

Testing, one, two, three. August 5, 1982 interview with Eric Rosenow, Southfield, Michigan, interviewer Sherry Weisberg.

My name is Eric Rosenow, present address 24290 Coolidge, Oak Park, Michigan.

Would you start out by telling me about your life before the war, what it was like for you where you were?

Are you on?

Yeah.

I was born in Germany, in Berlin, and as a child I worked in the theater and movie business as an actor. In 1934, just short after Hitler began to come to power, I created a band, an orchestra, where I played very successfully.

I couldn't do this very long because after two years it was no more allowed the Jewish people could perform music, or be in the theater business, or be in the movie industry. So this was the first profession that came that the Jewish people were eliminated.

The very first profession--

The very first-- the movie and theater performance was the first one. The music came a little bit later, a little bit later. But the movie industry and the theater industry was the first one where the Jewish people was eliminated immediately.

My music career in Germany lasted about two years. That was the end. Hitler eliminated to play-- that Jewish people perform for Gentile people. Then we could play only for Jewish people, closed societies, weddings, and bar mitzvah, or whatever it was, but no more for Gentiles.

In 1939, I finally reached the decision to leave Germany, willingly or not willingly, because I've been called up every day by the Gestapo when finally, you're leaving. Get out from Germany. So I booked two tickets with my brother, and we left in the end of March Berlin through Italy, and we took a ship and went to Shanghai.

Did you have other family living there with you, aunts and uncles?

I had my parents. I will come to this right away. I arrived in Shanghai April 27. My parents and my other brother still remained in Germany because there was no tickets available nowhere. So they came with the last ship. The war broke out already. They were 12 days near the Suez Canal, and the war broke out.

The question was if the English people let this ship go through or sent the ship back to Germany. Of course, then my parents would be transported and my brother to the concentration camps like anybody else. But finally they let this particular ship through and came in September, beginning of September, also to Shanghai.

So my whole family-- I mean my parents and two other brothers-- arrived in Shanghai. I'm not talking about uncles or cousins who remained in Germany, and I never saw them since.

Did you have any word about any of them, what happened to them as well?

Well, I got some word that they are being gassed and didn't survived in the concentration camps. So when I came to Shanghai-- I arrived in Shanghai the 27 of April. May the 1st I had my first engagement in nightclubs--

Just like that?

--as a musician. Well, thanks to my profession as a musician, as a pianist, I made always a good living. We were about 20,000 refugees from Germany, from Austria, and we also had some from Poland.

Those were the people that were transported through Russia?

No, no. There were a few people who came via Siberia, the Siberian Express over Harbin. But I wasn't one of them. I came direct from Italy to Shanghai. I didn't come with a train from Harbin to Shanghai, or I didn't come with the small boat from Harbin to Shanghai, no. But it was a very small amount of people who came from Poland or Russia to Shanghai.

But I just want to emphasize one more important fact, that we were 20,000 Jewish people in Shanghai. 5,000-- about 5,000 people died in starvation and climate. It was subtropical in Shanghai.

In 1942, the Japanese people created a ghetto. We had free to go in Shanghai wherever we wanted to go up to the point '42, 1942. They put us-- we had to move to a very, very small area to a ghetto.

But I mind you, even in that ghetto we were almost free to do whatever we pleased. We had barbershops in the ghetto. We had bakeries. We had movie houses. We made theater. We had music. We had everything. We were free.

We were living in camps, but I, fortunately, didn't live, live in a camp. I had a private house. House? A room, I mean. And we couldn't move out from the ghetto. There were wires. And in '45 we were-- the American people liberated us, and in '46 I got married to my wife, Annie.

I'd like to start with a very important fact. We're living now in 1982, and we are talking-- this is the time where we are talking about bombarding Lebanon. Well, let me tell you something. What Israel is doing over there-- I think they want to finish up the PLO once and for all. The world is crying out stop to Israel, stop to Israel.

I remember when I was in Shanghai that the American planes came over our ghetto and bombed this ghetto where the Japanese people put their ammunition. All the ammunition in that sector ready-- you understand now why I bring out this fact now?

It's very important.

The American people know that this was a ghetto, and the American people know that there was an ammunition camp right in the middle. The Japanese did exactly the same thing at that time what the PLO are doing, putting the ammunition among the civilians. This I just wanted to bring out.

And in '45 we were liberated and broke all the wires where we were kept together. And of course that time, in '45 and the war was out, we didn't know from gas chambers. We were completely isolated from the outside world. Even we had freedom in our ghetto, but we still didn't know what was going on the outside. We couldn't listen to radios. There was a penalty. Was death penalty.

Still the war was out. We didn't know where to go. We had to-- of course we had the Jewish committee there. We had the HIAS there. We had the Joint Distribution there. We had a choice in '46, either go back to Germany, where we came from, go to Palestine-- that time we didn't have Israel. Then it was Palestine, not our state-- or go to America.

