**Paul:** Good afternoon this is Paul Secrest for the National Park Service. Today is Monday August 28th 1995, I’m in the town of Brunswick which is outside of Troy New York and I’m here with Fred Kunz.

Mr. Kunz was born in Paraguay, born of German parents and came to the United States in 1927 when he was nine months old. He’s going to relay to us his history of his parents and why they came here and they remember very vividly coming through Alice Island also in 1927. Mr. Kunz can you begin by giving me your birth date please.

**Fred:** My birthday is July 17th 1926.

**Paul:** What is your full name please could you say it for us?

**Fred:** Fred William Kunz, K-U-N-Z.

**Paul:** Fred, Fredrick is it?

**Fred:** It’s Fredrick William.

**Paul:** Can you spell Fredrick please?

**Fred:** F-R-E-D-R-I-C-K.

**Paul:** Where in Paraguay where you born?

**Fred:** I was born in Villarrica.

**Paul:** Can you spell that?

**Fred:** V-I-L-L-A-R-I-C-A.

**Paul:** Tell me a little bit about Villarrica.

**Fred:** Well Villarrica according to my parents was a very small town not too far away from Asuncion, but since my dad had the position of being an overseer of a mahogany plantation. We were out in the woods primarily out in the forest. That’s one of the reasons my mother couldn’t take the climate and one of the basic reasons that we came to this country was to get back to the temperate zone.

**Paul:** Can you tell me a little bit about where Paraguay lies in the continent?

**Fred:** Well yes Paraguay is sandwiched in between Argentina and Brazil. Uruguay is on the coast of South American and Paraguay is interior and has one large river that goes through the, I’ve forgotten the name of it now. La Plata I think, I think it’s the La Plata River that runs through there.

**Paul:** You said that it was new Asuncion.

**Fred:** Asuncion yes.

**Paul:** Can you spell that please?

**Fred:** A-S-U-N-C-I-O-N.

**Paul:** I guess the best way to start this interview would be to talk about your parents in Germany.

**Fred:** Yes.

**Paul:** Why they went to Paraguay. What was your father’s name?

**Fred:** My father’s name was Leopold.

**Paul:** Tell me a little bit about he’s family background in Germany that sort of thing.

**Fred:** He was born in Karlsruhe which is a fairly large city in Germany.

**Paul:** Can you spell that too please?

**Fred:** K-A-R-L-S-R-U-H-E and my father went through the schools and he became a tool and die maker machinist. Just has he was about to go to university he decided he wanted to go to the university World War One broke out.

He was in World War one for four years, the entire in the German army of course. After the war he married during the war, my mother whose name was Frieda Klingler her maiden name.

**Paul:** Can you spell Frieda and Klingler?

**Fred:** F-R-I-E-D-A K-L-I-N-G-L-E-R they married during the war. One of my brothers was born and he passed away during the way. My parents had George and my sister Mary.

She was called Maria in German and George really his name was Horst H-O-R-S-T, but because when he was a small child they used to call him Horst he changed it to George, but anyway.

My dad didn’t like the political climate over there plus the fact that after the World War one things were really economically bad for the Germans.

There was an opportunity to go to South America to act as an overseer of a plantation where rare woods would be sent back to Germany and they would use them for venires on furniture and so on.

He took that position and he left, as I recall seeing in some of the papers somewhere about 1925, 24, 25. They went to Paraguay and while they were down there they had, took care of overseeing the mahogany plantation and sending the wood back to Germany for furniture manufacture.

**Paul:** Can you tell me anything about your father’s service during World War One? Did he ever speak about that experience?

**Fred:** Yes. He was in Belgium and in France during the war. He was wounded once from shrapnel. He was in the artillery.

**Paul:** Are there stories that he used to tell about that that you could relay to us on tape?

**Fred:** Yes. He mentioned several times in the, during the course of the war that in the artillery towards the end of the war things were getting pretty bad and the shells weren’t firing the way they should have fired and also the, there was hardly any food for them.

They were almost starving. It was quite a rough time on him, he was gassed twice too. He was in the trench warfare they used gas at that time.

**Paul:** Do you what would happen if you were gassed? What was the outcome?

**Fred:** Well the outcome was that you are pretty much paralyzed so he was sent to the hospital where he recuperated and then he was sent back in again.

He had quite a few friends who were killed in that war. My mother worked has a, she was back at the home front. She was making shells she learned the trade of turning shells to their proper size.

