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Journal

Interview with Goldie (Olga) Kagel, Russian immigrant, on July 1, 1969, in her home on Leah Blvd. in Wilmington, Delaware, by Myron I. Lazarus.

Q This is a recording of the Oral History Program. We're interviewing Mrs. Kagel, and your first name?

A Goldie.

Q Goldie Kagel, and the interviewer is Myron Lazarus. And you said, Mrs. Kagel, that you were born in Russia.

A The Ukraine.

Q In the Ukraine. Do you remember the city?

A Yeah.

Q What was the name of the city?

A You wouldn't be able to spell it--Kurivlovitzi--you know what it is--chicken livers or chicken feed, Kurivlovitzi. Do you want me to spell it?

Q All right.

A K-u-r-i-v-l-o-v-i-t-z-i.

Q Was this near any large city?

A Yeah, Mogilev-Podolskiy, communist, but that's the name of the town. When I was there, was Communist Podolskiy, when I left I heard of it Mogilev-Podolskiy. It's between two large cities, and not far from Odessa.

Q And not far from Odessa. There are many people that I met that are from Odessa.

A Well, they say they're from Odessa, they're not.

Q No?

A That was--Jewish people, you tell them, every father was a rabbi and they all lived in big city.

Q Odessa?

A Odessa. I had two brothers that studied in Odessa.

Q What occupation was your family in?

A My father died when I was a young child about a year old. My mother used to buy corn, wheat, you know, from the farmers in the summer and sell it to them back in the winter.

Q Is that right?

- A It's true, they needed money when they'd get a crop, and my mother kept it. In the wintertime, they needed it, came back and bought it. We bagged flour, like.
- Q Did she have a granery?
- A No, we didn't have a granery, we had a store in the basement there, a store for all kinds of corn and wheat, all kinds of . . .
- Q In a way you were lending money on the security of the grain, was that it?
- A No, we didn't lend any. Just some that had too much didn't need to come, some that were short came to buy.
- Q Uh huh. I see. Was there any other--your mother did this.
- A My mother did. My father died, left my mother with two children. I was the youngest one, and that's how she made the living. And she also bought wood to sell it in the wintertime. They had a place in the back where-- she buy the wood from a woodsman, buy a wagon from them, and then she sold it parts in the wintertime and they came back and bought it.
- Q Did you receive any education in this area?
- A Oh, yes. In Russia I went to a Hebrew day school [sounds like "the Talmetur"]. And they studied Hebrew and Russian as a language, as a side language. And then . . .
- Q What age were you when you went to the Talmetur?
- A I started as a kid. When I started--they don't start at five [inaudible]-- they start when the mother wants to send the kid. I guess my mother needed me out and then she made the living for us.
- Q Uh huh. Because people start at any age, three, four, five I heard, all kinds of ages. You didn't go to any public schools?
- A I went there to--after that I went to gymnasium. When I finished Talmetur I went to gymnasium.
- Q How old were you when you went to the gymnasium?
- A I think--they don't start by when you finish the--when I finished Talmetur they send me to--I had a chance to go to the gymnasium.
- Q But this wasn't Jewish-sponsored. This was a government . . .
- A No. This was already during--after the revolution. And I remember during the revolution we sat in the Hebrew classes, and when somebody knocked on the door, we hid our books and had Russian books inside. I still remember that.
- Q What do you remember of the revolution?
- A I remember more that my brothers talked about it than I knew about it. And

our city was like a main road--had a road that all the soldiers had to pass by when they retreated from [inaudible--sounds like "Neskor" or they advanced, they had to pass our little town.

Q Otherwise, going to the front in the west.

A Yeah. And retreating back . . .

Q Going back from the west.

A So I remember all the [inaudible, sounds like "bad ones"] as a kid, and I remember all these . . .

Q Now the programs . . .

A . . . and he can still [inaudible], you heard about 'em--all the bandits--the Ukraine Nationalists.

