Interviewer: So Jews were allowed to own land—

Herman Kaplan: Yes, Jews were allowed to own land in Lithuania, yes. In my time, there was no official government policy against the Jews in Lithuania, whatever antisemitism existed at that time, existed from the part of individuals. There was no formal government policy against the Jews.

Interviewer: And in traveling through all the other countries to come to the United States, in order to get the transportation or whatever, did you need, did you need large sums of money? How did that work?

Herman Kaplan: Well, that's a good question. We did need money. We had some money with us. You could take out only so much. When you left Lithuania, the government allowed you only so much. We were subsidized on the road by my grandparents from Memphis. They sent us money.

Interviewer: So, there was a way to get money through that way. That's amazing. And you then came to…Did you land in New York?

Herman Kaplan: We landed on September 12, 1940 in New York. My uncle, my mother's brother, [Mekesh (sp) 0:17:46.1], drove us to Memphis.

Interviewer: A long ride. What were your feelings when you knew that finally you were coming to the United States? I mean this is the last part of the trip. How did you feel? What were your expectations?

Herman Kaplan: Elation.

Interviewer: Elation?

Herman Kaplan: Really, the delighted to come. Yeah, we looked forward with great anticipation.

Interviewer: And when you finally arrived in Memphis, what happened? Did your family then take you in? Did they find your father a job? How did this —?

Herman Kaplan: Okay. We lived for a while with my grandparents in the same house where they lived. The children went to school in Memphis, and then, in the course of time, my father made contact with some of the people who we met during the trip and a number of them settled in a place called Danbury, Connecticut. And my parents ended up in Danbury, Connecticut, where he worked and my mother worked later also in a hat factory in Danbury, Connecticut.

Interviewer: Once you were settled here did your parents try to get other relatives out? Did your grandparents try to get some of your other relatives out, too?

Herman Kaplan: By then, it was too late. The war was on. That was virtually impossible to get anybody out. We did try specifically to bring out relatives we left behind but weren't successful, and by then it was late. We barely got out at that time.

Interviewer: Yeah. Again, back to your childhood, as a child, and all these things going on around you, were you basically a happy child or what kind of atmosphere was there?

Herman Kaplan: Yeah, I was a happy child. We're all…three of us were happy children. We went to school. We did what children did in that time, yeah.

Interviewer: And it was a Jewish school you said?

Herman Kaplan: Yes, actually, yes. It was a Jewish school in a town called [unintelligible 0:20:18.9].

Interviewer: What kinds of things did you study? Do you remember what kinds of studies you have? Were boys and girls in the same school?

Herman Kaplan: Boys and girls were in the same school and we studied normally, the usual curriculum.

Interviewer: And when you went off to gymnasium, was that still a Jewish school or was that—?

Herman Kaplan: No, that was a government school.

Interviewer: And as Jews, how were you accepted in that school?

Herman Kaplan: Officially, well, but among the students and some members of the faculty, there was distinctly evident antisemitism.

Interviewer: And evidenced by what? What kinds of—?

Herman Kaplan: Remarks, derogatory remarks about the Jews. If, for example, some of the kids got into mischief in school, some of the administrators of the school weren't particularly interested in what kids got into mischief, only the Jewish kids.

Interviewer: And in traveling again through these countries, when you stopped for a few days, as you're children in a strange country, in strange cities, what did you do? Did you stay in a room or did you explore a little bit?

Herman Kaplan: Well, we initially stayed in a hotel until we got to know the place better and looked for a place where we could stay cheaper than a hotel

because it's been a long time with the expensive amount of that. So we did manage to find places where we could stay cheaper. The people who owned those places, as individuals, they were very nice.

Interviewer: So there was no discrimination in terms of—

Herman Kaplan: Not that we were aware of.

Interviewer: You traveled mostly through Europe by train and you mentioned that through Germany, there were people who suspected you were Jews. It's almost inconceivable I guess to me to think that, at that time, there were not more overt feelings of antisemitism.

Herman Kaplan: I don't know what I was thinking of, but overtly, they didn't show any hostility towards us.

Interviewer: Now, your documents, you said in Lithuania, they were not marked—

Herman Kaplan: The passport was not identified as being a Jew.

Interviewer: So you traveled, and through Germany then, that was not on any of your documents?

Herman Kaplan: No.

Interviewer: Was it ever stamped on there when you got to other countries to get visas or anything?

Herman Kaplan: No, no.

Interviewer: So, you were never completely identified.

Herman Kaplan: No.

Interviewer: As a child coming here, what kind of readjustment did you have to make to living in a—

Herman Kaplan: I didn't speak any English. And so, that was a little difficult. I started to, because of my lack of English, in the eighth grade and, well, I gradually learned and I supposed that in about a year, I could get around in English reasonably well. As a matter of fact, I remember very well I had a very good teacher in the eighth grade. And by the time I got to the ninth grade, there was nothing new I learned about English grammar. She taught me so well. Well, my vocabulary was not as good as that of others in the class. My grammar was better than the grammar of most Americans.