**Paul:** Where was that?

**Fred:** That was done in Karlsruhe in Germany.

**Paul:** Is it a factory job?

**Fred:** Yes it was the factory, in the factory yes.

**Paul:** You mentioned that your parents married during the war.

**Fred:** Yes.

**Paul:** Can you tell me how their met and how that all came together?

**Fred:** They were school children and my dad was on the stocky side. They used to say, “Run here comes the fat guy” Because when they were friends, the girls would, he would chase them. Then eventually he got to know my mother and then their friendship blossomed into love and then they were married during the war of 1917.

**Paul:** Can you tell me a little bit about your father’s personality?

**Fred:** He was strict, he was a very strict person but he was a lovable guy. He took good care of he’s family, he took very good care of he’s family. He always worked hard and he was a real good father to me and to my brother and sister too of course. He used the rod occasionally but only when we really needed it.

**Paul:** What kinds of things did your father like to do for recreation?

**Fred:** He was a great reader, he read a lot. He was always working at the house.

**Paul:** What kinds of things did he do?

**Fred:** He could do anything. He could be a plumber, he was a part electrician, he could, he was a carpenter and he could do almost anything that was associated with household.

**Paul:** Just a handy kind of a man.

**Fred:** Everything and he was a very good machinist and he was a very excellent mechanic too when it came to fixing water pumps and things like that. Because that was one of his occupations when he was working for the Niagara Mohawk.

**Paul:** Once they got here.

**Fred:** Once they were here yes.

**Paul:** Let me ask you the same question about your mom. Can you describe her personality for me?

**Fred:** Well she was a very loving mother, very religious and we were brought up to go to church every Sunday and also we were all sent to Parochial schools, Catholic Parochial schools.

**Paul:** The family was Catholic?

**Fred:** The family was Catholic, Roman Catholic.

**Paul:** You said that your mother was religious, is there a story you can tell that reflects how religious she was?

**Fred:** She would take us and bring us to mass in the morning in fact. That was one of her reasons for moving to where I live today. Well we lived down here three blocks away was to be within walking distance of a Catholic church, so that she could go to mass during the day.

**Paul:** Did she teach you any prayers?

**Fred:** Yes. We were taught all the Our Father and Hail Mary and so on.

**Paul:** Can you say a prayer for us on tape in German? Do you remember any?

**Fred:**  Well we used to say the prayer before meals, we always said that [unclear 00:10:28]

**Paul:** Thank you.

**Fred:** You are welcome.

**Paul:** What did you, what’s the translation roughly?

**Fred:** It’s oh! God thank you for the meal we are about to eat and we praise you forever.

**Paul:** Talk about the kinds of recreational things your mother like to do.

**Fred:** Well mom was a great seamstress. She in fact at one time she used to make our clothing and she used to like the knight and crochet. She was a cook, she was a great cook.

**Paul:** Tell me some of the things that she cooked.

**Fred:** Some of things primarily were donuts. She had a special Berlin or they called which are donuts which are filled with jelly on the inside. She’d make a big pot of soup and then we’d have that Berliners and other donuts to eat.

**Paul:** Can you spell Berliner please?

**Fred:** B-E-R-L-I-N-E-R.

**Paul:** Like the city?

**Fred:** Like the city yes. Well that’s where they were originally made I guess. She used to make these huge cakes, onion cakes and plump cakes. Again that was, always a big pot of soup and the cake, but she cook many other things.

**Paul:** You said earlier that you believe your parents went to Paraguay in ’26, 1926?

**Fred:** No, that was when I was born.

**Paul:** ’25?

**Fred:** No, somewhere around, somewhere under 24, 25 time span.

**Paul:** I’m curious what your father relayed to you about that experience of going to Paraguay as opposed to what your mother may have relayed to you about going to Paraguay.

**Fred:** He was anxious to get there because it was an adventure to him. Mom was a little reluctant because she was so used to she wasn’t used to the jungle facilities.

**Paul:** Do you know how much about that she knew before she got there?

**Fred:** I don’t believe she knew too much of, she had much of a feeling for that. I think she was somewhat surprised when she got there. Again this is back in the 20s and you didn’t have the television. The only thing you could tell was from books and brochures.

**Paul:** Did either of them ever relate to any information about the ocean crossing to Paraguay?

**Fred:** They just mentioned that it was a normal crossing, no particular, nothing no specific problem.

**Paul:** Was there a German population in Paraguay?

**Fred:** Yes, there was. I think it was somewhere in the Asuncion region.

**Paul:** What sorts of things if you know were the Germans involved in doing in that part of the world?

**Fred:** I think primarily they were in agriculture for one thing and also trying to get involved in governmental positions such that they could build these countries up. You might say they were the fourth world country in those days.

**Paul:** Do you know if your father had any kind of experience when he was in Germany, experience like what he would be doing once he got to Paraguay. How did he get that job I guess is what I’ asking?