Q You talk about the Bergroans [so]--now, this was after the Czar.

A I know, but while the revolution was on, in the big cities, the little cities suffered a lot from bandits and you know, surrounding companies, and the Soviet [inaudible].

Q But these were bandits, stealing, right? During the war, when things were upset. This wasn't organized by the government.

A Well, Pethura was, the Ukraine Nationalists, but the Curidenikens [sp], they were supposed to be government, but they never succeeded. They tried to free the Ukraine but they never succeeded.

Q Um hmm. What was the name of this organization you were talking about that were trying to free the Ukraine?

A Well, the Pethurases [sp], Pethura--you never heard Pethura and Deniken?

Q Deniken.

A Deniken you heard. Pethura was one of the--they used to say the Son Deniken runs away and the Father Pethura runs after him. It was a little organized group that every month somebody came to--in the little cities they murdered and robbed.

Q But their object was to make the Ukraine independent.

A Yes. To free the Ukraine.

Q Your brothers, how were they involved in all this?

A My brothers were most of the time in Odessa.

Q Were they going to school there, or working there?

A They were in the gymnasium. In fact, when the communist government came to

our city, my brother came, he was a history teacher, he was [inaudible] Hebrew teacher. And they gave us land and everything, but . . . Jewish people are not farmers.

Q Farmers. Though there were. There are plenty of Jewish farmers.

A They were, yeah. But I don't know, my mother--we had no father, and my--younger son was too young, the other brother was the teacher. When they gave us, you know, land, we had nobody to work it.

Q Yeah, who was giving the land?

A That was already under the communists.

Q Communists. They were breaking up the big, large land holdings.

A Yeah, they broke up the big--we had a lot of rich landowners, they took, and they gave it to my brother because he was a teacher for them. A history teacher.

Q How about the other brother?

A He was young, too. He was in Odessa during the--he went to work as a baker, and came to United States and got in bakery, too. He's retired now. But they were both there--they went on--they were under starvation. They gotta starve there if they wouldn't have gone to work. So he went to work in a bakery. He was a healthy, husky fellow, he went to work in a bakery and made a living . . .

Q What was the date--do you remember, generally?

A No dates. I don't remember that, it's a long time.

Q Yeah. Well, this is when the Russians were . . .

A That's already under the communists. That's already after the . . . and they were . . . and then my mother decided that she don't wanta stay, with the two sons growin' up, and . . .

Q Um hmm. Did you have any sisters?

A No. We had a cousin organized from United States--he was sent as a delegate to the Ukraine. Well, he didn't go to--he stayed in Romania.

Q He was a delegate, you say?

A Delegate from our landsmarsch [sp], you know when the padoller [sp]--no, the padoller, it's not the family, it's from padoller guberne, from that place, they send a cousin of mine, who study what was goin' on in Europe. And he . . .

Q He was in Europe, then?

A Well, he was in Romania. My brother heard that we had a cousin in Romania

and he was a delegate from . . .

Q Your area.

A From my area, from our area. So one night my mother took a tablecloth and made him a pair of shorts. And with this on him he went to Romania and my cousin took him to Philadelphia. And he's the one that had been about five, six years in Philadelphia, working, and he send us money to come over there. And we couldn't come--our visa was--they had to leave Russia during the night through woods, through water, and we went to Romania.

Q You didn't have a passport, otherwise.

A No, we didn't have. I was a young kid was dressed for an old Romanian woman, and my brother he was supposed to go in a wedding to get married, to enter Bucharest. So I was dressed like an old Romanian woman, my brother as a young man, because I was supposed to marry my oldest brother. Dressed as--to get married in that time we entered Bucharest.

Q2 [Unidentified interviewer] Your mother went with you?

A My mother was with us.

Q2 This is the brother who was the baker who came here with you?

A No, this brother was in Montreal, Canada. I have a brother in Montreal, Canada.

Q2 This was the brother who was the teacher, then.