Interviewer: And it probably still is. Were you mostly with other Jewish children when you were in Memphis or was it really a mixed—

Herman Kaplan: It was mixed.

Interviewer: What kind of neighborhood—?

Herman Kaplan: It was mixed. It was a mixed neighborhood and, of course, we went to Sunday school, whatever, Hebrew, Jewish studies in the afternoon, that kind of thing. But the schools were general schools.

Interviewer: As someone who came here not speaking English, with an accent, whatever, did the other kids discriminate against you or—?

Herman Kaplan: No, we were curiosities, but there was no discrimination. They were very polite. They were very polite.

Interviewer: What kinds of differences did you notice between living here and living in Europe?

Herman Kaplan: Well, I'll give you some examples. My first impression of coming to the United States was a feeling of vastness, that there you travel for days in a car and you were still in the United States. And you could travel for an hour on the train in Lithuania and in an hour, you are already in Germany. So that feeling of vastness still being in the same country, that was one of the things I remember very distinctly. And the other was the freedom of speech, freedom of expression. I remember I was in New York at that time of the elections when Roosevelt and Willkie were running for president. It was before the attack. And I heard people talked very openly that Willkie is no good, that you shouldn't vote for him, that you should vote only for Roosevelt. And that amazed me, and I commented to somebody, "Suppose Willkie gets elected, he'll get even with you." And he said, "No, that's America. There's free speech. You can say what you want." I remember those two were the most impressive things that impressed me initially.

Interviewer: What about in terms of Judaism? Did you feel any difference in being able to be a Jew here rather than what you might have—?

Herman Kaplan: No, there's no…The Jewish life…A Jew in Lithuania, so he lived more as a Jew, as he identified himself more with Jews, he lived a more Jewish life in a variety of ways than one in the United States. In the United States, you sort of mingled more with the crowd.

Interviewer: You said your father went to Danbury and you were all—

Herman Kaplan: My father went to Danbury.

Interviewer: How long have you been here before?

Herman Kaplan: It must have been, I'm guessing, less than a year after we arrived. And, I was the oldest and I remained in Memphis with my grandparents for a number of reasons. One, I was further ahead in school and my uncle

was about to go to the army and I helped out a little with the business in Memphis. So I stayed in Memphis and I graduated from [unintelligible 0:27:55.2] High School in Memphis and then I enrolled in Southwestern College in Memphis and I was there about one quarter or so, when I was drafted and I served in the American Army. And I went into the service in 1944. I became an American citizen soon after I entered the army. That was in January 1945, Ocala, Florida. I took my basic training in Camp Blanding, Florida. And I became an American citizen in Ocala not far away, January 25th, 1945. And I was about to, well, actually, I got off the ship in Europe on VE Day, and got off in France on VE Day and we were marching down the road and I remember one of the GIs who were matching with me saying, "What a place, why do we have to come here?" And a Frenchman with very good English said, "Nobody sent for you. Go back home." Anyway, so I went to Germany, got stationed in Germany, and was about to go to Japan, but the atomic bomb was dropped on Japan. The war ended. I stayed in Germany for a while. I was stationed in a place near Amberg, Germany. I got to see the Nuremberg trials. And then, I got out of the army in August 1946 and I reapplied to Southwestern. Nowadays, people applied to a number of schools, a number of colleges. I applied only to one and they took me back. It's now called Rhodes College, but it was Southwestern in those days. I finished Southwestern in 1950 and entered Vanderbilt Medical School in 1950.

Interviewer: I mean, you were sent back to Europe basically in the army. What was it like? What did you feel like going back there especially going to Germany at that point?

Herman Kaplan: Germany was devastated. It was bombed. It was destroyed when I arrived. And I remember the Germans hated the Russians. They didn't mind the Americans. They liked Americans, but they hated the Russians; they couldn't stand them. But the country was devastated and the Germans were all angels. Nobody was a Nazi and they had nothing to do with the mistreatment of the Jewish or that kind of thing. But the country was…it was in shambles. And on the way back, I got in Germany, whenever it was, in December of 1945. When I left a year later, it was amazing how much recovery had taken place. All the destroyed…The bricks of the destroyed buildings were taken away and there were new buildings rising, and in the course of a year, it's amazing how much recovery took place.

Interviewer: What were your feelings though about this, being in that place at that time? Here, you had traveled all those miles and all that time to get away from this great power that was there, the Nazis in Germany and then you're—

Herman Kaplan: I had sort of a good feeling that they were defeated and that the Allied powers were the winners, and I felt they got what they deserved.

Interviewer: Have you ever tried to go back to your village in Lithuania?