But America you needed an affidavit, and I didn't have any affidavits. I didn't have anybody here. So the Joint came up with the idea that the German quota is still the biggest quota to immigrate to America, so regardless if you're Jew or German, we were falling under the German quota since this is a big quota that was unused.

So the HIAS, in cooperation with the Joint, got together and sponsored that so many German Jews in Shanghai could come under a collective affidavit. I was one of the lucky ones who immigrated that time to America.

How did it happen that you became one of the lucky ones? How was the decision made?

Well, as I mentioned before, the German quota is the-- was unused during the war. You have so many Germans,

regardless of religion, who could emigrate every year to America. This was interrupted during the war, so nobody could emigrate to America. So this was a big quota where the German people could immigrate to America. And the Joint and the HIAS, those two organizations, got the quota.

And I was falling under this quota, the German quota. They had a Polish quota. They have an Austrian quota. They have a Chinese quota, and it's all very small. German quota was a very big quota. Every year since 1800 they could immigrate to America.

So we arrived in '48 in San Francisco. Again, there was the Joint, who greeted us, who supported us. Now, the Joint tells us where to go. They don't want us to stay in California. They don't want us to go to New York because they have too many people to support already, the HIAS, the Joint.

So we had a choice, Saint Louis, Pittsburgh, and the city I never heard of my entire life was Detroit. I heard in Germany Chicago, New York, Saint Louis, Pittsburgh. And my mother-- olav ha-sholom-- my parents died here and my two other brothers, too. When my mother-- olav ha-sholom-- heard going to Saint Louis, she said, zu heiss, too hot, what? And when she heard the name Pittsburgh, she said, too much smoke, too much smoke. Detroit? We never heard it.

Take a chance.

And take a chance. All right, we took a chance like Columbus took a chance to go to America. So we took a chance to come to Detroit. Like anybody else, I had a big struggle. I worked in a factory here for three years.

What kind of factory?

Dodge, Chrysler in Hamtramck for three and a half years. I start teaching, and I--

Music?

Yes, music. I also played in nightclubs Friday, Saturday. So there was a time I was holding on three jobs at the same time. On weekends it was pretty rough for me.

My husband is a musician. I can relate.

What does he play? He plays the bass, the electric bass.

Oh, yeah?

Guitars and the sax, many things. He's--

Maybe I can use him. Does he have his own group?

He's in a group, and they're going to make it to [? Montreal. ?] They made the 10 semifinalists that will be opening up for Peaches & Herb.

Oh, beautiful, beautiful.

Yeah. They have a producer in California who produces for Noel Pointer, who wants a demo. They've got a demo--

So we have something in common.

Definitely.

Oh, I see.

He's holding down three jobs, too.

So I know. Believe me, I know, from mine.

So this is actually my whole life story in 10 minutes.

No, it's a good outline. It's a good outline from which to start. And what you told me makes me think of just 1,000 more questions that I really want to know. I would like to know more about what your family life was like before everything happened, before everything began. Thank you.

From Germany?

Yeah, that's real important because we have some history books, but we don't have-- we don't know anything. We don't know what your life was like.

Well, let me tell you something. My life in Germany, especially in Berlin, was very, very good. Of course, we were--

Oh, thank you.

You're welcome.

In Germany, we don't know what means districts like Oak Park, like Southfield, like West Bloomfield where more or less the Jewish people assembled there in a mass. Like they moved from-- they moved from Linwood to Dexter. Dexter was the neighborhood.

Then first it was 12th Street. Then from Dexter they started to move to Oak Park. Then from Oak Park they moved to Southfield and et cetera, et cetera. This is not the case in Germany. More or less the Jewish people lived and grew up among goyim, among non-Jewish people.

What were your attitudes towards one another? Absolutely magnificent I didn't feel any antisemitic-- we could go after our business. In school, I remember once in a while some of my colleagues, of the students-- they say, you Jude, Jew. And this was very, very minor incidents. But in general, I had a good life before Hitler came.

Did you feel-- did you-- did you identify as a German, as a Jew, both kind of?

I'm glad that you asked this question. The German Jew is known by the Austrian Jews, by the Polish Jews, by the Russian Jews. They think that the German Jews are better Jews than the rest.

The Russians Jews, the Polish Jews have no much not too much use for German Jews. They don't care too much for them, very simple. The German Jew-- and I'm coming back to your question-- felt always in Germany first I'm a German, and then I'm a Jew.

But this is nothing new to me since I immigrated to America. If you ask any American Jew before the war, before we had so many synagogues in America, what are you, he said, I'm an American. He didn't say, I'm a Jew. We had all the rights in America, a Jew. The Jew in Germany had all the rights you could ask for, so he was proud to be German. Same an American Jew. He's proud to be an American. Does this answer your question?

