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CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

Oral History Program

Old China Hands Project

INTERVIEWEE: BETTY GREBENSCHIKOFF

INTERVIEWER: June Behrens

DATE: March 10, 1990

JB: The purpose of our interview today is to record a period in time. We feel that you have something to contribute to our understanding of that period. Our focus is on Shanghai before, during and after World War Two. Our interview of what life was like in that period will become a part of the Oral History Archives at California State University, Fullerton and will be made available to future researchers and historians. This is March 10, 1990, my name is June Behrens. I am talking today with Betty Grebenschikoff of Ventnor, New Jersey. We are gathered for a reunion of Old China Hands in Anaheim, California.

Betty, will you tell us a little bit about how you came to be in Shanghai?

BG: Yes, I was born in Berlin, Germany, in 1929, and I grew up there with my sister and we lived a fairly nice life with my parents, my father was in business. I went to school there.

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I went to a Jewish community school from the time I was six years old.

By the time I was nine, in 1939, things had become very difficult for Jews in Germany, so my father tried to get us out. At first, my parents thought that they would send us to Israel, which was then Palestine, on the "aliyah." They were sending children out and leaving the parents behind and sending them to settle there on the kibbutz. But at the last minute, my mother got frightened that she would never see us again, so we were not allowed to go. We were quite disappointed because we kind of fancied the idea of being pioneers at that point, my sister and I, but my mother said absolutely not. My sister is two years older than I. I was nine and she was eleven then.

So, eventually, my father being a stateless person, meaning he had no German passport even though he lived in Berlin many years . . . He had come from Austro-Hungary and he therefore did not have any German papers, even though he fought in the First World War for the Germans. But he had no papers so, therefore, we had a hard time finding a country to take us in. We had no visas for America, we had no one in different countries to sponsor us, and the only place, eventually, that was left open to stateless refugees or stateless Jews was Shanghai, which was an open port and anyone could go there, provided they raise the money for the passage.

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So my father went to the Japanese shipping companies to get tickets for us and was told there would not be any available for months and months. But in the meantime, he had an interview pending with the Gestapo headquarters on the twentieth of May, and he realized that he would have to get us all out before that because he might never get out of that interview. A friend of his told him to bribe the Japanese shipping officers. So, when he handed him the papers the next day when he came in, he had put some money inside the papers, and, lo and behold, we did get tickets on the Kashima Maru, which was sailing from Naples, Italy, on the eighteenth or nineteenth of May, which was like two days before his date with the Gestapo. My uncle and my aunt also got tickets in the same fashion. They had no children, but they carried their little parakeet, whose name was Pipifax, in the cage all the way to Shanghai with them.

We left Germany on . . . I think it was somewhere near the eighteenth or nineteenth of May, 1939, and we traveled through by train to Italy, stopping in Munich and Rome and then Naples.

JB: Were there any problems on that trip?

BS: Not really, because my father bribed his way through. We took the train and we stayed in a hotel overnight. I remember in Rome my uncle had his dictionary and ordered breakfast with an Italian-German dictionary. We were this whole group. All

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our belongings were packed in what they called a lift, which was a huge packing crate. Our furniture that wasn't sold and our personal items and everything that we didn't take with us, that eventually got shipped out to Shanghai but got caught in the war somewhere near Batavia [in Java, now named Jakarta], and the ship went down and we never saw our things again, none of them.

By the time we were leaving Germany, things had become very difficult for us. I remember as a little girl being pushed off the sidewalk by hooligans and being called bad names for being Jewish and all that. The people in our apartment building where we lived, who had always been very friendly to us, looked the other way when we came because they were afraid to be associated with us because no one was allowed to talk to Jews. Things got very, very difficult. I remember them throwing stones at us on the street and saying goodby to what was at that point my best girlfriend. Her name was Anne-Marie Warenberg and I never saw her again anywhere. I think she went to Australia but I've never seen her again. So, if anyone hears this and finds her, let me know. (chuckling) But she was my girlfriend. Her father had been taken for his interview with the Gestapo and returned home a few days or a few weeks later and he looked about twenty-five years older than when he had gone. This was the kind of thing that my father was afraid of and that's why he wanted to get

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us out. So I said goodby to her in the schoolyard and it was all very fast. My mother didn't want us to linger over it too long.

JB: It wasn't a secret thing then? I mean, people knew that you were going?

