

DR. GERHARD LEVY
BORN: WOLLIN, GERMANY
1928

Dr. Gerhard Levy was born 1928 in Wollin, Germany, a fishing village in Wollin Island north of Stettin (now Szczecin, Poland). His father had a large clothing store and was a German veteran from World War I. There were only 20 to 30 Jews in town and he was the only Jewish child in school. By 1938, there were enough problems, caused mostly by outside agitators, that he was transferred to a Jewish school in Caputte near Potsdam outside of Berlin.

After Kristallnacht in November 1938 his father had to sell the business. He was taken to a concentration camp but released after about six months. He shows a photograph of his family taken a few months later. His grandfather lived near the German Polish border and was brought to Berlin where he died during the war; they suspect that he was killed by the Nazis but have only circumstantial evidence. After Kristallnacht, some of the synagogues in Berlin were repaired and there was an active Jewish Life.

After about one year in Berlin, the family received visas to go to Shanghai obtained through a relative who had gone there several years earlier. Much effort was needed to get together all the required documents for emigration and travel. Their belongings were packed under supervision by a customs agent and then shipped to China. After arrival there they found that most of the contents had been stolen by the customs people.

In 1940, the family went by train through Poland to Moscow and then on through Siberia and Manchuria to Shanghai. The trip was very interesting but he was too young to remember many details. They had to pay 1st class fare but received only 3rd class accommodations for the trip which took about one month. Shanghai then was an open city and they were settled in the Chinese quarter that was occupied by the Japanese. Life was very much like it is now in Hong Kong with great contrasts between the poor and the very rich. When the Japanese entered the war, there were about 15000 Jews who were restricted to about four city blocks. His father had a number of different jobs, such as retailer of Kerosene, bus conductor, selling second-hand goods and bookkeeper.

His mother cooked on a small outdoor hibachi but there was considerable shortage of food. He had to bring hot water from a "hot-water" store. For a few years he went to school and also learned Chinese and improved his English which he had started in Berlin. Then, to earn money he went to a plumbing school and later worked as an apprentice in a pharmacy. For this job he had permission to go outside the restricted area. The Jewish community managed fairly well. During the war they received information from a Russian radio station on development on the German - Russian front, and they also knew about the progress made by the Japanese. They had no information on the progress of the United States or about the Jews in Europe. He learned about the concentration camps only after the war.

When the war ended, the British wanted the Jews to go back to Germany but almost all refused. Israel had not yet been established. Only few Jews stayed in Shanghai; the others went to the United States, Australia and other countries. He found out that his relatives who had stayed in Germany had died in concentration camps. In 1948, through the efforts of HIAS, he and his parents could go to the United States and settled in San Francisco where his father became a janitor and his mother worked as household help.

His message is that one must not forget. Similar persecutions, not only of Jews, could happen again, and one should be prepared and study beforehand what should be done.