

Today's interview with Mr. Martin Moses of Chicago is being conducted by the Holocaust Memorial Foundation of Illinois, 4255 West Main Street in Skokie, Illinois.

We're going to begin our interview with Mr. Moses with some information about his early years in Germany. Mr. Moses, can you begin by telling us your date of birth and place of birth?

I was born in the Eastern part of Germany called in a town named Deutsch Krone on February the 1st, 1928, approximately five years prior to the Nazis coming to power.

And can you tell us about your family life at that time in Germany?

We lived in the country, in a small village, near Deutsch Krone. We were the only Jews in that particular town. And my family had lived around that area for at least 350 years. Primarily my first days or my recollections of the Nazis coming to power, it was a little bit further back. I was about six years old when Hindenburg died.

And I was coming home that night. Somebody picked me up and brought me home from where my dad was. And the bells rang. And at that time I asked the gentleman what happened. And he told me that Hindenburg, the old Field Marshal had died. And that was maybe the complete turn around in Germany, at least to my recollections where now Hitler has received all powers. He didn't even present himself, he didn't want to be a vice president or president of the country because he felt that the chancellor was fine and good enough for him.

Everything was disbanded. And he now had complete powers for Germany being the chancellor, in not only name, but also being the president of the country.

Let's spend a little bit of time talking about your family life and the communal life that you remember in Germany before the Nazis took power, and then go onto your experiences leaving Germany. Do you want to tell us about your parents, what they were doing in Germany?

My dad was a cattle dealer, and he also owned an inn, in this little village. We were not discriminated against. My dad had been a World War I veteran, had the Iron Cross, first and second class. People were friendly towards us. There was always people that hate, and always people that don't hate you.

But I remember one instance, and this is in 1935 when my dad had a run-in with a Nazi. And at that particular time, he was from a neighboring town. The SS came, and wanted to arrest him. They arrested him and put him in-- because the village had no jail-- into what they call the [GERMAN] house, or the fire department, where they kept the fire engine.

Several people saw it. One of the fellows by the name of [? Heinstein, ?] went out and brought the local gendarme, who lived about seven kilometers from there with a motorcycle. And the Nazis asked him to detain my dad at least for a couple of days. And he refused. And he says, look, did the man kill anybody? No. Did he rob anybody? No. What did he do? Well, he said, [GERMAN] Nazi, you dumb Nazi, and which wasn't even true.

And the upshot was that he came, brought my dad home, and stayed with us all night to assure himself that they won't come back. So this is the kind of people, the people themselves, were not against the Jews. It was more or less the regime.

Did you have a Jewish education?

Yes. Because we didn't live in the town itself, the hazzan came at first, and he tutored me a couple of hours, two hours, once a week. And after that, when we moved to the bigger city, to Schonlanke, there was no need for it, because in fact, there was a Jewish community of about 150 or 450 souls. And I went to that Jewish school.

It was a very Orthodox community, because they were really one of three towns in Germany that had a matzah factory, Unh, hunh. Albany here in Chicago, it was a very Orthodox setup.

And so your family was Orthodox?

Yes. Well, the irony of the thing is if you want to be Jewish in Germany, you have to live in a small town. Because everybody knew and you couldn't open your store on Shabbos, so you couldn't do anything on Shabbos, because everybody knew you. If you wanted to be assimilated, you moved to the bigger cities, because there you--

You could be--

You melted in. You melted in.

Right. Do you want to tell us about the circumstances leading up to your leave of Germany?

The Kristallnacht, which was November the 9th, my dad was taken in an Aktion, like every other Jew in town, and sent to the concentration camp at Sachsenhausen, near Oranienburg in Central Germany, near Berlin. He spent there 100 days. And prior to leaving, my mother had made a commitment to the Gestapo that if he gets out, within 30 days we would leave Germany.

And they didn't even let him out--

After 100 days--

After 100 days from November, on February the 17th, he came out. And on March the 26th, we boarded a ship in Naples to go to Shanghai.

How were you able to get the proper credentials to do that?

OK, all you had to have is money to buy a steamship ticket. And of course, what they did was they made us buy a return trip ticket, round trip ticket, knowing that nobody is going to go back, to collect more monies. And we went on a Japanese steamer called SS [PLACE NAME]

And you traveled under your German passport?

We traveled on a German passport, which I still have to this day. I was just entered into the passport as a child.

And how old were you at this time?

I was 11 years old at this time. And--

It was just the three of you then?

The three of us went. There was about 120 other German Jewish refugees going to Shanghai.