**Fred:** I think he just applied for it, he saw an ad in newspaper and he went and applied for it. Because of the conditions back in Germany at that time and he didn’t like the political ramifications that were started. He just wanted to leave.

**Paul:** What were the economic problems going on in Germany?

**Fred:** Well basically they had a very high inflation rate. In order for you to buy your groceries the wives would go to the factory, they were paid every twice a day because of the inflation rate.

The wives would go to the factories, the husbands would give them the money and then the wives would go to the store and buy hard goods and food.

Because the following afternoon the prices would go up, so that’s how bad it was. In fact eventually the postage stamps cost a billion Marks because of the inflation rate. That’s just, and all their savings were completely whipped out.

**Paul:** What was the political climate? What didn’t he like about the political climate?

**Fred:** Well the political was there, there was a no direction, no leadership. The Weimar republic has it was in those days was floundering. Again the people had very little to eat and the inflation rate was so high and that was it primarily.

**Paul:** I should say for the sake of the tape that Weimar is spelled VEIM-

**Fred:** W.

**Paul:** W excuse me. W-E-I-M-A-R thank you. Alright so your parents got to Paraguay.

**Fred:** Right.

**Paul:** There is a brother and a sister.

**Fred:** My brother and sister were born in Germany and came along right.

**Paul:** Tell me what you know about their lives in Paraguay.

**Fred:** It was pretty strange to them. Because the climate was hot and they was very little civilization in the section where they were living because it was in the juggle, in the forest.

**Paul:** Do you any details about the actual structure that they were living in?

**Fred:** Yes, I had some pictures, we misplaced them somewhere but we had some pictures where it looked just like a thatched roof made from straw and a few sides and that was it. It was a very primeval if you want to call it that way.

**Paul:** Well sure coming from an industrial country like Germany.

**Fred:** Yes, where the streets where all had cobbled stones and then going there where everything was horseback. Everything was of course in those days everything was horseback and wagon, horse and wagon.

In the big ruts and especially the torrential rains they used to tell stories about that. They had to put umbrellas up because it rained through the roofs. Then their also had ants, army ants would come through every once in a while and eat anything in sight practically.

**Paul:** Are there any stories from your family about encounters with wild animals or reptiles?

**Fred:** Primarily my brother, he was fooling around with a frog one time with a stick and he poked the frog and the frog spit. It spit out some solution and it hit him right in the eye. It formed a coating right over his eye. My parents took it and washed it out, so he didn’t lose his sight but he could have lost it.

One time my mother was bathing with us and she felt a sting in her foot this was in a stream close by. She took her foot out and she noticed blood and they was a native woman, an Indian she said to her, “Get out quick, get out quick.”

In Spanish or in Guaraní which is their local language there. It turned out that she was bitten by a Piranha, so it was a good time to get out of the water.

**Paul:** Can you spell the name of the local language please?

**Fred:** I think it is G-U-A-R-A-N-I, Guarani. It’s a combination between Spanish and the Indian language Guarani.

**Paul:** Your family is contending with piranhas and poisonous frogs and all this kinds of things they don’t have in Germany.

**Fred:** Yes.

**Paul:** Tell me a little bit about for instance schooling did your brother and sister go to school or?

**Fred:** They were pretty young at that time. Mostly home taught, they were mostly home taught until we came to this country.

**Paul:** Were there any stories that your family has relayed to you about your birth and the circumstances that surround your birth?

**Fred:** Yes. It turned out that in this part of the country they were mostly natives and people that had lived there for a long time. Consequently when I was born I had, they had an Indian midwife to help my mother out. My father was probably boiling hot water, as their show in the movies usually.

When I was born, I was blond almost white blond and this created a big furry because they had never seen anyone like that before, so they made a big issue of it.

Because they thought that they had people coming from various parts of the forests coming in to look, to see this child that was white, with white hair. That’s the story their told me, I can’t verify that of course. I don’t have the hair anymore.

**Paul:** Can you tell me something or maybe you can’t but if you know anything about the relationship between the German population and the native Indian population?

**Fred:** They thought quite highly of the Germans down there at that time. Because they always tried to teach them the right, what their taught was the right way to do things, to grow more crops and to build up the country. They had a very good reputation there.

**Paul:** Can you talk a little bit about what you know about your father’s work on the plantation and exactly what that entailed?

**Fred:** Well my dad’s primary job was to go out into the forest and identify those trees to be cut and shipped back of course. He also had to identify the type of tree and he was a, he learned some forestry just before he left. They taught him of what types to send and so on and so forth and the length and the best lengths to send and so on.