BG: No, no. They knew we were going, yes. We knew, it was not secret, but it had to be done quickly and quietly. We didn't really want the Germans to be aware of it. They were not standing there watching, but they didn't like it if you got away from them. So we left, we said goodby to my grandparents, who stayed behind, and another uncle and an aunt on my mother's side. To this day, I can hear my mother screaming as my father and my uncle carried her down the stairs, because she had to say goodby to her mother. Her mother, at that point, had a broken hip and she couldn't move too well. So they said, "Oh, well, things won't get too bad, you know, we'll stay here and we'll wait it out or eventually we'll follow you." What happened, of course, was that we never saw them again. They all died in the camps.

The same thing happened with my father's family who at that point lived in Czechoslovakia. They had actually lived there all the time. He came from a family of nine children and I had only seen that whole family once when we took a trip to Czechoslovakia when I was maybe five or six. Most of them, his parents, his brothers, sisters, children, my cousins and

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all, with the exception of maybe one or two, all went through the camps. One aunt came through the camps--four of them, as a matter of fact--and eventually died in Israel many years later. One uncle came through and one cousin, but all the rest of them--there must have been fifteen or sixteen of them or more--they all died in the camps. So this is what we escaped from, you know, although at that point, when we were leaving, we didn't know that's what was coming, you know.

So we got on the ship eventually, the Kashima Maru, in Naples, Italy, a little Japanese ship, very clean, very nice. My father had bribed the guys enough so that we had nice cabins. My sister and I had a cabin and my mother and my father had a cabin and my uncle and my aunt and their bird. So we took this journey across, through the Suez Canal and through Bombay and Hong Kong and Shanghai.

JB: Do you have memories of that?

BG: Yes, I have, and I've been writing about it now and it's all coming back to me, which is why I'm running on like this.

JB: Yes, good, do continue.

BG: We couldn't get off the ship, except once or twice, because Jews were not allowed to get off. But other than that, we didn't have too much trouble, you know. We had a nice time on the ship because it was fun for the kids. There must have been about ten kids there. Recently, I met someone who was

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on the ship also at the same time as me, which was very interesting. He's not at this reunion, though.

JB: How long was the trip?

BG: Three and a half weeks by ship. Three and a half weeks was a long, long trip. Tempers were getting frayed and people were getting tired and no one knew what was going to happen when we would get to where we were going. When we landed in Shanghai, it was hot, humid, which was the general routine there in the summer, very hot, very sticky, very crowded and very smelly. My mother was glad to get off the boat because she was seasick practically all the way through.

We then got off and a friend who had gone there before us met us and said he had rented a room for us in Shanghai in a little rooming house. So we had a room on a little lane there in Shanghai. It was not badly furnished, in a brand-new building, but the bathrooms were very primitive. There was just these little . . . what they called the jam-pots. The guy would come every morning and pick it up and take it out and carry it to fertilize the fields. We didn't have our own bathroom. I mean, this was a community bathroom for everyone. We all just lived in this one room. My uncle and my aunt had another room.

There were refugee organizations, the International Refugee Organization, the IRO. The ORT ladies were there, I remember them distinctly, the Organization of Rehabilitation

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and Training, that is. I think they are American-based organizations. I know, later on when I was much older, one of my friends said, "Oh, yes, I belong to ORT," and I said, "Well, you people fed us our first meal in Shanghai." I remember that and I even remember what it was. They set up kitchens and homes for people who had no one to meet them, that didn't have a room waiting for them. They had like settlement houses and they had kitchens set up. Our first meal, I remember, the children were separated from the parents because they cooked different things. It was Cream of Wheat for the children, which I always loved, so it was fine, you know. I still love it today. We eat it German-style with the cinnamon on top and the butter on it and we eat it from the outside around on a flat plate, because that way you don't burn your mouth, it doesn't get so hot. I taught my children to eat it like that, and my grandchildren, but this is neither here nor there.

JB: Tell me, what part of Shanghai were you?

BG: In Hongkew.

JB: Oh, you went immediately to Hongkew?

BG: We went immediately to Hongkew, yes.

JB: I see, and this reception committee was there to greet you and to help you locate and to . . .

BG: Well, this friend of ours had located a room for us. If he had not been there and we had no one to meet us, we would have

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gone to these open homes that they had. Not homes, but like settlement places, more or less like dormitories. Many people wound up there and we were lucky not to, because they were very crowded and it was like bunk beds, you know, rows of them with clotheslines in between. Shall I go on?

