

My name is Susan Hackney, and Hildegard Israel will be talking about her experiences leaving Germany and going to Shanghai on Kristallnacht. And today's date is March 19, 1998, and here is Hilde.

I was-- my father had arrived in Genoa, where we waited with the help from the Jewish community. And we were only-- all we had with us was 10 marks or 420 in our pocket. We were not allowed any more money.

And so we needed the help of the community, and they treated us very well there. We had a heck of a time-- heck of a time to find them. Of course, I spoke English and German, but nobody understood me.

When we got-- after we arrived from the train until I finally hit on the-- I had an envelope with me. I drew a Magen David on it. And I wrote every name that I could think of of the Jewish community, people, synagogue, anything I could think of.

So finally, I held it, have it in front of the noses of an military and he looked at it. And he said, oh, Hebrew put [INAUDIBLE]. He will put [INAUDIBLE]. That was the name of the synagogue in-- you know. We will Hebrew [INAUDIBLE].

And then he gave us some directions. He didn't speak English, but somehow we found it. And then we landed in-- that Jewish community they gave us a room And gave us this room, and that is where we could eat, otherwise we couldn't have survived till the 23rd of November because when I left in-- I arrived there on the 10th of November in the morning in Genoa.. So then when my brother arrived-- he arrived about, I would say, five days, six days after me without my parents.

And which brother was this? Your youngest?

The younger brother. The older brother was in Amsterdam. And so we waited for my parents. And we couldn't do anything. Even in Genoa we couldn't see anything. We walked, and walked, and walked, and walked because we couldn't afford a bus, or streetcar, or something like that. We couldn't afford for it. We just walked.

And so finally my parents arrived on the 22nd of November, the night before the ship left. They came-- they arrived safely, my parents, but I also had my in-laws. My in-laws' family was there, too, with us. And it was a mother-in-- my mother-in-law and my brother-in-law. So we were then-- the ship went--

[PLACE NAME] it's a country [? line. ?] [INAUDIBLE] was the ship where we went on. the accommodation where there was none-- it was not the cruise But our ship had quite a lot of refugees on it.

And we were-- when we came to Shanghai [INAUDIBLE]. Yeah. The arrival when we came up the Yangtze it was horrible.

The arrival was horrible?

The arrival when we came up with the ship, the Yangtze.

The Yangtze River?

It was terrible.

Why?

It was war zone. [GASPS] The Japanese and the Chinese-- it was a war zone. There was so much destruction. You only saw the-- from factories or whatever it was only the iron that was left. It was horrible, really. People did just cry because how awful-- but I said at that time-- I was young enough. I said, what do you want? You are out of Germany.

I tried to get some sense to them, but it was hard [INAUDIBLE] all the way. We came up the Yangtze for an hour, hour, 30-- came into Shanghai.

When we arrived in Shanghai, we were-- as far as I remember, we were picked up from the Shanghai community probably. I can't say. It was too much that I could remember. But we were-- we were taken down off the ship and on trucks, which reminded us, of course, how the people were taken away in trucks in Germany.

Trucks? In trucks.

Oh, yeah. Oh, dear.

Yeah. Trucks. We were standing on the trucks. We were standing. But if you remember that you saw the same idea in Germany, only we were brought to an office building and the other office building, temporary put up cots and so on, temporary.

And they were-- I don't know. That thing is a little bit fuzzy because-- yes, we all found rooms, rooms, single rooms where we could that we could rent and so on. But the committee already-- committee-- they gave us some money so that we could rent over there.

And our-- my-- it's hard. I remember we were at a-- we stood with the Japanese people. They lived in Shanghai. My parents rented a room, Chinese, primitive. But we had our rooms. Then after that we had bombed-out schools. They said we could be there for the rest of people that came. We were the first-- of the first 500 people that arrived there.

You were?

Yes.

In the first 500?

Yes. You got an ID, the so-called [INAUDIBLE] pass. And that-- I had something between 3 and 4, my number. And they helped us to get rooms in town. But they formed a kitchen that we could get food, and that we were, in principle, on our own.

And we were under Japanese occupation. At that time when we arrived, there were still English there, the French. They were still there. In Shanghai there are different sections where the people lived, and the officers' famous band that was English, American that is famous.

And they were still there. I remember crossing the bridge over to the-- and we lived in the Chinese section.

You lived where?

In the Chinese section.

I see.

In Hongkou. It was what we could afford. We lived from hand to mouth, of course. But in the-- the sections were there the German, the Russian, the English, the French. [NON-ENGLISH] Office-- the Bund, of course, is world-famous. It looked like it could be in America, high office buildings and so on, beautiful.