Very well. I'd like to know some more about how you did live as a Jew in Germany, your association with the synagogue, if any, what kinds of things did you do in your home, did you observe the Sabbath, things like that.

Yes, yes. We were not-- you have German Jews, also very religious Jews like anybody else, then you had a lot of German Jews that were Reform. They were-- Reform we call liberal Jews. I observed the high holidays. Of course, when I was a child I loved to observe Hanukkah because we got presents, naturally.

But I personally don't come from a rich family, not, so we always had a struggle. But we lived balebatish. We didn't have much money. Like you asked some of the-- the rest of the community. They say, well, Jews-- they're all rich. We had a lot of poor Jews in Germany, in Berlin. And they had a hard time to make a living.

My father was a-- he was employed by the government. He got twice a month money, on the 15th and the 1st. On the 20th the money was gone, and on the 5th the money was gone. So we had a struggle. We struggled. And my parents gave me a piano lesson. I went to conservatory, and everything cost money.

So you didn't go to cheder?

No. Oh, well, I didn't go to cheder, but I went to what we call in Germany riligions schule.

Can you spell [? "religions" ?] for me?

R-I-L-I-G-I-O-N-S, riligions, school. We had to-- there was a must in Berlin. You had to go twice a week after your regular school-- after your regular elementary school or whatever it was you had to go twice to Jewish riligions schule. I wasn't too crazy about it.

[BOTH TALKING] here.

But today, I'm sorry that I learned so little about Hebrew.

Do you speak Hebrew?

No.

Yiddish?

Yiddish, yes.

You speak seven languages, right?

Yes, yes, Russian, Polish, Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, and English. I learned the language a little bit in China. My wife spoke better Japanese than me.

And how did you learn Japanese-- I know-- I can assume how you learned Chinese. How did you learn Japanese?

Well, we had contact with Japanese, and we had contact with Chinese. I played in nightclubs and bars before the war and after the war. After the war we had only Japanese customers and Japanese and Korean customers. So I had to learn the language.

And their songs as well?

And their songs, but not Chinese. Yes, Chinese a little bit, too. I still do, when I'm performing here sometimes in clubs and societies, a journey around the world. And I emphasize it's almost a true story where I traveled. It's a very unique musical traveling.

So when you went to the riligions school, they taught you elementary Hebrew--

Yes.

--writing, reading?

Writing and reading, yes, what I know very little now.

So I imagine you got the aleph-beis, and that's about it.

Yes, yes, just about.

Religious practices-- was it the--

I went to bar mitzvah. I had my bar mitzvah, big bar mitzvah. My we had in the house a bar mitzvah celebration. My father bought me a piano. It was a big thing.

I'll bet. I'll bet. What about your first piano when you left, when you were in Shanghai? Were you able to buy one?

A piano? I never had a piano in Shanghai.

Never? So you were singing in the clubs?

Right, right. Well, they had pianos in clubs, yes.

What do you remember about how your parents felt about what was happening right before the war started?

You see, at the beginning, when Hitler came to power, we Jewish people who lived in a grosstadt. Grosstadt means a big city like Berlin. Berlin had a population of four and a half million people. It's not a little village.

At the beginning, the Jewish people didn't suffer that much, they start with small cities first, experiment over there. We had more or less freedom in Germany, in Berlin until about 1936. Then it starts getting rough.

Now, my parents felt-- my parents felt-- unfortunately-- I must emphasize this-- they thought Hitler didn't mean the German Jews. I'm sure you heard this before. This was wrong from the German Jews.

Of course, my father was fighting, was a soldier in the First World War. He had the Iron Cross. But we learned later that Hitler meant all Jews, not only the Polish Jews and the Russian Jews.

I remember one incident in 193-- in 1938, I believe. The countries in Germany are very close to each other. They're grenze. Grenze means borders, borderlines, where you just can cross from Belgium to Holland or from Sweden to another country, to Switzerland. You don't have to-- at that time, we didn't have plane service. It was easier.

I remember a lot of Jewish people got smuggled over the border to Holland and to Belgium before Hitler came in to these countries, too. And there was one truck. It was on Christmas Eve in 1938. I supposed to be on it. I decided to go with that truck to Belgium.

And my mother begged me not to go. She didn't let me go. And this particular truck I think with 30 or 40 Jewish youngsters got caught and sent in concentration camps.

I wonder how she knew.

She had this intuition that-- don't, don't go. She begged me not to go.

And your father?

The same way, yes. My mother was the ruler in the house.

Tell me more about that. Tell me.

Well, my mother was the-- she lived with me-- she got 90 years old. With me, she lived with me. She was a real

dictator.

Yeah?

She was the head of the house. What she said goes. Not my father, my mother. I was the baby in the house. I had two other brothers. I'm the youngest one.