JB: Please continue, yes.

BG: So we lived in that room and tried to get acclimated to the countryside and everything. Hongkew was a very congested area, had been heavily hit before by the Japanese bombing in 1937. There were a lot of ruins around and it wasn't a particularly pretty place. It was very congested and ships were coming in constantly with refugees from Europe all the time. So we were organized to get our meals at this meal station there and go over there and eat every day. The food was all right, you know. They organized the refugee women to help with the cooking and the peeling of the potatoes and all this sort of thing.

There were schools being set up in that area, the Shanghai Jewish Youth Organization was one of them, they called it the SJYA. There was a Mrs. Hartwich who was the principal. I forget the name of the first school. I think that may have been the first school I went to. After that, Sir Horace Kadoorie took an interest in those children and built the school for us, but I will come to that a little later.

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JB: I know the name.

BG: Yes, yes, I met him again later and I talked to him. We went to that school and here were all these children not knowing a word of English and the teachers were all English. There was one of them in particular that I always liked a lot. Her name was Jane Oystragh, if she's anywhere around. I still remember her. They taught us to speak English somehow. There must have been forty or fifty kids in the class, all sitting there thinking in German, and they taught us. They did it by singing. We used to sing "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean" and "Clementine," just by rote. We had no idea what we were singing. Eventually, something would come through and we would figure out what we were doing and that's how we learned English. Although, on the ship coming over, my father who was always very studious tried to make us learn so many new English words every day, but it really was not speaking English, you know. We just knew a few scattered words but we didn't know what we were doing. So we went to school there. During recess they used to have this big bucket on the side of the playground which had warm tea in it, and everybody would dip a cup in there and drink that because it was so hot. And it was pretty awful, too. (chuckling)

So we lived there and we went to school there. We moved around to different rooms that we would rent, you know, trying to get better ones as we went along. Eventually, my father

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and my uncle either bought or managed one of the houses that we lived in and it was much larger than what we had been used to and was a little nicer. That was very nice, but they were not used to being landlords so they didn't do too well with it. My father tried to get into business. He used to be in the stationery business but he tried to get into any kind of business he could. Eventually, he wound up with working with importing and exporting chemicals.

JB: So he was able to find work and to keep the family together and keep the family in better housing?

BG: Yes. Well, he was very, very good at this sort of thing. He worked very, very hard and he never rested. He was just a real provider and a real support to all of us always.

JB: Did you go out into the International Settlement?

BG: Yes, he went out to work there and we went out there, you know, to look around and to see how other people lived and what went on and all this. But as long as we were in that school, we didn't get out too much because that was our home. However, then when the war started, or even before that, my sister and I were put into the Shanghai Jewish School on Seymour Road, which was in the city of Shanghai, across the river. We used to take a tram car and we went to school there because my father felt we weren't learning enough at the SJYA School where Sir Horace Kadoorie was the benefactor of that school, which I mentioned earlier. He used to come around,

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riding his bicycle, with his white shorts and his white shirt on and his topee [sun hat or pith helmet] on, you know, his sun hat on. He used to ride around the compound. They had built the school like a U-shaped compound and all the kids had to line up and cheer, "Hip, hip, hooray for Sir Horace!" And we all did this and we loved it. It was wonderful because here was this Englishman who looked so funny on his bicycle, you know. He was quite a benefactor. He did a lot for the people out there. Well, he spoke to me once and I was so shook up, I didn't understand what he was saying. He patted me on the head. He didn't know what I was saying, I didn't know what he was saying and we had a wonderful time.

We then transferred over to the Shanghai Jewish School, which was not an easy thing to do because the Shanghai Jewish School on Seymour Road took care of the children who lived in the International Settlement. They were not too concerned with the Hongkew children who had their school. But scholastically it wasn't up to par and my father said we were losing too much time, you know, not really learning anything, and he tried to get us into school. It cost like $5 a month or something each and we were both instructed to do well and not to waste the $5, you know, because it was hard enough to come by.

JB: Right. You were then refugees living in Hongkew?

BG: Yes.

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JB: You didn't really have the same status as the Jewish people who were living in the International Settlement?

BG: No, we didn't have any status, really. We were there because that's where we had arrived, you know. I mean, we had no rights as such, and no one really, except for the international refugee organizations, paid any attention to us. They were good. I mean, they helped a lot.