The French had more living sections-- not to-- like the Americans did. But then I remember crossing the bridge to the English section at the Bund, and there were still guards standing from the English and Scottish uniform.

And I didn't understand or hear. I didn't know about-- I walked along the walkway, I think. It was a big bridge. And then I got a [? dunce ?] from a Scotchman-- [? listen-- ?] because I was walking where I shouldn't walk. But there were -- the

English there at that time. Then afterwards, the [INAUDIBLE] [? was ?] Japanese, only Japanese there.

And we lived in a-- we had then, of course-- they knew where to-- and so for a while then-- [INAUDIBLE] but then there was Ghoya, who was something like governor over our area. He lived in Hongkou, and he was the devil.

Now, he was what nationality?

Japanese.

I see. And he was the administrator of the neighborhood where you--

Of the Jewish area.

Of the Jewish area?

Yeah. No, I mean the Jews lived with the Chinese.

I understand, So just the neighborhood.

Yeah, the area on-- it was Hongkou. Like here, [? Sugar ?] House-- that was Hongkou. We lived on our own, and you could go where you want. You can walk in the English, or Russian, or whatever section, at least for a while.

And then after my-- I can only-- we didn't see it. The Germans insisted that the Japanese should put us into a kind of ghetto.

How did the Germans have any authority in China?

No, they didn't have any. They put the pressure on the Japanese, the Axis. That was the Axis.

The Axis, the Alliance, the Allies.

The Japanese, yes. The Japanese--

I see. OK.

OK?

Yes. And they put pressure on the Japanese government to put the immigrants there, the refugees, in a certain designated area that later would be known as a ghetto. We could not be-- we were on our own, but we could not leave the area.

If you wanted to get out for some reason, business reason and so on, we had to go to the office that Ghoya was. OK. And he was terrible. For no reason he would jump on the table and smack that-- slap the people if somebody came. And he was tall, good-looking. He slapped them. He put them-- for no reason at all, he put these people then outside on the balcony in the sun for hours.

He [? asked ?] [INAUDIBLE] whatever hit him. We were offered [INAUDIBLE] if you had to go there. But you had to go there. Either you got a pass, a button that said, only for a few hours or for the full day by color, but you had to have that button.

And who is this administrator again? Can you say his name very clearly?

Ghoya.

Ghoya?

Ghoya.

I see. OK.

He was Ghoya, and he was terrible. And yes, we were there. Of course, there were soldiers, Japanese soldiers and so on. In some ways, they were very nasty but not-- what shall I say? They didn't attack you or anything. Yes, nasty, OK, maybe some people got attacked, too.

We were a big-- we were about 23,000 refugees, so you didn't know everything. And we ourselves lived opposite-- near was there underground that-- any metal, melted it, whatever they did with it. It was underground, and it was very often attacked by the planes from the Americans. It was a ticklish location.

To live in?

Very ticklish.

Oh, my.

Ok But I only had to go with my boss. I was a dressmaker, and he made blouses, export blouses before that was shut down but still had a connection to their blouses in Shanghai.

And he had to bring us as proof that he needed the passport. And we [INAUDIBLE] check my colleague and I. We were three girls. We had to go with him. [INAUDIBLE] was checking. When he was released, he got the passport on the button. Then we were just-- When we left that building we were--

--relieved.

--relieved.

And this was Ghoya's building?

Yes, that was that government building in--

So your boss basically helped you get what you needed?

We had to go there, yes, into the building, and he didn't know how he would treat our boss. It was a horrible feeling. And the Japanese-- they did as they pleased. OK? They did as they pleased.

Now, the Germans had decided they should put a concentration camp up in Shanghai for the German, German or whatever, Hitler refugees. And that, as far as I understood, was that Germany said no. They didn't go with that. They wanted to put also-- open [INAUDIBLE] in there.

And we didn't know-- how much in danger we were we didn't know. We lived in the houses that we rented. That means homes. You didn't own anything there in China. If you own a house that is owned for 99 years, then it goes back to the government, but of course we rented a house. There were several of us living there, of course.

And my husband had started a business there, this woodworking-- because the import of buttons or anything was gone. And the industry in Shanghai was very much knitting sweaters and things like that, so they needed buttons.

And my husband started that, very primitive at first, and afterwards he developed, I would say, not a big business of it but he lived-- we survived on that. I myself worked, of course, as-- I made blouses, as I told you, but they took all this without much.

And we lived from day to day. You did not know-- if you bought today-- you went to the market and bought, let's say, a pound of potatoes and maybe, if you are-- and onions. There were onions.