**Paul:** Did he ever tell you what to look for in mahogany tree, I mean those sorts of things that.

**Fred:** He never told me about, in the tree itself but one time we had the job of locally picking out a casket for someone who had died. He went up to the casket and the person at the store at the place that displayed room said, “That’s solid monogamy.”

My dad went up and just blew on it a little bit and let the moisture from his breath get on it and then he just wiped it off and he said, “No, that’s Vanier” He had that kind of a feeling the woods.

**Paul:** He brought he’s knowledge-

**Fred:** Brought he’s knowledge with him yes.

**Paul:** Is there anything else that your parents relayed to you about their existence in Paraguay that we haven’t touched upon?

**Fred:** Yes I think primarily there were some uprisings too. Sometimes the natives would start getting dissatisfied with their conditions perhaps for some one reason or another. They would kill people and one of my dad’s friends was killed down there.

They would also identify how, they would always drink Matte M-A-T-T-E. They would have a guard which is dried out and it’s hollowed on the inside and they would put the matte in there and then pour hot water in it and then drink it with a metal straw in fact I have one in my drawer in there. I was brought up with matte they always gave me a little bit of that. It’s delicious tea.

**Paul:** What is it made out of?

**Fred:** It’s a tea, it’s made from a plant and they just dry it in the sun and then break it up into small pieces like tea leaf. It’s very good.

**Paul:** I’m curious in retrospect now looking back on your growing up with your parents here in Troy did their experience in Paraguay have any profound effect in their later life in America?

**Fred:** I think it just rounded out their education if you will. Because and their always were able to, my dad could speak Spanish pretty well. Has a result he made quite a few contacts with people from South America that he would meet in Troy or at picnics and things. It was good as a social tool to be able to speak with people from Spain or South America I should say.

**Paul:** Tell me why their left Paraguay?

**Fred:** Well their left primarily because of the temperature, the climate my mother couldn’t stand it and the too the lack of civilization. She wanted to get back to civilized area.

**Paul:** She’d had enough of the piranhas.

**Fred:** She’d had enough of the jungle life and of course this is back in the 20s things were pretty rough down there, just looking at some of the photographs.

**Paul:** They are still pretty rough down there, you can only imagine how often.

**Fred:** Yes.

**Paul:** Tell what you know about their leaving Paraguay about the process and what they had to go through to get out.

**Fred:** Has I understand it they wrote to my cousin here in this area, not my cousin by my father’s cousin who and then requested some funds be sent to them. Then they, Mr. Bodemer or B because that’s was my father’s cousins name.

**Paul:** Can you spell that too?

**Fred:** B-O-D-E-M-E-R. He took care of handling the paperwork that had to be done from this part to this area and has you saw I have for Mr. Oswald Heck who was the travel bureau man locally in Schenectady. In fact it turned out that he’s son eventually became the speaker of the house in the New York state assembly many years ago.

**Paul:** What was he’s last name Heck.

**Fred:** Heck, H-E-C-K.

**Paul:** Thank you he was the travel agent.

**Fred:** Right he’s father was the travel agent and he took care of all the correspondents and so on and so forth. At that point my parents moved since they knew that they were going to come to the states, they moved to Villarrica which is a larger city a slightly larger city obviously from where we were.

They stayed at the hotel Schlesing until all the funds arrived and they went to the US consulate in Asuncion and took care of the paperwork through him, so this way they could come in through a quota system.

**Paul:** Could you spell Schlesing the name of the hotel?

**Fred:** S-C-H-L-E-S-I-N-G.

**Paul:** Thank you. Obviously a German hotel.

**Fred:** It’s a German hotel right.

**Paul:** I should say for the sake of the tape that you have a fantastic collection of paper archives.

**Fred:** Right.

**Paul:** From your parents experience and we maybe referring to them as we go everything including the receipt for the ship and we’ll be talking about that. What do you about they are getting ready to go in terms of paperwork and that sort of thing.

**Fred:** Just that they had to, to come to the states they also had to go through Buenos Aires because that’s where the boat, ship I should say was docked so that they had to come down through the La Plata River to Buenos Aires where they disembarked.

They pretty much had these large steam ship covers that’s what you call them in German, club covers but suitcases very huge ones. They had several of those as you can imagine with three children there is always something to pay to bring along.

**Paul:** What did you parents take with them from Paraguay? You mentioned the straw that you-

**Fred:** Yes. They also brought, we had a rattle snake skin mounted, it was dried rattle snake skin which was about, it was about five feet high and they brought that in. They also brought a stuffed parrot, a beautiful stuffed parrot but it wasn’t allowed to come in. They took that at Ellis Island, there is only certain things you can bring into the country.