Herman Kaplan: No, I was in Russia about five years ago. I didn't try to go to Lithuania then. In the first place, I didn't think they would let me. At that time, I had no particular desire to go there. My son wants to go to see his roots and he wants me to go to Lithuania with him. So, right now, it's on hold. We'll see what develops. Right now, I don't think right now it's a good time to go to Lithuania with the unrest there, but we might just go; it depends. It depends how thing go. When I came over here and I told people I was from Lithuania, in the first place, you had to spell it. Second place, they didn't know where it was, and the third place, they didn't know what it meant. And now, everybody knows Lithuania.

Interviewer: If, in fact, you do go back with your son. What is it that you personally might be looking for?

Herman Kaplan: I would like to go to the place where I lived.

Interviewer: Do you think there's anybody there still you might know at all?

Herman Kaplan: No, certainly, there are no relatives. They're gone. The relatives had gone to…Some had gone to Russia and then got moved to Israel. Some—

Interviewer: I see you have relatives who got out.

Herman Kaplan: I got relatives who got out. I got of number of relatives in Israel who lived in Lithuania. The Jews of the little town near where I grew up, I'm sure have all been killed. I was in Israel about 10 years ago or so and went to Yad Vashem and specifically looked up names of people whom I remembered in the town of Lithuania, a number of them, and they went to the archives and brought back information about them. And everyone I asked for to look up had been killed. And there was a lake in a forest near the place where I lived, and the word was that they marched them out in the forest near the lake and shot them.

Interviewer: So, they didn't even bother taking them off to camps. They just…that was…

Herman Kaplan: Some of them, they just shot them, yeah.

Interviewer: Your relatives, some of them got out through Russia to Israel?

Herman Kaplan: Israel, yeah.

Interviewer: Was there any kind of a Zionist feeling in your village or among the Jews before?

Herman Kaplan: The predominant feeling among the Jews there were Zionists, yeah.

Interviewer: So, there was that thought that someday maybe, I mean, people would get to Israel?

Herman Kaplan: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: Did your family ever think of that as an alternative rather than going to the United States?

Herman Kaplan: We couldn't get to Israel in those days, either.

Interviewer: It was Palestine—

Herman Kaplan: England wouldn't let you.

Interviewer: That's right. All the doors were closed.

Herman Kaplan: All doors were closed, yeah.

Male: What were the feelings like to know that you had to flee your homeland? Was that…I'm sure you heard your parents discussed it and then you were at the age where…you kind of knew what was going on. What was that like?

Herman Kaplan: Well, that was a mixture of emotion. One is that you really hated to leave the place where you grew up, to leave the people with whom you're associated. Yet, the general atmosphere was getting to be so bad and so uneasy that to get away to a place like the United States, now, it may well be depending on where you'd go, but to go to a place like the United States was a great welcome. It was big relief. And I remember when my family left, there was this mixture of emotion, bittersweet. Sad about leaving everybody you knew, but at the same time, the opportunity of the United States.

Interviewer: So, it was more opportunity versus fear that you follow?

Herman Kaplan: And freedom, freedom.

Interviewer: Did you feel this kind of a fear of things coming?

Herman Kaplan: Yes, yes, yes.

Interviewer: So, it really was a relief.

Herman Kaplan: Yes, it was a relief. There was a lot of tension in the air, so to speak. There got to be a shortage of basic things like soap, for example. It was getting to be scarce. And if you went to a store to buy a bar of soap, the merchant would go to the backroom or under the counter and get a bar of soap and break it in half and sold it for the same price of the whole.

Interviewer: You knew the war or something was coming. Did you, as a child, realize what it meant to Jews, what it would mean to the Jews?

Herman Kaplan: We didn't know the specifics of the ins and outs, but we did know that what's in store for the Jews was horrible. It was the general feeling.

Interviewer: Now that you're here and settled and definitely an American, is there something about the way you now look at people and situations that may have been colored by what you'd gone through earlier?

Herman Kaplan: Well, you have an appreciation for those who live in places other than here where life is different. Like for example, Russia now. You have an appreciation for those things. You appreciate America more. Think it's a great land.

Interviewer: And how, now, do you feel about being Jewish, having gone through all these and come to where you are now? How do you feel about being Jewish?

Herman Kaplan: I feel great.

Interviewer: When you got to this country, did you continue your Jewish education or was that basically stopped?

Herman Kaplan: Yes, I continued certainly, yes.

Interviewer: In what way through…Hebrew school, is that—?

Herman Kaplan: Yeah, Hebrew school in Memphis, yeah.

Interviewer: In terms of your own children, in what ways has it perhaps colored the way you raise your children and what you've done for them?

What I was asking was, did your experiences color the way you raised your children or what you taught your children about life in general?