Now let me ask you did. You have any other family that was still in Germany at this time?

Definitely. My uncles and aunts who perished in the Holocaust.

I see. So you never saw them actually--

No. We have made every effort to find them, nobody there. Possibly 25 close relatives. These are-- my dad came from a family of 14, had three brothers and three sisters perished in the Holocaust.

Well first of all, when we left Germany, all they would let us take with us was 10 marks, which is an equivalent of at that time about \$4 or \$5.

Really?

Yes.

Per person?

Per person.

They did let us take our personal household goods, like clothes, dishes, books. But then again, we really couldn't take anything, just what we had with us.

We arrived in Shanghai with these 10 dollars, that's it. And consequently, we had to start from scratch. The Jewish committees, the [NON-ENGLISH], which is here the HIAS, put us first into a camp, not a detention camp, just a reception type of thing. My relatives in America sent us some money, so moved out of that particular camp or reception area, into a one-room flat.

This was in Hongkew, the Japanese occupied territory at the time. And there we stayed until the Japanese did a proclamation in March of 1943, where all Jews moved into a designated area. And again, we moved to then to what was known as the [PLACE NAME]

And what kind of a facility was that?

This was a Chinese school prior to us moving in, and consequently there was about-- these were big sized rooms, five or six families to each room.

And then about how many people were in there?

About 800 to 900 people.

These were all Jewish?

These were all Jewish refugees, coming from either Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia some, and there was 18,000 of them that had reached those shores by the beginning of the war, which was in December 1941.

Can you tell us what life was like in the camp there?

We did receive one meal a day, which was funded by the American distribution, Joint Committee, through devious ways by transferring the money to Chinese people through Switzerland evidently. And the Chinese advanced this money, knowing that they were get it back after the war, so that they could buy, the committee to buy foods for us to survive.

And what did you actually do on a daily basis in the camp?

I was permitted to take up a trade. And I learned the trade of being a machinist, which stood me very good when I came to this country. My dad dealt in selling furs to make some kind of a living with the open stands on a street. I should first advise you, tell you that the camp or the designated area that they let us live in was about two by three miles, two miles wide, and approximately three miles long, covered about 20 streets.

And into this we were herded, these 18,000 people. The amount that survived is about anywhere from 13,000 to 14,000. And primarily this was due to not propagating themselves more. Because families were not founded. People didn't have any children, because they didn't know what this would all be.

At one time, the Japanese, through the urging of the Germans, through a fellow by the name of [? Wiederman, ?] who used to be Hitler's company commander in World War I, he was a consul general in Tientsin, were urged to kill us,

similar to that the Germans stayed in the concentration camps in Europe. But the Japanese, being fearful of the consequences after the war, did not go along with this.

And consequently, we were able to survive. But presently, there was beatings by the Japanese. There was the restrictions of not being able to leave the territory, the inability to really make lead normal lives.

Did you think that you would actually see a future from that time-- What were your thoughts during that period?

There's always the hope. We knew that this could not last forever. Surprisingly, we heard-- the radio were open. The Russians had a radio station, the Russian government. And this gave us a lot of hope, due to the fact that these people told us about the victories in Europe. And we could follow the war, of what really is going on.

These stations were, by the way, broadcasted in German by German Jewish refugees. Another thing that we produced this year there was a book written by a fellow named Dr. Mark Siegelberg, [? Schutzhaftjude, ?] and then he gave a number, which was written about the concentration camp. Mr. Siegelberg was taken out of Shanghai just before the war started with the Japanese, as the American troops and the British troops left Shanghai. He was taken to Australia.

In fact, I'm in search of the book. I've not been able to find the book.

Can you tell us about your experiences when the war was over and you realized that there was going to be a future?

Well, the first thing we got is when the atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima.

How did you get that news?

OK. That news was over the national radio. We did not understand or comprehend. There was some people, of course, they had talked to the police, and [? physics ?] with us, who did understand what was going on. The average person did not understand what kind of a lethal weapon was unleashed.

Shortly after that, the Japanese emperor went on the radio, and he declared to the Japanese people that a terrible thing has happened, that he needs to wait for peace. And at that point, we knew that the war was coming to an end.

Americans did not come into Shanghai, because the commander, the Navy commander and the army commander of the Japanese troops, wanted to keep on fighting in Shanghai And until this was settled, no Americans would land in Shanghai, and they came on the 26th of August, I remember. So the war it wasn't until September 1 for us.