**Paul:** That’s probably why they brought you there.

**Fred:** Yes.

**Paul:** Because it was rattle snake skin and some parrot. I have another question for you. What did they take from Germany when they went to Paraguay?

**Fred:** Well dad took he’s army uniform, in fact mom later on in this country made a coat for me out of that, he’s old army coat. I think he brought he’s knife with him. He had a rather large knife which he could use in the jungle.

Pretty much writing equipment I know that. He had a pair of chaps which were leather chaps he could put on and writing bridges. Mom just brought as I recall I mean based on our conversations just normal clothing but they were amazed at how hot it was. It was, sometimes it would get into the hundreds.

**Paul:** In Paraguay?

**Fred:** In Paraguay yes.

**Paul:** It’s funny because they are going through a double immigration experience, it’s always interesting what people chose to bring with them.

**Fred:** Right.

**Paul:** They are not only bringing the stuff from Germany but now they are bringing stuff from Paraguay.

**Fred:** Right.

**Paul:** Because they end up with all of it.

**Fred:** Right.

**Paul:** When they get to Troy.

**Fred:** Then two the season were completely reversed because it’s summer when it’s winter in Germany. That was quite a change for them too.

**Paul:** How long did they have to wait in Buenos Aires before they got on the ship?

**Fred:** I think it was only a few days, several days.

**Paul:** Do you know anything about the examination process or anything like that even if they was something like that.

**Fred:** No, there was no examination process they just had to go through the consulate and they just stamped it since it was officially stamped by the American consulate in Asuncion. That was like a, you know they are just going through this country it’s just a transit like a transit visa almost, they just stamped, you’ve been here and that’s it.

**Paul:** Since we’ve gotten to the point about the boat we should explain the name of the line that they took was the Lamporte Holt line.

**Fred:** Right.

**Paul:** L-A-M-P-O-R-T-E and H-O-L-T and they is a little discrepancies between some of the written paper work and the printed paperwork.

**Fred:** Right.

**Paul:** Mentions that they took the Voltore, the handwritten paperwork looks like it’s a Variban, V-A-R-I-B-A-N so we are not quite sure what ship they took if the Voltore bare bond maybe voltore in Spanish or any language or something.

**Fred:** Right.

**Paul:** I do want to say also that we have the receipts for the ship passes and cost in American dollars.

**Fred:** Right.

**Paul:** $578.62 and that would be for?

**Fred:** All of us.

**Paul:** Mom, dad.

**Fred:** George, Mary and myself.

**Paul:** I see.

**Fred:** Five.

**Paul:** We can assume that you probably went for half theirs or something.

**Fred:** I can’t verify that, but it was third class too by the way.

**Paul:** What if anything did they relate to you about the passage to New York?

**Fred:** Apparently it was uneventful because they were probably so busy taking care of three children that they didn’t have too much time to relate to other people aboard.

**Paul:** Do you anything about where the ship might have stopped prior to going to New York?

**Fred:** It stopped, it just went to New York it was a direct from Buenos Aires to New York.

**Paul:** What time of the year was this?

**Fred:** March. They landed in March.

**Paul:** March.

**Fred:** March to 23rd of 1927.

**Paul:** Tell me what you know about what happens to them once the ship approaches New York?

**Fred:** Now you have to remember this they were coming it was summer in South America and they are coming up here so, it was just in the latter part of the winter here. They were quite cold but did mention that they had seen the statue of liberty and they were quite impressed by it when they came through.

**Paul:** You mentioned that they had recollections of having to go to Ellis Island.

**Fred:** They went to Ellis Island.

**Paul:** What were those recollections?

**Fred:** That they were physically examined there all of us were. Then I think they stayed there over night and then the following day they took the train from New York City to Cohoes.

**Paul:** They probably took your parrot away at Ellis Island.

**Fred:** They took it at immigration wherever that was it was probably in Ellis Island. A stuffed bird not a real one.

**Paul:** Right.

**Fred:** A live on.

**Paul:** You think the family was held overnight at Ellis Island.

**Fred:** I think it was just an overnight stay.

**Paul:** I see. Anything else that you were told about the ship arriving in New York and the processing or anything else?

**Fred:** No, just that it went along, apparently satisfactory to them. They had no bad stories to tell. In fact they were glad to set foot in the United States at that point.

**Paul:** Did anyone come to New York to meet them?

**Fred:** No. They had their train as I read in Heck’s travel bureau paper there. They had the tickets already for the train from New York City to Albany I think it was which and that’s where Mr. Bodemer and he’s family picked our family up.

**Paul:** Did your mother or father ever tell you maybe things that they saw here in America that they had never seen before things that were new to them?