So, when the war started, the Japanese eventually realized that they had to do something with us, and so . . .

JB: Let's back up though. Now, when the war started, what was your situation when the war started? Did you know that war might be imminent? I'm talking about the war at the outbreak of December seventh.

BG: Between Japan, right. Well, you could tell that things were going to get bad. I mean, the rumors were all over the place. That little place where we lived in Hongkew was always full of rumors, to begin with, I mean, with that many people living there. Even so, at the same time they kept up the culture. There was music, there were plays. These people didn't just sit around and moan, you know, they kept themselves going. There were concerts and there were . . . I even tried out for a theater show, which I didn't make it, but I remember singing "Red Sails in the Sunset" and I wasn't very good. so I didn't get picked to be part of the chorus. I think I must have been

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maybe eleven or twelve and I had visions of being an actress then.

Anyway, now, we realized that the Japanese were up to something and that we couldn't get out, we had no papers, you know. Again, came the thing where anybody who had papers tried to get out and go somewhere else to a different country. We couldn't do that, we had no papers, and also at that point we had not enough money anymore, because my father had lost all his money in Germany and you couldn't really bring much with you and it was difficult. So, then when the Japanese decided to get tough with us, they decided that they would put us all into this segregated area for the European refugees, which was a circumscribed area called either "the district" or "the ghetto," where these 20,000 people all were supposed to live together and stay in this one area. Well, there wasn't enough room there. So the house that we were renting a so-called apartment in at that time, the landlord exchanged it for a house within the district and took all the people with him that were living with him in his house to the other house, plus maybe another twenty more. So what happened then was that each family got one room, that's it, for all their belongings, for their family. And in that room in one corner we had . . . This was on 51 Chusan Road. It was a row house, what you might call a row house in America. It was a three-story house and, at one point, I guess it was a one-family

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home. We were on the second floor in the back and we had one room. In one corner we had a little gas ring and some running water, in the other corner we had a couch for my parents where they slept, we had two camp beds where my sister and I slept under the window, and a table and chairs in the middle, and our suitcases and our trunks from Germany were piled up on the side, covered with tablecloth, okay?

JB: What about the bathroom facilities and the kitchen?

BG: The bathroom facilities were terrible, terrible. The kitchen was what we had there.

JB: Oh, in the corner.

BG: In the corner, right. But that also doubled up as washing facilities for us because the bathroom on our floor was used for sixteen people. It was filthy and no one bothered to clean it, because you weren't going to clean up after fifteen other people, and there were a lot of cockroaches that had lived there way before we got in there. So it was a mess. That's where we spent about three years. I remember, when we could get it, we used to buy rice by the sack and flour by the sack, when it was available. In order not to waste fuel, my mother would get the rice to a boil on this little gas range she had and take it off and wrap it up in newspaper, put it in the bed and cover it up, and then half an hour later you had the most perfect steamed rice you ever saw.

JB: Oh, my heavens.

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BG: And we always for years thought that you cooked rice like that.

JB: In bed?

BG: Even later, you know, after everything was fine and we had our own homes and all, we cooked rice like that, and we never thought anything about it, but it always came out perfect. It was steamed, perfectly steamed. Of course, you couldn't go to bed because the rice was in the bed.

JB: But it warmed your bed for you.

BG: It warmed the bed, yes. We had not only beds, we also had bed bugs in the beds and we had roaches flying in the windows and weevils in the flour. My sister and I would put the flour out on the table and take the weevils out.

JB: Was it difficult living with sixteen people?

BG: Well, that was just on our floor.

JB: On your floor?

BG: Yes, and then upstairs was the same thing and downstairs was the same thing. Then, during that period, it was very difficult. My parents had a very rough time. At that point, of course, the Japanese had us in the district and we had to have special passes to get out, in order to go to school.

JB: I would like to know about that. How did that work?

BG: Sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn't. They had a Japanese commander called Mr. Ghoya. He was a little Hitler-type.

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JB: Dwarf-looking man?

BG: Yes, you've heard about him?

JB: Yes, I have.

BG: All right, now, he was a tyrant, you know, but he liked children. This was his only winning streak, he liked children. He didn't give us too much of a hard time. We had to line up outside the wall of his police station or whatever he called it, his barracks, actually. We had to line up there in the sun for hours and go and get ourselves a pass to go to school, because at that point we were still going to the Seymour Road School, which was outside the district. That pass was good for before school and right after school and you had to get back within that time period and show your pass at the gate when you came in.