At that time, those our movements were free. But being this type of thing, the war didn't stop right there and then. Because even you had free movements, and everything was starting to come, we still did not leave China for another almost three years.

And what are you doing in Shanghai?

Well, then we did-- have the professions that people came with, and have the kind of things that they could do. Money was coming in from American relatives. And the life became much easier.

Can you tell us how you finally did get to leave China, you came to this country, is that correct?

Correct. Only I came to this country. My parents could not come at that time. They had the Polish quota system. They were born in a town, right on the Polish border. And they had to go to Israel, in 1948 after Israel was established Israel in 1951.

I, on the other hand, came right away in 1948.

And how old were you in 1948?

I was just 20 years old.

And you had relatives to come to?

I had relatives to come and live in Chicago.

To Chicago, is that right?

In Chicago, correct.

Right. And your parents joined you?

In 1951. I brought them over here.

I see. And they then lived here.

They lived here. In fact, [COUGH]

Have you ever gone back to Germany?

Yes, my professional life now takes me back to Germany, possibly three or four times a year.

I am a purchasing agent for Baxter in their [INAUDIBLE] division. I do buy all the surgical instruments, and I do go back to a little town called Tuttlingen near the German Swiss border. It is the capital of the surgical instrument makers. This has been founded maybe 200 years ago. And this is where all the instrument makers are situated and located.

Can you just very briefly tell us perhaps your emotional reactions from your journey now as a free person?

I really don't have any reaction. The people I deal with are mostly younger people. And if I look in their faces, I can't really establish a guilt, due to the fact that they are my age or much, much younger.

If any person that's 70 or 80 years old, he must have been someplace. Surprisingly, I researched the town of Tuttlingen and I don't find that any amount of Jews ever lived there. There's not a Jewish cemetery. And there's no semblance of a Jewish community in that particular town. The next town that would be there is Ulm, which is about 100 kilometers away, or Freiburg which is about the same amount. Freiburg today has a Jewish community, and so it has also [? Schtrikland ?] which is also about 100 miles away.

Has anyone ever been interested in knowing about your experience, because you are Jewish, or are they not even aware that you're Jewish?

Very few people. Most likely, they sense it. But they are not-- I have never been asked what my religion is.

I see.

I have told them again and again I'm not German. I don't feel German. I was born in Germany. But I have no allegiances to Germany or the German people. This is my business transaction story.

Thank you very, very much for this [INAUDIBLE].

You're welcome.

We certainly appreciate having this opportunity.

Mr. Moses, can you tell us more about your experiences in Shanghai?

Well, I would like to go back and explain to you what type of Jewish communities Shanghai had. There is the-- I shouldn't say Shanghai. I should say China. First of all, there was Jews living in Tientsin. And there was a good sized community. And there was a good sized community naturally in Shanghai and in Hong Kong.

The Jews in China go back most likely to antiquity maybe 2,000 years or so. These are people that came in on the Silk Route, and completely integrated into the Chinese culture, and into the Chinese communities. And that is the community of Kaifengfu.

They had a synagogue there, most likely until 1850 or so. I personally have never saw a Chinese person that was Jewish, even though I lived there for 10 years. Then the second immigration came on the Jews from Baghdad. And these Jews became multimillionaires, so their names are known, the Kadoories, the Sassoons, the Hadeems. Living in--

About when were they in China?

They came in about 1850. There's a lot of rumors on how they made their fortunes. But they export and import. They were very influential in China, especially in Shanghai.

Then a third immigration came. These are the Jews from Russia. They came right after World War II-- World War I, I'm sorry.

So about what year was that?

About 1917 to 1922. They were about 3,000 people. And then came the German Jews immigration. They started in 1933, a few doctors, a few professionals came, in a very small number, maybe 200 families. And then in 1938, right after the Kristallnacht, we came, the German Jews, the Ashkenazi Jews, which amounted to about 18,000 people.

These Jews were very productive in a sense, in culture. They founded their own synagogues. There's about five to six rabbis came with them. And then towards the end, after World War II, just before World War II had started, two complete yeshivas came, the Mir and the [INAUDIBLE], of about 400 families, , students and their rabbis. And they also were sent through Japan. They came over to Siberia, and they were sent from Japan to Shanghai.

And so the culture, it was most likely just as good as anything else. You felt Jewish, because you had a rich Jewish community. And everything was tailored to the Jewish things. Just to mention a few, what kind of immigrants these were, 28 years after we arrived at the shores, a fellow by the name of Michael Blumenthal became Secretary of the Treasury.

In the United States.