A Yeah, he was the one a teacher and he was--he's now in Montreal, Canada.

Q And you went to Romania, and . . . what happened there?

A They lived two years in Romania.

Q Two years in Romania--Bucharest.

A That's why we [inaudible] because we lived--well, the brother in Philadelphia, he didn't make too much. But my brother gave me lessons a little bit and--of course we lived like animals in a small--one woman build little square little cubicles, rooms, and she rented for--and we lived two years. That was my worst period in life, living two years, waiting every day to . . .

Q To leave.

A To enter United States. So still the quota was closed and we went to Montreal, Canada. I have a brother still there.

Q Well, how did you get Romania to a seaport?

A When Costanza [sp], the Jewish immigration, helped us out. The Jewish Hias helped us out, took us to--let application that my brother come and be able to be teacher. He was sent to a town and he was for a while there, then we had a friend, a rabbi, a landsman, he knew my father and he took my brother . . .

Q From where was this rabbi?

A From Ukraine. He took my brother and recommended him to work in a store. And he's still working there for 45-50 years, he's still there.

Q One brother's working in a store and another you say was gonna be a rabbi.

A I had two brothers--yeah, but he did not. He was supposed to be a teacher, but he's not, he's working in Montreal as a manager in a business.

Q A store?

A Yeah.

Q What seaport--I mean, where did you get the boat?

A Constanta. That's in--somebody told me that's not true, but then I find out it is, that Constanta the seaport from Romania. We slept three nights outside . . .

Q On the boat? On the deck?

A Not on the boat, not on the deck, on the beach, to wait for the boat to come in.

Q Was it a large boat?

A No. It was a freight boat, Cunard line.

Q This was not a passenger boat.

A No, it was a freight boat, but they took some.

Q How was--do you remember the trip?

A I remember I was the first one to get sick.

Q You were the first one to get sick.

A I was the first one to get sick.

Q Was it many people in the rooms, or . . .

A No, it was--we had a cabin, me and my mother and brother. They had a cabin that was--well, the thing is, you don't know no language, you don't know where you're going, who you're--we were supposed to go to my brother to Philadelphia, but that quota closed and we turned to go to--and they took us to Montreal. That's what our--you know--real disappointment was.

Q You were supposed to go to . . .

A We were supposed to go to Philadelphia. At least to see our brother, it's different to go to Montreal and not know nobody, no language, no nobody.

Q How did your mother make out in Montreal?

A Oh, we grew up and we worked and we made a big mistake, we never thought that my mother wanted to go things, and we were European, that's a shame, a mother should work, it's a disgrace in Europe.

Q Well, when she landed in Montreal, I mean, where did you go? I mean, you didn't know anybody.

A That's what it is, and you suffer. You wouldn't understand these things. And that's why I didn't wanta talk about it. Sure it's miserable. You're livin'--but we heard people talk Yiddish, that was very thrilling. We walked on the streets of Montreal--we still come into Montreal, I go to visit sometimes, and I hear them call each other and talk Yiddish and I thought it was beautiful. That's how we . . .

Q And this is how you got settled.

A Got settled--we got acquainted with others. When I walked in place in the street, I told my brother, "Hey, they speak English here!" And a nice [inaudible] that happened to us, we were in Algeria, where that ship was--cattle ship, it traveled around all over--in Algeria, we stayed a couple of days and a Friday night we saw a Jewish synagogue, we stopped over there.

Q This is in the Mediterranean, now.

A Yeah, and I had a mendova [sp?] on me, a Jewish star, and they couldn't--didn't know a word, but my shaw--that's how we knew that's a synagogue with the mendova on there. But they started to talk to us, we don't even think, [speaks Yiddish], and that's how we got acquainted, we knew they were Jews. We couldn't talk no--we couldn't talk their language and they couldn't talk our language.

Q How long did you stay in Algiers?

A Oh, they stayed a couple of days there, that's all. That was from the boat leaving us off for a couple of hours for going out.