So tell me more about them as well.

My other brother was a musician, too, was a drummer, and my other drummer-- my other brother, the second one-- he had a very, very hard time to make a living in America, couldn't adjust himself. He left-- he got married here, and he left for San Diego. He arrived in San Diego and stayed there a few years and passed away in San Diego. My other brother here had a heart condition, and he died here in Detroit.

How recently?

Oh, I would say about 15 years ago. My father died in 1956, and my mother died in 1974.

The rest of your extended family-- they were all murdered?

Right, right, uncle, and aunts, and cousins, yes. I have-- I have-- I had one cousin in Great Neck in New York who was in a concentration camp, and they transferred him with a train to another concentration-- and he jumped out from the train and was hiding for one and a half years in the forest.

Do more about his story that you could also tell--

Not too much. I was very in close contact with him, but I really don't know. He was hiding-- you know something? You cannot condemn all the goyim for this.

Oh, no.

You had goyim who were hiding Jews. They're risking their-- they was risking their own life, too.

Sure. They were-- I know I'm not pronouncing this right, but in the Ordnungspolizei. I'm going to show you the word here. This organization right here-- some were very bad, and some were very good.

Yes, Judenrat, yes.

And they did, they did. They did--

yes. Some were hidden by goyim and organizations, too, yes.

You mentioned just a while back that you really didn't hear anything about what was going on in the rest of the world during the time that you were in Shanghai.

--in Shanghai, right.

Completely cut-off.

Yes, yes.

I really would like to hear more about your reactions to when you first started hearing what was happening to everybody else.

Well, when we found out later-- we couldn't hear shortwave, definitely not. When we found out what happened, we certainly don't want to go back to Germany. But during the war, the time we spent in Shanghai, we always had the feeling, well, Hitler will break his neck pretty soon. How long can he be in power?

So we thought being in Shanghai was only temporary. We thought we would go back to Germany again, where we left, where we came, where we knew our language. We never dreamed to come to America.

Unfortunately, I was not a Zionist either, so I don't want to--

Why do you say "unfortunately"?

Well, today maybe the Jewish people are more Zionist-oriented than ever before to immigrate to Israel. If I would be a Zionist at that time-- that time, I probably would go from Germany already to Palestine or even from Shanghai to make the decision to go with my family to Palestine. But I wasn't a Zionist. I know very little about it.

I noticed that when you first said that to me you used the word "unfortunately."

Yes.

Was there an attitude at that time towards--

Right, you had a lot of Jewish people that were real Zionist people. They were for definitely to go to Palestine. But on the other hand, I know so many people that are big Zionist people, but when America opened up they were the first one who went to America.

We're going to backtrack one more time. Tell me what you know about who organized the ghettos.

The Japanese people.

Tell me some more, what you know about how that happened.

Well, how that happened-- you see, the Japanese people didn't know any different from Jews or non-Jews. The Japanese or the Chinese people called us foreigners, [NON-ENGLISH], and the American people the Chinese people called [NON-ENGLISH]. They didn't know-- the Japanese people and the Chinese people-- they didn't know any difference between Jews, [NON-ENGLISH] or [NON-ENGLISH], no.

But the Nazi influence became so big in Shanghai. We had about 5,000 top Nazis in Shanghai that they built-- yes, that they built a ghetto-- they put the Jewish people in the ghetto-- where we before could walk freely in the whole city around and could do our business, after our business.

Now, when the war was out, there comes a very important point. We learned across the bridge in Shanghai and the waterfront they start building gas chambers for us. So if the war would last another half-year, the Japanese people would put us in gas chambers. They had no other choice.

What were your thoughts at that time when you realized that?

Well, the war was out. We didn't know it before. Don't forget that we were completely isolated from the world. Do you want to say something? No, you can say something.

[INAUDIBLE] us already, for the gas chambers.

Yes.

Everything on it, and it started when the war started between Germany and Japan. Then they put us in the ghetto

because we are Jews.

No, not at the beginning, honey.

When the war started with America and Japan. They were allies.

Yes, yes.

And they did everything the Germans told them to do.

Have you been interviewed? Has anyone contacted you to tell your story as well?

It's the same thing.

No, it's never the same because you're two very different people with very different feelings and very different reactions to what happened. I would like-- at some point I would like permission to also talk with you and get a complete story from your viewpoint. Would you be willing to do that for this project?

What kind of project? Do you know?

It's the Holocaust [INAUDIBLE], where they're building the Memorial Center, and they probably having a museum, something like this, one room where they display some of the--

Testing, one, two, three. Today is August 21. This will be part two of interview with Eric Rosenow.

This is Eric Rosenow. This is my second interview for the Holocaust with Sharon Weisberg. Is that the right name? OK.

OK. Thank you. If you wouldn't mind, I would like to have you give me a little bit more information about the liquidation of the ghetto, what actually happened, how they did it.