Herman Kaplan: Well, yes, I think so. And we tried to bring up our children in a distinctly Jewish atmosphere; all three of our kids went to a day school. They went to Akiva School. They got a very good education there. Not only did they get a very education in Akiva School, they were well prepared for the other schools. One of your children went to University School from there, one MBA, and one to Harpeth Hall, and they were very well prepared and were very well adjusted and they felt very well at home with their Judaism.

Interviewer: And your wife, was she a refugee at all?

Herman Kaplan: No, my wife was born in the United States. She was born in Brookline, Massachusetts and we married in Brookline, Massachusetts. In the course of my training, I started off with Vanderbilt medical school and I spent two years on a house staff in Vanderbilt and then I went to Boston for three years and I met my wife in Boston. And then, we got married in Brookline.

Interviewer: And you came back to Nashville?

Herman Kaplan: Came back here.

Interviewer: Is there something about the South that you found very hospitable or—?

Herman Kaplan: Yes, I like it very much. It's a great, great place to live.

Interviewer: And your father? Tell me a little about him. What happened? He went to Danbury and then—?

Herman Kaplan: My father went to Danbury and he worked there in a hat company.

Interviewer: Right.

Herman Kaplan: And he died a relatively young man of a heart attack in 1950, in May 1950, and that was the year I was accepted to medical school.

Interviewer: And your mother?

Herman Kaplan: My mother, after my father died, a year or two later, she returned to Memphis. One of my brothers was in Memphis then and he was in business, and she returned in Memphis. My youngest brother went to college in NYU and dental school in Northwestern and he settled in Memphis and he is now on the faculty in the University of Tennessee Dental School. So, my mother returned to Memphis and she died three years ago in Memphis.

Interviewer: So, all the children or siblings you've all become basically professionals and…

Herman Kaplan: Yes. One brother is a dentist and my middle brother, the second one, is in the real estate business in Memphis.

Interviewer: Are there any other aspects of your story that you would want touched on or can think about that would—?

Herman Kaplan: I think we've touched on the major aspects. I just want to say that it's a great feeling to be in the United States. It's a great country. I like it here.

Interviewer: How do you feel about the two Germany's getting back together now?

Herman Kaplan: Well, from one point of view, politically, I know it's probably inevitable that this should happen. From another point of view, both from the point of view of European stability and security and from the point of view of what might happen with anti-Semitism with a revived and powerful Germany, that certainly calls some uneasy questions.

Interviewer: So would you be for or against it or—?

Herman Kaplan: I can't say that I'm for or against. I think it will happen. I think whether I'm for or against it, I think it will happen, but I think that the Jews in general and Europeans specifically, places like France, Poland, I think are very uneasy about a united powerful Germany.

Interviewer: How do you relate your experiences with what's going on with the Soviet Jews now? Do you see some parallels in what happened to you and what they're going through?

Herman Kaplan: I think they have gone through a lot worse things than what my family had gone through because compared to everything, while things went rosy, it wasn't so bad for us when we were in Europe. But I think the life of the Russian Jew now is much worse, much worse that what we had and certainly, while there was anti-Semitism in Lithuania, Jewish education took place and Jews had no problem living as Jews while the contrary is true in Russia. So that what's happening now is I think a lot worse than what happened when we were in Lithuania.

Interviewer: Is there anything that you would want other people to know, after you've told your story, are there things that you would want people to know to remember to think about in the future?

Herman Kaplan: Well, I think there are ups and downs in life, in a way, life is uncertain. You can tell that from potential ruin and destruction, and potentially we could have perished in Lithuania, in Europe. We were fortunate. The Lord blessed us and we came to the United States and found a new life. So, on one hand, there is the uncertainty of life. On the other hand, you never know what things will do in years to come.

Interviewer: What could people do to prevent another Holocaust or another rise of a government like the Nazis? Are there things that people could do today that might have been done then?

Herman Kaplan: Well, it's a difficult question to answer. Generally, people are more emotional than rational. Hitler succeeded in rousing the German people through emotions against the Jews. Unfortunately, the lessons of the Holocaust seemed to have become lost on a number of people. In some instances, the story of the Holocaust never existed even in the United States now, and in spite of the horrors of the Holocaust in Germany, Poland, there are Holocausts around the world. Cambodia, other places. And, human nature being what it is, I'm not sure that this is the last of the Holocausts.

Interviewer: And in terms of this country, you were lucky you got in. What do you feel about immigration now for people who are coming from diverse cultures who are escaping from whatever terrors they think there are?

Herman Kaplan: I think it's nice that they should come to the United States or that they can come to other places where they are welcome. For example, in the case of the Russian Jews, going to Israel, those can come here, whatever their choice is. I think it's fine. I think America should let them in.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you have anything else?

Herman Kaplan: Well, I thank you.

Interviewer: Okay. Thank you.

Herman Kaplan: Thank you both. It was very nice.