In the United States. I have a lot of my friends that are doctors, medical doctors, college professors. So I don't know of anyone that's in jail are going to jail.

And some of these fellows left from Shanghai to Israel.

Yes.

Mr. [PERSONAL NAME] who was later an ambassador and who is now a chancellor at the University in [? Vegas, ?] I believe, was a fellow Shanghai-er. He, of course, came from the Russian immigration. Zerach Warhaftig who later on became Israel's minister of religion, also was in Shanghai.

Very few of the people who left Shanghai before World War II to come to the United States, because of the quota system, and I don't know of maybe a handful of 20, 15 people that did. Most of these people went to the United States.

After the war.

After the war. Then a good number of them went to Australia, and of course, Israel. The life in Shanghai was hard. The Japanese restricted us to certain areas. The Japanese also were brutal. They could come into the camp and beat people up anytime they wanted to, for any infraction of anything that they thought was an infraction.

What's a funny story about it is when Germany lost the war, the Japanese came to console us, because right or wrong, they said it was your country. Of course, we were glad to see that the war had ended in Europe. And this gave us much more hope that this would now be directed against them.

We had several air raids. And I remember at the beginning of June 1944, we had an air raid, in which we lost about 50 people, because they hit one of our camps by mistake.

This was an American--

No. This was American bombs. Because they kept on bombing us once a week or so. This was the only time we really drew fire, and we really lost people. Because what the Japanese had done is they had taken these camps situated in such a way that their munitions factories or any other vital factories were right next door to them.

So you were kept in a very dangerous geographic location.

Correct. In Hongkew. And they did this on purpose, of course, knowingly figuring that the Americans might not bomb.

Would want to protect you. So they were aware that the Americans knew about these camps.

Correct. They were aware that this was known. We found this later on out by American GIs coming into our area, and telling us what happened. One particular Japanese who was very cruel was called by the name of Goya. I think just read a book the other day about him that used to call himself the King of the Jews. He was a small person, who at one time worked in the consulate. I don't know if he was at the consul in San Francisco. And he always felt that the Americans didn't take him for 100% as a person. That they kind of-- this little slant eyed so and so.

And he translated this now that he had all the power in retaliating towards the Jews.

Although it was really the Americans that he--

Yeah, but we had the same kind of color of skin.

Right.

Caucasian. And he now--

The Western--

The Western, yes.

Did you make friends when you were in Shanghai?

Yes, we made friends, including Chinese.

Ah, with the population as well?

With the population. The Chinese population did not know anything about Jews, or have any kind of feelings for Jews, because there was never any amount of Jews in China. We're talking at that time 500 million, 600 million Chinese, and maybe 35,000 Jews in all of China. So they really hadn't-- especially if they didn't live in Shanghai or Tientsin, they had

no exposure whatsoever to Jews, or the Jewish customs, or the Jewish anything.

Have you been to Shanghai?

No, I have not. I look forward to some day.

You would like to go back there?

Yes.

So then in spite of the travails, somehow--

Well, the Chinese people have nothing-- I have nothing against the Chinese people, not even the Japanese today, due to the fact that we did survive, and the Japanese did give us a haven. Because they could have cut us off not let us come into Shanghai.

Do you have any understanding as to why they were willing to give Jews a haven, given that they were allies with the Germans?

Well their allied status was not as proven as it looks. They had a kind of a feeling that the Jewish financiers would retaliate after this was over to them, and this might not look very good. Even though today in Japan, there's a tremendous amount of antisemitism in books.

Yes.

And I have no idea where this stems from, or why this was, unless there's money in it for them to do this. Because there is no big Jewish community in Tokyo and Kobe to speak of. When you talk 110 million Japanese, and 300 and 500 Jewish families there, I mean, there's no exposure to that.

That's right. Have you told your own children about these experiences?

Yes, my son is aware of it. In fact, I look forward this year to take him to Germany. And emotionally I was not fit to go to Dachau by myself. Because if I go to Dachau, I have to pass from Tuttlingen, a town called Gunzburg, where Dr. Mengele's family lives in splendor. They own the Mengele Factory. And they're the ones that supported him all these years when he was living in exile. And I'm sure that they knew exactly--

Where he was.

--where he was. Because money was through Simon Wiesenthal. we know that they supported him in Brazil, and knew at all times where he was, and in fact, the son went to visit him. Mengele's brother married Mengele's wife after she divorced him.

So, yes they're aware of what's going on.

Thank you, again.

Thank you for having me on.

It's important to us.