**Fred:** No, just the abundance of food that they had not experienced in the past. They were really and the number of automobiles at that even in the 20s were more automobiles here than they had been in Europe of course they were hardly any in South America that time.

**Paul:** Right. Where did they go to live when they first arrived?

**Fred:** They lived in Cohoes. They first they lived a week with the Bodemer’s, and then dad had a just a temporary job has a farmer at Mr. Herbs H-E-R-B-S he’s farm in Cohoes.

**Paul:** Doing what kind of work?

**Fred:** Just farming more or less working in the field.

**Paul:** What were they, what kind of vegetables?

**Fred:** Planting, I think primarily they were planting potatoes and corn and things like that. Then of course he’s background was as a tool and die marker in Germany or a mechanic. He took a job with the, it was Niagara Hudson in those days, its NYMO today, but those days there was a garage down in South Troy.

He and he’s cousins husband Bodemer’s they both worked in the same place. He was fixing the trucks primarily at that time. Then after that he worked there a couple of years and then there was an opportunity for him to go back into the tool and die making profession if you want to call it that in general electric.

**Paul:** I should also say for the sake of the tape that Nanaimo which is spelled N-Y-M-O are the initials for Niagara Mohawk.

**Fred:** Niagara Mohawk.

**Paul:** Which is the local utility company?

**Fred:** Right.

**Paul:** In upstate New York. Where does your memory kick in? What’s the earliest memory that kicks in?

**Fred:** My earliest memory in Cohoes when I first saw snow. I must have been three years old because and I said snow in German of course German was my first language because my parents would converse in German.

I could still remember looking out the front window and seeing this white stuff come floating down. It was the first time I had seen it of course. Saying schnee I guess so it must have been at least three saying schnee in German which is snow.

**Paul:** How is schnee spelled?

**Fred:** S-C-H-N-E-E.

**Paul:** Talk to me about the house in Cohoes which you remember about where you live.

**Fred:** It was a two story family. We lived down stairs and there was another family who lived upstairs. They names was Johnson and they was some friction there because immigrants sometimes were looked down upon. They was a little bit of discrimination to put it very mildly. It wasn’t that bad according to dad and my mother.

**Paul:** What would they do to you?

**Fred:** They would just do things to the children their kids would come down to play with my brother and sister to some extent, but nothing serious.

It was just a little bit of discrimination especially since we couldn’t speak, my parents couldn’t speak English that well at that point and time and of course my brother and sister too the same thing. There was a lack of communication which is always difficult when you can’t speak the same language has others.

**Paul:** What old world German ways did your parents hold onto here in the United States>

**Fred:** Primarily discipline. They always made sure you had certain things you had to do. You had to work, you had to do certain jobs.

**Paul:** Do you remember some of the rules of the house?

**Fred:** Well as we got older. Well there were certain times, well as we got older of course but as we were younger you had to do your chores before you could leave the house. Mom was there to check to see that they were done.

**Paul:** What was your chore?

**Fred:** My chore, well we used to dust, we used to have to dust the house and mom was a very sticklish about cleanliness. The other thing was too you had to take care of your clothing. Because you did get your clothes dirty that was another, they were good clothes and play clothes. You could change, when I was younger we used to have aprons too. Mom made aprons for us so that you wouldn’t get the coats dirty.

**Paul:** Did your mother get a job here in the United States?

**Fred:** Yes. During the depression you see right after dad took the job in Schenectady then we moved to Schenectady from Cohoes to general electric job we moved to Schenectady.

While we were there we had a large flat so what she did is she took in boarders. She took in some immigrants that came over and they would stay in the rooms and mom would cook for them and also do their wash.

**Paul:** What do you remember about those boarders specifically?

**Fred:** They were nice fellas, clean cut type you know. They were working, when they were working and then they’d come home, they were just like part of the family because of course they were also from Germany too at that point. There was a good relationship between them, they were almost like cousins if you wanted to call them that.

**Paul:** Now did you speak exclusively German in the house?

**Fred:** We spoke exclusively German in the house except once we started going to school, my parents asked us to speak English to them but they would respond in German okay. We learned to speak English in school plus our playmates outside and that’s the way we learned the language.

**Paul:** Do you remember your own experience just beginning to learn English and how that affected you?

**Fred:** I had no problem with it. It just seemed to flow pretty easily because, see in those days they didn’t have kindergarten the schools I went to so you went in the first grade. By the time you went into the first grade you pretty much had a good, a reasonably, you could speak in English pretty well. Now my brother had a problem.

**Paul:** How old was he when they arrived?

**Fred:** Let’s see he was born in, he was about six, five or six in that range. He had to go to school in Schenectady he started school. He was held back a year because he couldn’t speak English.