JB: And he was there to check it?

BG: He wasn't there but either the soldiers were there or the local police (pao chia) made up of refugees was there to check it. They had them doing it. So my father also got a pass because he was trying to do business outside. Some of the men lost their passes because he wouldn't renew them, Mr. Ghoya wouldn't renew them. That meant instantaneous cut-off of your livelihood because you couldn't get out again, you see. So they had to be very, very careful to say the right thing, to do the right thing, to smile the right way and to bow down the right way in front of this tyrant, this little

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guy, who used to stand on the table, on his desk, and say, "I am the king of the Jews." Okay? He just enjoyed himself thoroughly. He would take water and throw it over the men, cold water.

JB: A sadistic man.

BG: Just sadistic, yes. I know my father was always very, very worried but he never let on because we had to go, too, and get our passes, you see. My mother never got out of the district at all during the war because there was no reason for her to get a pass to go out. There was nothing for her to do out there, she didn't work, you know, she took care of us.

JB: She stayed in the room.

BG: Yes, she stayed with us. Well, we walked a lot, you know. But it was so congested we couldn't really walk too much, you know. So then we managed to get through that. At the same time, there were air raids, which a lot of people don't realize. We had many, many air raids from the Americans, which we welcomed, they were trying to knock out the installations on the river. We were very near to the Whangpoo River. The water company, the electric company, they were trying to knock out their facilities. Sometimes their bombs would stray and would hit our section.

JB: Did you have any casualties?

BG: Yes, we had casualties. There was a very, very big air raid in 1945, early 1945, and there were casualties then and there

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were casualties at other times. When the sirens would start we were all told to go downstairs, but there was no basement, there was no cellar in those houses. So we all went down to the first floor and they pushed the tables together and put mattresses on top of the tables and we went underneath and sat underneath. We thought this was a big joke, which it really was because any self-respecting bomb isn't going to worry about a table with a mattress on it. But this was more for shrapnel, you know. So we all would go down there. Sometimes it happened during the day when my father was at work and my mother was terrified. She used to get all stiff and then get paralyzed and they would have to carry her down the stairs.

JB: Now, was this a frequent happening? Could you count the number of times?

BG: It escalated. Towards the end of the war it escalated.

JB: So it was something that may have happened ten times, twelve times?

BG: Something like that, yes. But the chance of it happening was there all the time. I mean, you would get this at night.

JB: So you lived in fear.

BG: Yes, you'd get this at night, especially when there was a full moon. You'd say, well, that was good air raid weather, you know. One night, when it was good air raid weather, the sirens went off and we went downstairs. When we came back up again--we had left our windows open, it was hot--there was a

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piece of smoking shrapnel on my sister's pillow, where her head would have been, that had blown in from outside and that was there. We called that our little piece of America. It was from an American bomb. (chuckling) We were rooting for the Americans but yet they were bombing us, you know. Strangely enough, a lot of people didn't realize, I guess, that we were down there.

JB: Backing up a bit, you then had enough food, you were able to survive when you got . . .

BG: Such as it was. There was a black market going on, don't forget, during that time. We were luckier than the people in the camps, no doubt about it, but there was not enough food, not enough proper food, not enough fuel, not enough utilities. You only got so many kilowatts per month and, you know, then that's all you could have. The food was poor.

JB: You were deprived but you were surviving.

BG: We were surviving. Yes, we were surviving.

JB: That's about what you were . . .

BG: But, of course, like I say, there was a black market and many people who didn't manage to save money or have rooms or anything, they had a very, very hard time.

JB: And this period lasted for . . . ?

BG: Until 1945, in June, I think it was. When was the war over? April, June?

JB: Can you recall the end of the war?

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BG: Oh, yes.

JB: Would you please give us that? Describe that experience.

BG: Well, there was a false alarm two days earlier. Someone said the war was over and it wasn't, because the Japanese soldiers were still out there shooting light bulbs when the blackout curtains didn't fit right, you know. They would come into the house and shoot the light bulbs out and use them for target practice. It became very quiet. When the war was finally over, it was very quiet out. And when you went out, you didn't see one Japanese soldier anywhere. They had just all disappeared. And then we realized . . . We tried to listen to the radio to the Voice of America, which we sometimes would get, but you'd get punished if you got caught listening to it. Then we realized . . . We did, once in awhile we would get it, you know. We usually got the Russian or the German news on the radio.