Q You say this was a cattle boat.

A Probably, I don't know, was a--I remember the ship.

Q I've heard so much about the cattle boats but we haven't interviewed anybody who came over on a cattle boat.

A In fact I sent a [inaudible] there to find out--I didn't know how old I was, to send down to that ship. So I remember in the ship--well, I forget now . . .

Q Now how did you actually make a living in Montreal?

A No, as I started to--what does a girl does without a language, I had to learn how to sew. I went to the shop and I learned how . . .

Q But you say your mother didn't work, she was at home.

- A No. They were rather European idea that it's a shame for a mother to work. And so she stayed home and I remember my brother made \$6.00 a week and I made \$5.00 a week, and my mother still saved a dollar or two in the bank. I can't understand that now.
- Q Well, there was one brother with you.
- A One brother. The older brother--the one--they lived in Montreal. So my brother went to work and he got \$6.00 a week. I went as a seamstress and made \$5.00 a week. And my mother was a rich woman, getting \$11.00 a week to make a living from. And she still had a Sabbath meal, and somehow she managed.
- Q What was your brother doing?
- A I told you, my brother was in a store. He got a--Rabbi Hershorn [sp], he's still in Montreal--he took him and he recommend him, he said, "This fellow I know, take him in the store." And so he started from sweeping the floor, a messenger boy, now he's managing the place. They wanta get rid of him already, they wanta retire him. Now in Montreal, I think, they can work after . . .
- Q Uh huh. Do you remember the name of the store?
- A Schecter Wholesale Dry Goods.
- Q Oh, I see. It was a wholesale--or was it retail?
- A No, it's wholesale dry goods.
- Q Do you remember the year you came to Montreal?
- A I don't know one . . .
- Q Well, you said you were 12 years old.
- A Not exactly. When I came to Montreal I was--then I lived there, then I came to visit here and I met my husband and settled down here, so we're all scattered, brother in Montreal, brother in Philadelphia, and I'm here.
- Q How long did you--before you met your husband--how long were you in Montreal?
- A Oh, quite a while, about 15 years or around in there. About 29 years ago I met my husband and I . . .
- Q Uh huh. Now how did you manage to meet someone--was he from Wilmington?
- A My husband?
- Q Yes.
- A No. I came to Chester, Pennsylvania, I have relatives, they have a store. My husband worked there and they had a general store. She said, "Go down

and sell."

Q So you went to Chester?

A It's a cousin of mine. And I met my husband, was working there. And we argued about the movie. I asked him last night, I thought you were coming, if you'll ask me this question--something Doctor . . . ? He saw the same picture and we started to argue about it.

Q Dr. Zhivago, are you thinking . . .

A No, that's another. Something about a Doctor . . . I don't know, and we start to argue about it, and that's how we met. He adopted a different opinion and I was a different opinion, we argued all day long about it. He was supposed to be manager for hardware store and I'm supposed to sell dry goods. It wasn't so busy that day and we argued all day about the picture.

Q Was he born in this country?

A He is born in the North. He was born--do you know about Philadelphia, some things?

Q A little bit.

A He was student in Gerard College, if you heard about it.

Q Oh yes, definitely heard about it.

A He lost his parents when he was $4\frac{1}{2}$ years old. He was an orphan. So his grandfather put him in Gerard College and he graduated. And he came out of Gerard College . . .

Q And then he got involved with this hardware store?

A Yeah. When he get out from Gerard College, a salesman recommended him to work for my cousins. And they still have a big store in the Marcus Hook, general hardware store in Marcus Hook. So he was there when I came to Pennsylvania from the same--they came a couple of years before me.

Q That was a long trip to go from Montreal to Chester. But that was because you had family.

A That was because I had family. I left for a while--that's what Jewish people are, they're traveling.

Q You came to Chester pretty much because you could make a better living in Chester than Montreal.