As soon there was the news out that the war is over and the Japanese people surrendered, they opened up the gates, the borderlines so that everybody could go where they pleased. And I believe that the Japanese people who occupied that time Shanghai were put in camps, and the Jews, the 20,000 who survived the, so to speak, Holocaust, the ghetto in Shanghai, would go after their business like before.

And the people were looking forward to leave Shanghai wherever they could. At that time, we didn't know if we would go back to Germany, if we would go to Palestine, or to America, or any place. It was completely puzzled, this time, because America-- we didn't have any affidavit.

And a lot of people thought, well, the war is over. Hitler is no more there, and we would go back to Germany. But then later we found out what happened, actually, in Germany, that he killed so many million Jews and gassed them. So we were against going back to Germany. That's about it.

Displaced persons camp-- did that-- was that used for any part of the population that was in the ghetto to your knowledge?

What do you mean?

Sometimes after some of the ghettos were liberated people couldn't go to any of these three or four or whatever places immediately, and they were moved to yet another camp, waiting to go to their destinations.

No. You see, you must understand the Shanghai ghetto was not a camp, was not-- there were no tents where the people were housing. People housed in rooms, in camps, but they were well-built so to speak, as much they were built in China.

But there were no tents put up, or the people lived in rooms, real rooms. So there was no-- a mass of people at one place. It was not a concentration camp. So I don't know if you can visualize the situation in Shanghai. We lived under bad conditions but no comparison whatsoever like people lived in concentration camps. There were no guards behind us. We had no guards behind us.

No guards whatsoever?

No, whatsoever.

I didn't know that, OK.

There were no guards behind us whatsoever. We just couldn't move out from this district. There was a district where the Jewish people were put in this completely-- like half of Oak Park.

The empire from Japan was a little bit afraid to-- we heard that they put already gas chambers up across the bridge if they would-- if the war would last longer. But what we heard, that the headquarters, the Nazis, requested that the Japanese people put the Jewish people in the gas chambers. But the empire was a little bit afraid of this, as far as I know, so he delayed this, he delayed this, he delayed this.

OK, that's good. I didn't get enough of a feel for a daily routine while you were living in the ghetto. If you could just even briefly tell me what a typical day was like for you or for friends of yours--

People or friends-- they worked. Some of them were in shops. We had shops there. We had grocery stores. We had bars there where the Japanese people even came in as guests. And there were music in the ghetto. There were theater in the ghetto. There were movie houses in the ghetto. There were dancing in the ghetto.

I must say we were lucky that we could escape to Shanghai. This saved all-- Shanghai actually saved about 15,000 or 18,000 people their lives. 5,000 people, as I mentioned before, died on climate and starvation, but the rest could survive.

Take for instance, me. I had a good profession. I always worked. When other people didn't have a meal, I had three meals a day because when guests came into bars and restaurants they invited the employees to eat with them, to drink with them.

Really?

Yes. Many times I took food home because I had two brothers and my parents. Of course, in the daytime we had a kitchen what was cooking for the underprivileged people that couldn't support themselves, and they had-- they had stay in line and get their food.

Who set that up?

I asked-- this was set up by the Joint contribution in connection with the Red Cross, I believe. It came from private donation. More or less it came from private donation during the war. We had pretty wealthy Jewish people in Shanghai. They made a good living.

The ones that were already there?

That's right.

Yes, OK. Were they also forced to move into the ghetto?

Well, you had Jewish people with British passports, with Russian passports. You had American people there, too, American Jews.

Living there?

Living there. And I don't believe that they could get those people into the ghetto, that the Japanese people couldn't get these people into the ghetto. So there still was an international settlement in Shanghai, what was not occupied by the Japanese people, even during the war.

You see, this section where we lived was completely bombed-out by the Japanese people. It used to belong to China. The war was on since 19-- the war started between China and Japan 1936, and that section where we lived was completely bombed-out to the ground.

And the Japanese people let us come in. Why did they let us come in? Build it up. There was no electricity. There was nothing. And the 20,000 Jewish people built up this little community.

Wow. That's a very different picture than what I had--

You see, the Chinese people actually didn't let us in. Did I mention that before?

Uh-huh.

Yeah. The Chinese people didn't let us in. The Japanese people let us in.

So there was a vast difference in attitude then, I would imagine, that the Chinese had towards you versus the Japanese.

Yes. The Chinese people-- when I left Germany-- I think I mentioned it before-- he asked me for \$5,000 gold, American dollars, to come to Shanghai. At that time, I didn't know how \$1 looked. I didn't know how one American dollar looks.

So the Chinese consul, where I went in Berlin-- I think I mentioned it in our first interview. He said, well-- I asked him, why don't you give me a passport to go legal to Shanghai? He said, what do you mean passport? You don't have any passports to come to Shanghai. I said, but what about the people who are there already? We put them all in concentration camps when we get back Shanghai from the Japanese people.