JB: Oh, you could have radios though, then?

BG: We had a radio. Yes, we had a radio.

JB: You had contact with the outside.

BG: We knew but we didn't know. We got the version that the German or the Japanese version or the Russian version. We didn't get anything from the Allies, we didn't get that at all.

JB: I see.

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BG: Even though we were living right next to the Ward Road Jail, as a matter of fact, where they had interned some of the flyers that they had shot down, the American flyers. And when they escaped, there was a big hullabaloo going on. They were hunting them down all over the neighborhood. I don't believe that they caught them. Everybody then came out and realized that you could walk out of the gates of the district and no one stopped you. It was a little scary at first. And that was when we realized it was really, finally over, you see?

JB: Such excitement.

BG: And it was just incredible, incredible excitement. They had prayer meetings, you know, thanking God that it was finally over and all this and we could finally get out of this miserable house that we lived in all that time, you know, that room. (chuckling)

JB: You were then about fifteen?

BG: I was fifteen and I grew up in that time, you know, fast, very fast. (chuckling)

JB: Yes, I'm sure. All right, then at the end of the war did you make plans to leave Shanghai?

BG: Well, not immediately. We couldn't do it that fast. That was 1945. We then got out of the district. My father who had been working was very . . . We bought a little house in Joseph's Court on Kwenming Road. As a matter of fact, this other lady I met, she lived there, too. We finally had a

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little house, an attached house, and I went to . . . By that time, I had left school when I was fifteen because my mother had gotten very ill during the war. She had dysentery and she was very ill and they didn't expect her to make it. They didn't want to put her in the hospital because so many people died in there and she refused to go. So I was taken out of school when I was fifteen, out of the Shanghai Jewish School, to nurse her back to health. I was delighted to stay home. I didn't like school so I was quite happy to get out. Later on, I thought maybe that wasn't such a great idea, but by then it was over.

JB: Did you know Debby Bloomfield?

BG: I don't remember.

JB: I think she was a teacher in the Shanghai Jewish School.

BG: I'm sure, yes.

JB: Please continue.

BG: As a matter of fact, one more thing, during the war years when we were in that room, my father used to get gall bladder attacks at night and you couldn't get a doctor because there was a curfew. So he used to suffer all night until the doctor would come in the morning and give him a morphine shot. So that was horrid with all of us in the same room, you know, and all this.

JB: Yes, feeling his pain.

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BG: It was very, very hard. When my mother got ill, I stayed home to nurse her. My sister kept going to school because she was in her last year at that point. So she recovered eventually. Then, after the war, the Americans came in and it was fantastic. To walk down Nanking Road and see the ships come in and see the sailors and the Marines run out and get in the pedicabs and the rickshaws and ride down Nanking Road, we were stunned. It was incredible! I was walking down the street with one of my girlfriends and, I mean, we were just beginning to feel our oats--we were fifteen going on twenty-five, you know--and here they came, hollering and screaming and yelling. They called me "red" and I didn't know what they were talking about. My hair was red at that time and I thought this was the greatest thing that ever happened. All the girls, we all decided we were going to apply for jobs with the Americans, so we all got jobs. My sister worked with the air force as a secretary, I worked in the PX selling whatever they were selling, beer or candy, cigarettes, soap, all that stuff, you know, and that's when my name suddenly became Betty. It changed from Ilse Kohn, which was my birth name. It was Ilse Margot Kohn, right? The last year that we were in Germany, when I was still a little girl, it was Ilse Margot Sarah Kohn, because the Germans made every Jewish female put a Sarah in their name and every Jewish male put an Israel in their name as a middle name. All right, so here I had all this bunch of

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names and didn't like any of them, right? But I knew that my great-grandmother's name was Betty and my mother had said she called me after her but never put it on the birth certificate. So on my application to the Americans I wrote Ilse Betty Kohn. They picked on Betty and since then I've been Betty. It was wonderful.

JB: Now we know. (chuckling)

BG: So that's how Betty came around. I went to work in the PX at the German School, the Kaiser Wilhelm Schule, they also have a reunion here, some people. But this is after the Germans got out. I remember we pulled down all of Hitler's pictures. We had a wonderful time.