A No, I just wanted for--after I lived a few years in Montreal, a cousin came to see us, and then I in turn came to see them. She first--when we came to Montreal, she came to see us. And I--a few years later I came to visit them, it's just . . .

Q Did you receive any education in Montreal? You said you . . .

A Oh, yeah. I continued with--I know a little bit Hebrew, more than most. I learned to . . .

Q Well, this is from the Yalnetur you learned your Hebrew.

A Yeah, but here, too. I still sometimes gather with some people. I belong to a Hebrew speaking group. Hogenwe [sp], I don't know if you heard of it. [Sounds like "And Dr. Bierman used to--you heard about Dr. Bierman."]

Q Oh yes. Yes. Well, you continued your Hebrew education in Montreal.

A I continued it in English, too. I went to night school.

Q Did you go to public school in . . .

A I went to night school. See, I lost--the worst part of my life is that I lost two or three years in Romania. And there I couldn't go to school. But I continued--I went to night school, I went to night school here to Wilmington High School here. And my husband is nice. He's American born, if I ever say something, and--you know, when I went to night school? When my two sons grew up. And I felt then that something is missing, that I need more education. And I went to Wilmington High School.

Q I see. Now, how did you get from Chester to Wilmington?

A We got married. My husband got here a hardware store. We have a paint and hardware store. It used to be a hardware store, now it's all paint. [Inaudible], but maybe you need paint.

Q So he started business for himself here in Wilmington.

A Yeah. He got rich. We were virtually poor people, and somebody--he saw in the paper that a store was for sale. And the salesman recommended him to go and see the place. I was never satisfied with it, but he's still there.

Q Now where was the place, now? What's the address?

A Now 28 Governor Printz Boulevard.

Q I know, but where did he start?

A He started first on a small hardware store on--oh, I don't know, it's . . .

Q Was it on Second Street?

A No, no, no. Vandever Avenue. [Inaudible - sounds like "And the market from there is Judge Grace."] And I raised two nice sons and I was miserable being in the back of the store.

Q You lived in the back of the store.

A I was miserable, hard, but . . .

Q Well, I noticed they either lived on top of the store or in back of the store . . .

A I lived worse . . . half in the store, I was up they needed me down, I was down and afraid the children were in something upstairs, so . . .

Q And you have two children.

A I have two nice sons, one married in Philadelphia, psychologist, working for the state of Pennsylvania, and one, Allen, is down in Westville, Delaware [?], working the first summer for--he was two years in the Navy, and he lost four years from high school for college, but he started college again. It's very good to see him going back to college. He took some classes on the boat.

Q Now, you moved from--your husband's business was first on Vandever Avenue and then on Governor Frintz. How long ago was it on Governor Frintz?

A About eight years ago, we moved to Governor Frintz. . . . I don't know, we had a lot of trouble, he was beat up a couple of times in Wilmington, and . . .

Q It's kind of a lonely . . .

A And all his customers moved away and they was always stores building, new stores building up, you know, and customers wouldn't come, and then when they moved out in the suburbs, they would have stores right near them. We have a few loyal customers that they'll come for a special color or what, but it's not as I would like to see it.

Q Did you belong to any organizations, other than, let's say, being a housewife and helping with the business.

A I belong all the time. I belong to Jewish organizations around here.

Q Which ones?

A B'nai B'rith, I belong to Adas, I belong to--I took Hebrew lessons with Mrs. [sounds like Davoes]--you know Mrs. Devoes?--'til about a year ago we separated. We were about four or five women managed to meet once a week . . .

Q This was the Hebrew-speaking group.

A No, this is separate. This was--I took Hebrew lessons; I joined Sister of the [inaudible] from Adas Kodesch. See, she was teaching a group of women. Some of them turned to be Hebrew teachers. And I was with her 'til about a year ago. But she was speaking with a certain college, and the 30th year--I didn't belong 30 years--but there's going to be a celebration this year because they're 30 years [sounds like "assistants"].