He managed okay after that but he had a problem, my sister not because she was younger. In conversing with the local neighbors we could speak English before we got into the school but not my brother of course.

**Paul:** Did your parents make a concerted effort to learn English or did they I mean how did they approach that?

**Fred:** Yes. Well they went to night school, but mom went during the days when dad was working. She used to take me along and this was in Schenectady they always gave me a coloring book or something and had me sit in the corner while this ladies were all saying the, following the teacher in the pronunciation of English.

I always remember one thing and I knew the difference already then, the teacher would say the man eats the bread and then the class would all respond, the man eats the breat. I knew that was wrong even then, but those were the kinds of things I remember at that stage. That’s what mom did she wanted to learn English and of course dad had too because he had to work with people. He went to night school.

**Paul:** Did your mother in her learning of the language, how did she approach using English out in public?

**Fred:** It was difficult for mom because she was at home most of the time, so she didn’t have the luxury of working with people that much.

It was more difficult for her, but she would with her broken English she would still go to the store and buy things and whatever. She would try to speak as best as she could even though it wasn’t correct English at that point.

**Paul:** We are in Schenectady during the 1930s right?

**Fred:** Right.

**Paul:** The time period you are talking about?

**Fred:** Right.

**Paul:** Is there strong German community?

**Fred:** Yes. There is, there was a Turner Hall in Schenectady.

**Paul:** Turner Hall.

**Fred:** Turner Hall in Schenectady and there was what they called a Turn Verein. Which is a society for lifting weights and gymnastics primarily.

**Paul:** Can you spell that please?

**Fred:** What?

**Paul:** Turn Verein.

**Fred:** Verein, V-E-R-E-I-N. Turner is T-U-R-

**Paul:** Turner Hall which was a social hall.

**Fred:** Right.

**Paul:** Then they was this the Verein.

**Fred:** The Verein which is part of the hall.

**Paul:** Like an athletics club?

**Fred:** Yes. It’s an athletic club and they had the all the weights and the dumbbells and things like that. Which was brought over, that’s part of the culture, the German culture is gymnastics and singing. They also had a singing society there too.

**Paul:** In what ways did your parents socialize at that time?

**Fred:** At that time they would, if the hall had an affair we would go has a family to the hall and participate, mostly the German foods and the beer and of course not at that stage but my dad would have a few with the folks.

Then they’d have the activities whichever was the, they put on an exhibit, the lifting the weights and then gymnastics for both women and men. The singing society both men and women they would sing German songs.

**Paul:** You said you were Catholic earlier on.

**Fred:** Yes.

**Paul:** Talk about your religious life at this point.

**Fred:** Okay. I started going to school at St. Joseph’s academy in Schenectady, its right in the heart of Schenectady.

**Paul:** This is a catholic school?

**Fred:** This is a catholic parochial school and my brother and sister did too. The first year my brother went to the public school but then they decided it was better for him to go to the catholic school.

Saint Josephs at that time did have quite a large German population too. It was part of the German culture to some, a very limited extent. We went to that school and we’d go to mass on Sunday and then.

**Paul:** Was it a Saint Joseph’s church?

**Fred:** In Saint Joseph’s church was right across the street from the school. It’s right off State Street or it was. It’s close now of course. We went to school there, I went to the first grade there.

**Paul:** Do you remember there being immigrant children in school?

**Fred:** They were some yes. In fact they were Polish children there too and Italians, some Italian people were there too. Of course the normal English or Irish, Scot people too.

**Paul:** Did the church sociality your parents’ social life at all, did the church play a function, have a function?

**Fred:** Not so much at that point because they were still doing things at home most of the time. They didn’t have time enough to socialize except for once in a while going to this German hall.

**Paul:** That was what?

**Fred:** Picnics.

**Paul:** That was the major social.

**Fred:** That’s the major socializing and with just the neighbors, just the local neighbors. There was a tailor who lived, we lived in Schenectady, the first one of the houses we lived in was over a bakery and then right new door was a tailor shop and he happen to be German. Dozell his name was.

He was a widower so he had a daughter so my mother more or less acted as a surrogate mother to her. That’s the way those things worked.

**Paul:** Were they many German merchants in Schenectady] at that time?

**Fred:** There were quite a few yes. The butcher I don’t recall their names now and there was a pharmacy too. That was run by Germans.

**Paul:** This is a visible presence in the community.

**Fred:** It’s a visible presence and the tailor of course.

**Paul:** Has you were growing up say, through grade school and into high school how did you think of yourself, what nationality did you think of yourself?