JB: (chuckling) I'm sure you did.

BG: We had a nice time and I worked there for maybe half a year and I made a lot of friends and I was very popular and it was all very nice. Of course, it didn't last very long.

JB: How long did it last?

BG: It lasted maybe a year altogether. We were making American dollars and we had money and we went out and we had dates and we went dining and dancing and we had a wonderful time. Eventually, though, my father said I should do something constructive with my life, and he was right. Then I went to business school and I learned typing and shorthand at the Laidlaw Business College. Then I went to work as a secretary for different people and eventually wound up working at the

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Glen Line Building on The Bund in Shanghai for the United States Navy Supply Corp with Commander Frampton as my boss, who was a very nice man. Then I met my husband in the Race Course. He was a gym teacher.

JB: Was he an American?

BG: No, he's Russian. He was born in Vladivostok in Russia and his mother and his father came down to Harbin and Mukden in Manchuria. His brother Igor was born there and they came down to Shanghai. But, in the meantime, his father had died of some kind of ridiculous disease which they have antibiotics for today.

JB: Was he then in Shanghai at the time you were there?

BG: He was in Shanghai from the time he was four years old, but he was a Russian and he was free to do whatever he wanted to do.

JB: On the outside.

BG: Yes, he was on the outside and he was quite a popular man. He has his own story, you know.

JB: Yes, of course.

BG: He was working in the YMCA and in the Shanghai Jewish School, but after I left the Shanghai Jewish School, so I never met him. Anyway, he was a teacher at the Shanghai Jewish School and in the summer he worked for the Americans in the swimming pool at the Race Course, and that's where I met him in August

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of 1948. By September of 1948 we were engaged and by November we were married. We didn't waste much time.

JB: In Shanghai?

BG: In Shanghai. So we had a mixed marriage there. We got married in the Union Church, which would accept us both, because neither one of our religions accepted the other one. They wanted us both to change to something else and we said we weren't going to do that. So we got married and then, shortly after that, the Chinese Communists came into Shanghai, in 1949.

By this time, my sister had left Shanghai as a war bride. She married a GI, an American GI, and she was repatriated to America, although she had never been there before. But with the Communists coming in, they pulled out all the dependents. She was already pregnant with her first child then, so she got out. Just before I got married, they took her out on a ship with my brother-in-law. I remember waving goodby to her and the band playing "Now is the Hour" on the docks. Remember that song? (chuckling)

JB: I certainly do.

BG: Every time I hear that song it takes me back.

JB: How about your parents, now?

BG: My parents were still living in the house that we had bought after the war, trying to get to America, finally, which was very difficult for them because the American consulate, at

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that point, had closed in Shanghai and you couldn't get your papers processed.

JB: How about . . . the daughter couldn't help, your sister?

BG: Well, my sister had just gone to America. She had gotten them a sponsor. Yes, she helped, she got them a sponsor, a lady that she got friendly with. But it wasn't until two years later that they managed to get out. She left in 1948 and my parents left . . . Oh, even later than that--in 1951. I left in 1950 with my husband. We tried to get to America but our quota number was not high enough and we had no sponsor.

JB: Did you feel that you really had to get out of China?

BG: Yes. Yes, we had to get out. Living conditions again became bad with the Communists there. All the foreigners were leaving, everyone was leaving. By the middle fifties, there was no one left that I can remember.

JB: Again, was it political or economic reasons?

BG: It was both. We were living, at that time, in the YMCA. We had gotten married in November 1948 and, by 1950, we were living in the YMCA, right across from the Race Course where we had originally met. In late 1949 we saw the Communists come into the city. We looked out through the curtains and there was a lot of shooting going on and all this, and the Communists came through. There were pillboxes right in front of the building and we saw them come in. We saw the Nationalist soldiers take off their uniforms and leave them

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in the pillbox and walk away without their guns, in their underwear, so they wouldn't get taken prisoner by the Communists. We saw that through the windows.

They called this the Liberation, you see. The Communists were liberating everybody, so this was called the Liberation, which was not that way for us. It made it more difficult for us. So, of course, everybody was scrambling to get out. We couldn't go to America, which is what we wanted to do, but my husband's mother had a friend in Australia who sponsored us. At that point, I was eight months pregnant already with my first child, so time was of the essence to get out.

JB: Yes, right. So how did you manage to get out? I mean, did you go by . . .