OK. Those people less fortunate than you were-- I know that the conditions, the subtropic conditions differ greatly.

Yes, yes, yes.

How did the government handle those people? Did they try and make things better for them? Or they just died, and that was it?

No, no. We had hospitals in the ghetto where people could go when they got sick. You had a lot of doctors in the ghetto. Even if something went wrong, they came to your house. And-- don't forget-- we didn't have penicillin that time.

Sulfa drugs still?

I don't remember. But anyway, I was undernourished. With all my goodies, with all my jobs, and with all my eating, I was undernourished. I weighed about 98 pounds. I had what they called sprue. Sprue is a subtropical disease. Whatever you eat turns into diarrhea. It sounds very bad now, but that's the truth.

And I was very low on calcium, what I'm-- up to that very day today I'm low on calcium.

Still?

Yes, yes. And I had-- I was anemic. What means anemic? The red blood corpus turning into white ones. So I was eating a lot of liver, just putting on the pan for one second, and two second, and it's still bleeding, the liver. That's very healthy. That has the biggest vitamin, what the normal body needs.

Iron, I would imagine.

Something like this, yes. And I remember I had-- two or three times a week I had vitamin shots, and the people who couldn't afford it went to the hospital and got it free. It was well-organized. It was very well-organized if you're in need. It wasn't enough. I remember I was standing in line. They call it kitchen fund kitchen fund. And I was standing in line to get food for my parents and for my brothers.

They didn't work. They were not fortunate that I had this profession. But the food was not ay, ay, ay. But of course, we didn't get steaks, or ham and eggs, or whatever. We got the soup, and we got a banana. We got a piece of bread.

Was there any kosher food available?

Kosher foods-- I believe there was some provision made of kosher food. But I didn't eat the kosher food because, first, we were not kosher at home, so we didn't care one way or the other. We cared only that we had enough to eat. What it is we didn't care.

Did you hear either stories or friends talking to you, those people who did keep kosher, and here they came to the ghetto, and perhaps it wasn't as available? Did you find that those people were forced to change their observance? Did they? Did they have to die instead?

Well, we had a lot of people. They were very religious. Let me put this very blunt to you. We had very-- we had a lot of Jewish people that were very religious, and they kept it up.

And one of the very religious Jews were ones of the first ones who could immigrate to America. They were the Hasidic Jews, and I know many of them here in Detroit with whom I'm still friends. They became [INAUDIBLE] and some of the catering places.

But a lot of people turned away from religion. They thought, if this happened to us, why Isn't God protecting us? A lot of people turn to a different religion for one or the other reason.

Local religions even?

Yes. They give up their Jewish religion and turn to Christianity or Catholic. Why? It has a reason. They offer them food. They offer them clothes.

But I understand when the war was out they turned back. Now, I understand this. You do a lot of things for surviving, and that's what happened.

I'm going to ask you a couple of very personal questions, and if you're not comfortable answering them, please don't.

Go ahead.

But it would be real helpful if you could. I know from my background and the type of work that I do in interviewing people and helping them with emotional problems-- I know that people, when they go through tremendous stress and change, get very, very depressed, and they're suicidal, chronic depression that never lifts, things like that there. Would you be willing to talk about any of the changes that you and your family went through?

It never came in my mind. It never came to my mind because I never was really desperate. I really was never this desperate that it entered in my mind because I always could make money for surviving. If I didn't make music, I was staying on the street was a little-- and sell something, anything.

And the Chinese people walked by, like a flea market, and bought it. I got even merchandise in consignment. They give it to me until I sell it. Otherwise, what I didn't sell I could bring back. So this what you asked me never, never entered in

my mind or my parents' or my brother's.

Did you see this happening to friends of yours?

Well, suicidal I really can't tell. A lot of people got sick, very sick because they-- it had something to do with a woman, man and woman. The women were sick, and when you-- God forbid-- got a sickness over there, you couldn't get it out because there was no penicillin, the kind of sickness you can't cure over night, like syphilis or gonorrhea, whatever you call it. Whenever you caught this, there was no hope.

So people--

Also there was a mental institution. You had people-- you had a mental institution. But the mental institution was not run by Jewish people. It was a mental institution already there, and I believe we had quite a few mental cases in this institution. And I believe the only survivors what is even now in Shanghai, I heard, are those people who are mental patients. They couldn't leave.

Because they were-- the law forced them to stay there? Like we have the laws here about-- I forget the word here. There are some laws that force people to stay in mental institutions.

Yes.

Is this what you're referring to?

Yes, yes.

So those people may still yet be over there.

They may still be there.

OK. So for the most part, this really didn't happen to you. You had a lot of strength and courage.

I personally, yes, yes.