Q So you speak Hebrew?

A I speak a lot of it. I speak Russian, I speak Hebrew. I still speak

Russian.

Q Put the Hebrew you didn't learn in Russia, you learned that in . . .

A In Russia I did; I went to Hebrew Talmetur.

Q They spoke Hebrew?

A That's all--everything was in Hebrew. They don't believe it, it's unbelievable, but everything was in Hebrew. And Russian, we had the Russian language.

Q That's interesting, because usually in Hebrew schools, they didn't use it as a language. They used it to read, not to speak.

A No, that's different. Talmetur is entirely different. But you start them out from the beginning and you continue everything, and everything--I knew all the flowers and everything I knew. And we had Russian as a Russian language. And then later on the communists didn't like the idea and they changed it to a Russian school. With them there, they had gymnasiums and they had--you could enter any school you want in Russia. Because my brothers went to Odessa to the gymnasium from that school.

Q Um hmm. I'm trying to pick up where you got your Hebrew language. That's kind of unusual.

A I was born into Jewish and Hebrew language. In the streets they talked in Ukraine and Russian, I picked up all kinds of languages. I was three years in Romania. Since we were in Romania, I had to learn to speak Romanian, otherwise I was lost, a younger person. I had to learn something. But then I forgot it again.

Q Are there any other organizations that you feel loyal to, or you're very much interested in?

A Well, I belong to the Adas, I belong to the Sister [sounds like Hervae]. Sometimes I go to a Saturday night service. I helped them out for a year.

Q Well, you belong to Adas Kodesch.

A Yeah.

Q Do you remember much of Vandever Avenue, what it was like when you first came into Delaware? Do you remember the date, possibly, that you . . .

A I don't remember that, but that was our first building . . . it would be about . . . I know one thing it's been about 30 years ago. And I didn't like it.

Q Well, you didn't like the store situation.

A I didn't like the kind of a store it was there, because it--we were poor, we couldn't buy a decent store, so we bought somebody's schnapus [sp], you know what it is? I'm ashamed to be here recording. I mean, somebody's

junk, and it didn't pan out right.

Q Um-hmm. Do you notice any changes in Wilmington, or the Jewish community, from when you first came to Wilmington and so on?

A Not a lot . . . I like Jewish people . . . I like Wilmington people, I like the people I know, I like them a lot.

Q Well, I want to thank you very much. And how'd you like to hear yourself?

A I was telling you that--the last part of it, that people in the neighborhood--a girl was killed, she was shot.

Q Now you're talking about the Pergrun [sp] in Russia, under the communists.

A Before. During the revolution. It didn't work out--one night the communists were there, but during the--we were months without government, there were every bandits as they called themselves, they were government--the Ukraines, the Pethura [sp], the Denikens and so many--they called themselves a government, but they didn't last long.

Q Now usually when people talk about Pergrun, they talk about organized raids on Jews, usually initiated by the Czarist government.

A Yeah, he had this. We had this and we had from the bandits, too, in the woods. The Ukraine has got a lot of real--you know--woods. We had a lot of Pergruns, they organized--soldiers that ran away--they lived behind the government and they just were bandits--a group of bandits. They were not from our--from the Ukraine--they were not from our neighborhood, they were somewhere else, but they were still attacking these people.

Q But were they attacking others besides Jews?

A Well, mostly they were attacking Jews.

Q What do you remember of them?

A I remember that one night a neighbor started to scream and the men down there heard a shot and a girl was killed. They attacked her and . . .

Q Did they come in on horses, or . . .

A Yeah . . . they attacked her and she started to scream, "Kill me, kill me," and they shot her. I mean she's the one daughter in the house. And I just remember in the morning they all started crying, you know, for "my innocent girl getting killed." A cousin of mine got shot. So these things are just--I don't want to remember them. When we were talking about it, I begin to cry.

Q Well, I want to thank you very much Mrs. Nagel.

[END OF INTERVIEW]