BG: Well, the International Refugee Organization, whose head at the time was one Lorenzo Lo who was a school buddy of my husband, he put my husband in charge of this group, to take them through . . . We couldn't get out through the harbor because there were rumors of the harbor being mined. So [he was] to take this group of people through by train from Shanghai to Tientsin, and take a ship, the Heinrich Jenssen, from there to Hong Kong, and from Hong Kong people would fly out or take steamers out to wherever they were going. But he was in charge of this particular group, which was all very nice, but I was pregnant. I had a difficult pregnancy and I was not moving around too well. I was twenty years old and

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I was leaving my parents behind, who didn't have their papers together yet either, and it was another one of these traumatic things, you know. But this time I was smart enough to understand I was really in trouble. (laughter)

But I had some help on the way. There were two nuns on the train from Shanghai to Tientsin who were very, very good to me. I told them that I was Jewish and they said, well, I reminded them of Mary, who did not have a place to lay her head either when she was pregnant. They were very sweet to me and they gave me a medal, which I kept for years and years and years. They picked up my feet and put them on their lap, because there was no place for me to put my feet up and I was swelling up.

Anyway, we got to Tientsin eventually. After a couple of nights in a hotel, where again people were so good to me, because my husband was busy with this group of old people and young people and he was running all over the place. And here I was . . .

JB: A young, eight-months-pregnant lady.

BG: Yes.

(End of Side 1)

BG: So, eventually, we got to Hong Kong on the Heinrich Jenssen, where we had a cabin with six beds in it, bunk beds yet. Anyway, we got to Hong Kong and we were supposed to take a ship to Australia. Of course, they refused to take me on the

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ship because I was too far in my pregnancy. Here was Sir Horace Kadoorie in Hong Kong, who once was my benefactor in school. We contacted him and I told him that I was the one who shouted the loudest, "Hip, hip, hooray!" and he arranged for us to fly to . . . not because of that, but he took us to tea at the Peninsula Hotel and he arranged for us to fly to Australia through the refugee people there, via Singapore. This all happened and we flew to Australia and a few weeks later I had my daughter there, my first daughter Jennifer. Eventually, I had another child there, Elizabeth.

JB: Jennifer is the age of my daughter.

BG: She'll be forty this year? (chuckling)

JB: Yes.

BG: Then came Elizabeth. Then when Jennifer was three years old and Elizabeth was one and a half, we went to America. My parents were here at that point. They had gone to America via the German refugee camps to get their papers processed in the Black Forest. From Shanghai to Germany, from Germany by ship to America, and they met my sister who was then established in America. When we came in . . . They got to America two years before we did. When we arrived, well, we had a journey . . . From Australia, we took a ship. We tried to do it as cheaply as we could because we didn't have much money. My husband was teaching school and I was having babies and there wasn't much extra. My parents helped us out a great deal,

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they paid for a lot of things and took everything they had. We took a ship from Sydney to Italy. We were supposed to go through France to go to England, and from England to America, but there was a strike going on. So we had to go by train from Italy through Switzerland, Germany and Holland, and then by ferry to England. While all this was going on, my youngest one, Elizabeth, became ill and we had quite a hard time with her. She became very ill on the trip and just cried and cried all the time. When we got to London by ferry, eventually, from landing in Harwich, we then had a three-hour train ride to London where we put her in Saint Bartholomew's Hospital immediately and they nursed her back to health. She was just totally exhausted, she just couldn't go on.

JB: So you stayed there for awhile.

BG: We stayed there a week, went to see my uncle in Nottingham and stayed there another week while I was having myself a little nervous breakdown, and then flew to America and met my parents after not seeing them for three years.

JB: A wonderful reunion.

BG: And not seeing my sister for five [years].

JB: Did you settle in about the same place?

BG: First, we spent a year in Springfield College, where my husband had a YMCA scholarship for one year for post-graduate work. Then we settled in New Jersey.

JB: The entire family?

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BG: Well, we did. Yes, my parents were in New Jersey, my sister was in New Jersey, but we went to Atlantic City because we heard they had a beach there and there was a job in the YMCA. My husband was a YMCA man, so he got a job there. When we heard that they had a beach and they had a Y, we said, "Okay, we'll go." He got a salary of $4,000 a year. He never saw that much money before in his life, so he took it and that was it.

END OF INTERVIEW

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