Do you remember something happening to any very special friends that just tore you apart, people that you were exceptionally close to? No? OK.

No. May I steal a cigarette from you?

You certainly may. In fact, you're going to laugh. I like the Brights so much that when I finished my Benson & Hedges I just put my Brights back in that box.

Oh, is that right?

Yes.

Oh, this is not Benson & Hedges?

No, I ran out. But I like the carton, and I forgot the Brights.

OK. Thank you.

So I reloaded.

Thank you.

OK. You're welcome. The issue of hiding probably does not apply to you or anyone that you know of.

No. In Shanghai, no. A lot of Jewish people are being punished by the Japanese authority because there was one man with a name Ghoya. He was a little man, and he was really ruling that ghetto.

Who was he? Tell me more about--

He was like a governor, and he was put in charge of the Jewish people in that ghetto. And he saw that the Jewish people couldn't move out without a passport. And if he liked somebody, he gave him a passport. If he didn't, he slapped them even.

He was so small. He hated big, tall people because he had to-- he went on a chair to talk to him. And he was the ruler of the ghetto, Ghoya. Mr. Ghoya, they call him.

On the other hand-- don't forget-- you can't visualize how this ghetto really worked. Night times we had a lot of bars where a lot of Jewish girls were attending the bars. They were sitting with the customers and were drinking. And sometimes Ghoya came into the bar and some other Japanese people, soldiers, came in and are big spenders. Some of the Japanese people were very friendly to the Jewish people.

What about intermarriage?

Intermarriage were very, very few. I don't think that there were any intermarriage between Jewish people and Japanese. There was some intermarriage between Chinese and Jewish people but, on the other hand, very, very few.

There was no such thing but you asked me before, that you need protection. No, you didn't need a protection. You needed food. This was the most important thing.

Sure, basic survival.

Yes. Yes.

Hi, hello.

One second.

Well, the Israelis, they didn't do any worse than the American people or the English people did when they bombed our ghetto. They knew. The American people knew definitely that there were 20,000 Jewish people living in this ghetto. They know that the ammunition arsenal was put right in this vicinity.

Of course, there were civilian casualties. A lot of civilians, a lot of Jewish people died when the planes came down in Shanghai.

Straight?

Absolutely. Our friends who lives upstairs, Mr. And Mrs. Marcus-- her father died when the American people bombed Shanghai.

Do you know, roughly, how many Jews died?

I don't know, no.

All right. Again, this may not apply, but you never know. We do address the issue of resistance and the partisan movement. Was there any kind of movement towards uprising in the Shanghai Ghetto?

No.

No?

No.

Never any committees meeting--

No.

--and talking about what's happening to us, we've got to do something?

No. The Japanese people put us-- they restrain us over there that we couldn't move out, that we could go after our business. We were free to do anything what we want, but that was about it.

We didn't know what was going on outside. We're not allowed to hear shortwave radio. This you could-- if they would detect us, they would shoot you. The Japanese people put a lot of people what did something wrong-- or they took them away from their house and put them in a jail. They call it bridgehead. And they were not dying there. I didn't hear anybody-- but they punished them.

Tortured?

Tortured, yes. But nobody was dying.

Did anybody wind up staying behind that you know of, they were kept in jail after? You know?

I don't remember. I don't believe so. I don't believe so because the jail was liberated also when the war was out. It was occupied by the Japanese. As soon they-- the war was out the Japanese people left their hands, and that's it.

I'm going to-- as long as we're moving into talking about liberation-- you already started talking with me about that-- I just have a few more questions in that area. I know about your decision to come here into Detroit and how you wound up here. When did you become a citizen, actually?

After five years. It was the first thing I applied for, citizen, right away. After five years, I made my citizenship.

Was that difficult?

No.

No?

No, not at all.

There was no prejudice at the time against people who had been in your circumstance, come over?

By who?

By the United States government, by the bureaucracy that you had to deal with?

No.

Did they make it harder for you?

No, not at all, not at all. Don't forget that I came over-- I think I mentioned before-- under the German quota. There's no Jewish quota. America has no Jewish quota. America has a German quota, and the German quota was not so filled. There were plenty of German who didn't immigrate at that time to America, so it was pretty empty.

And the Joint Distribution Committee had so many affidavits available for German Jews that we were filing under this quota. We were examined in Shanghai if we were delinquent, if we were sick. If we were sick, we would have difficulties, yes.

When the war was out, I felt pretty strong, but the sprue-- they called it tropical sprue in China. Here, they call it non-tropical sprue.

So it was different from dysentery? Or was it the same thing?

It just was the same thing, just about, yes. You couldn't-- there was a time you couldn't leave the toilet. You have constantly to go.

There's something I forgot to mention. You see, China-- your blood-- when you live a certain length of time in China in a subtropical climate, your blood-- it's getting thin, very thin. So here, when you're coming to a different country, it takes quite a while to adjust yourself, climate-wise, I'm talking.