**Fred:** I always thought myself as an American always because it was just a, the German part of it was just a background I always looked at as that way.

**Paul:** Were they any conflicts especially as you got older between the way you looked at the world versus the way your parents looked at the world?

**Fred:** Not really. We all felt that we were just Americans of German heritage.

**Paul:** Your parents thought of it has that?

**Fred:** Definitely.

**Paul:** That’s interesting.

**Fred:** Definitely my father was a strong American.

**Paul:** Did he become a citizen?

**Fred:** Yes.

**Paul:** Can you talk a little bit about that process?

**Fred:** Yes dad become a citizen on, I can tell you this specifically because it is a very magical date for me. September the 10th 1934 he became a citizen.

**Paul:** You were living in Schenectady at that time.

**Fred:** We are living in Schenectady at that time and then mom became a citizen in 1936 or 37 in that timeframe. It took her a little longer because she had to learn English okay?

**Paul:** Tell me about, obviously your father becoming a citizen mean something special to you, why?

**Fred:** During World War two I wanted to get into the Navy. I was in high school at the time. I wanted to get my high school finished before I went into service. It turned out that I had gotten on an accelerated program so that I could get out in January of1934 so that I could join the Navy.

I took a test for electronic technician and I passed it. I was ready to go into the Navy in January 44 it turned out I was just about ready to be sworn in and somebody called me into the office in Albany and said, “You have to be a citizen for 10 years to join the navy to be in the navy”

I lacked six months okay, so I can’t accept you and here I had done all of these work. Accelerating the program to get out early so I can get into the navy and they wouldn’t accept me. That’s why I remembered. The day I was drafted was September the 10th 1944 I was citizen ten years and I got into the navy that day.

**Paul:** That’s why it means so much to you?

**Fred:** That’s why it means so much to me.

**Paul:** Did you parents ever want to go back to Germany for any reason or did they go back to Germany?

**Fred:** They never went back. My dad did after the war, world war two. He did go back and it was 1958, he had been away for 35 years.

**Paul:** Did he go alone?

**Fred:** He went by himself yes.

**Paul:** Why did he want to go back?

**Fred:** Well my mother had passed away so he wanted to go back because he had brothers and sisters over there and he wanted to visit them. He’s mother of course had died many years prior to that. He wanted to go back and touch base with people and he did.

**Paul:** What were his feelings about that experience?

**Fred:** He really enjoyed that plus the fact my brother was CIA at the time. He could stay with him that was in Berlin in those days. He could visit he’s relatives down and of course my relatives who went down in this black forest region in Germany.

**Paul:** What about you, have you been either to Paraguay or Germany?

**Fred:** I have never been to Paraguay, I really don’t have any need to go there. It would be nice I suppose sometime but I’ve been to Germany once. I went in 1990 I went to visit my aunts over there. I went with a germane hall tour.

A group of us got together and they traveled in the southern part of the Germany. I went to visit my relatives, I stayed three days with them and then I joined the tour and travelled around and it was good, but I had never seen them. Just by photographs of course and they’d never seen me. It was quite a reunion we had a nice enjoyable time.

**Paul:** How did you feel emotional about seeing the land that you probably had heard quite a bit about?

**Fred:** It was, I saw the home that my father lived, no didn’t live there. My father lived there with, when my parents were first married. They showed me homestead there and the home my dad lived in initially was bombed out during the war so there is gas station.

They took me around and showed me where my parents were married, the little chapel and so on. It was part of history, part of your genealogy if you will. It was something really interesting to be there and to meet cousins that you’d never met before and to shake hands and so on.

**Paul:** Speaking German.

**Fred:** Speaking German and speaking English too. They were, one of them is now a city planner in Berlin. He and he’s children all speak English very well. It was no problem and I could still speak German reasonably well.

**Paul:** What do you think is inherently German about you? What inside you makes you German?

**Fred:** I think primarily I don’t know, I think it’s my way of living. I try to do the right things and that was ingrained in us as children. It’s very difficult to put my finger on any specific thing, I think I’m a good religious person, but it’s hard.

The food I enjoy certain foods now I have to stay away from certain types of the German foods lately. I’ve had the worse so on I’ve got to be very careful of that. The fat free days that we have today.

**Paul:** All right it’s been awkward.

**Fred:** It’s been awkward at all well yes.

**Paul:** Well Mr. Kunz I want to thank you very much, this has been really a very interesting hour that we stance.

**Fred:** Yes. I enjoyed it too.

**Paul:** This is Paul Secrest signing off with Fred Kunz on Monday August 28th 1995 in Brunswick New York just outside of Troy. Thank you very much.

**Fred:** You are welcome.