And maybe for two people two ounces of bacon or an equivalent to this. We ate quantities, big pots of what we cooked, big pots. But, just to be fed, not quality.

And it's a funny thing. There was-- we had a salesman, and he asked us one evening-- small Chinese noodles, which are always fresh, and fresh noodles-- you get always this kind of flour. He asked if he could use that water as a soup.

That is the situation. I saw that many people could not even think of buying any soup and so on. I wouldn't say of starvation because you could fill up. Then the Japanese later on-- when the Japanese decided they wanted to be good to us, showing up with the Red Cross international. We got eggs and potatoes.

What we got were rotten eggs, and what we got were rotten potatoes. But we had to pick them up. We had to pick them up because they didn't like to be-- if you had [? two people. ?] That's all rotten. You couldn't even eat it.

So you were just having to make an appearance there to make them look good?

Yes, yes. And we were opposite-- as I say, there was a metal factory. They were metal welders. There were-- as a matter of fact, [INAUDIBLE] came up with, it did, of course, was from very different.

Also they started [INAUDIBLE], and when you heard-- the [INAUDIBLE]. They were like bamboo fences and things like that. The bamboo pickets when it burns back there. Like this just shooting overnight. You never knew what was going on.

And then the Japanese started to congregate in a certain area in the center where the refugees lived because they figured they wouldn't bomb it, they were poor And were poor, too. look at in that they had something like stations, radio and all that-- that was going on in that area. And the day came of course, that they bombed that area.

And there were quite a few people that were hurting and hurt and so on. At that time, I have to admit my husband wouldn't let me go there. I was pregnant, and he didn't want to let me go into the area But they-- they knew there was a radio station there. There was everything military important. So they had to, the Americans. Had to.

And things like that. Of course, food situation, as I say-- we lived from the day to day. I could buy a pound potatoes with a few onions. And a little bit nap but only know little bit so that you had a taste on. The next day I couldn't even buy the potatoes.

It was an immense inflation. People don't know what an inflation is. Three times in the time that we lived there. Three times the money was deflated again. 4 million?

But the lowest value on area. Down to one but we got Chinese dollar, so it's a yen, down to one yen deflated but you bought two yesterday for a million suddenly was a bad yen. Three times we went through that inflation.

And I have seen people there that suffered a lot. The worst thing, Of course, were the intellectuals in Shanghai, they could not adjust they could not adjust. I didn't know-- one day-- and I remember I came down from the office building where we worked.

And there was a man selling newspaper. He looked really-- he had a coat on, just cut off, and he really looked To our eyes, terrible.

And I was asked then if I knew who he was. I said, no, I don't. I was told it was a very famous lawyer standing on the street corner in Shanghai selling newspapers. A very famous lawyer, I was told, of course, he was not the only one. We had to try to adjust as much as we could, even know we never knew what would be coming up.

And to some people-- my husband thought, I'm not going. It was-- of course it was time, and the Germans, of course, [INAUDIBLE] to go underground and so on. I don't whatever they did there. They had to go.

And he maybe put explosives here or there, whatever, because he never told me. So there were people, of course, also underground and lots of people that never lived anywhere else but in these camps, the school type-- that's it-- in big rooms. Division only-- the division between the families were only blankets, old blankets.

There were also the kitchen where they could cook anything. [INAUDIBLE] terrible, primitive, dirty because there was no possibility. They caught dogs in Shanghai. They had [? products. ?] Because the wild dogs in Shanghai-- it was-- one time I was pregnant, and I went over to the store, and there was something laying on the street.

And I didn't see what it was before I came close to it. It was a baby's leg, a baby's leg, a poor, fleshy baby's leg laying on the street. [INAUDIBLE] you know how [INAUDIBLE]. The point was I was pregnant. That is not something to see when you are pregnant.

That was Shanghai. In Shanghai, if people died, they didn't have the money, they just rolled them up in a mat, bamboo or doormat, and left them outside. And that's why the dogs were called the [INAUDIBLE] of Shanghai.

The what? Were they called?

[INAUDIBLE] of Shanghai because they ate, and they ate the meat. They ate [INAUDIBLE]. They ate anything, like I said. They were wild dogs.

Oh my God.

And that's upsetting. To me, that was my personal experience with the baby leg that was shocking.

We are resuming this interview on May 19, 1998.

It might be interesting to know how I get my baby clothing, which I couldn't afford otherwise, in Shanghai. I was told by other people that there was a junkman who bought up all the clothes, old sheets, everything, and he was a junkman, that he had lots of baby stuff. So I went there, or we went to, my husband and me, and asked him. And he said, oh, yes, I have.