Have you made it all the way back to health? I know the things that you mentioned earlier are still--

No, no.

Would you mind talking about that?

Well, I'm low on calcium. I have difficulties many times of walking. My bones are very weak and brittle. I have to be very careful that I don't fall down. That would be it. And I have to take vitamin and calcium medicine to make my bones stronger, but I'm still always-- when I go to a doctor-- my doctor's Dr. Sandberg, Hershel Sandberg, and he always says, Eric, you're low on calcium. You're on the borderline. You have to take more calcium.

And 15 or 18 years ago, I had a complete physical at the Ford hospital, and they detected that I have a non-tropical sprue. I asked him if this has any connection with the tropical sprue. They couldn't give me a real answer for this.

Because a non-tropical sprue about 15 to 18 years ago was a very rare case. They didn't know too much about this in this country. There was a doctor from Argentina which sent me-- who was more familiar with this kind of disease. So he found out that's what it is.

You believe there is some connection?

I certainly believe there's the connection with tropical and non-tropical sprue. I believe so, yes, yes. I never had it in Germany.

Are you telling me that you aged maybe by about 20 years by being over there, having those experiences? The reason I ask is that you're describing things to me that apply to people where senility has set in, not just emotional, mental senility but physical.

Yes. I would say so, yes. Because this immigration from Germany-- thank you-- to China doesn't set in your clothes. It definitely affects your body. It must affect your body because-- climate-wise and food-wise.

Is there any organization or government agency, any reparation at all for people who are in your circumstance? Or do that only apply to the camps? Do you know?

Money-wise, you're talking?

Yes, I'm getting reparation money from Germany. I also get pension from Germany. I'm getting a pension from Germany-- I proved it with my pictures. I was in the movie business and theater business-- I think I mentioned it to you-- when I was very young. I have still my pictures here where I played in so many pictures as a youngster that I could prove it.

They pay me a pension. Why they pay me a pension? I could have become a star. I could've be a star. I could've be a bum, too. Don't get me wrong. But that I was taken out of this kind of business when I was very young that I couldn't make a living anymore, also as a musician, as an orchestra leader, today I'm getting my pension. I also get a pension from Social Security from Germany.

The 10 years, the nine years, whatever, in Shanghai-- they counted it. And my wife gets a pension also from-- she doesn't get Social Security, but she gets a pension of what they call [? berufshaft. ?] [? Berufshaft ?] is that you've been taking out of your profession. And she got also a small pension of health-- what do you call it? Health pension, yes. I don't get it.

That is new to me. I did not know that you were able to get [BOTH TALKING]

Yes. Many, many people are getting it, yes.

After you got here, did you-- and to Detroit in particular, did you find that you talked a lot about your experiences in the ghetto with coworkers, people, your friends here, people that you lived with?

For instance, with whom? To whom?

To whom? Did you know people who came from the ghetto and also moved to Detroit?

Yes.

Did you find--

We have a lot of people here. A lot of people died already. A lot of people, our friends, died.

Those that remained alive, when you got together socially or what--

Oh, we're getting together sometimes, even up to that date.

Did you talk about things, or did you avoid them?

Well, there's nothing to avoid. We talk about the past sometimes, yes. And everybody has a different experience. But everybody is happy that this is over, and they could settle.

After all, the war's over how many years? 30, 35, something like this? '45, '55, '65, '75. No, it's more, 38 years, 37 years. Around 37 years, when you examine the situation, people who came through Shanghai like in my age or maybe younger, other people, a lot of years passed by. People got older.

Coming back to the reparation pay, I think this was the first thing what America put in power, that the German government has to pay reparations. And I think they put it in law.

Of course, the German government-- up to that date, they pay their German former citizens, Jews, who had to-- who got to prove-- who had to leave Germany they're paying all over the world this reparation money.

Of course, you must realize another 20 years from today they wouldn't have to pay anything anymore because they all died out. So so to speak, it's a good gesture from Germany not to cut it off. We always were afraid that one day the

German government, if it turns a little sour in the government or what government will come to Germany, that they will say, well, we don't pay any reparations anymore. This would hurt a lot of Jewish people who really depend on this money.

But so far they didn't do it. I think they think, why should we do it? We're skinning ourselves out anyway. Year by year it's getting less and less.

That's quite an insight. Again, these next questions-- they're also personal, and do the best that you can with your comfort with them. You've told me about the physical problems that you're having as a result of your experiences.

Do you find that even today, 37 years later-- do you find that the past interferes with your life today beyond the physical experiences, nightmares, attitude, anything at all that bothers you today?

Not really.

How did you work that through? I'm sure you had feelings about what happened to you.

Oh, definitely. But through the years I think I personally adjust myself pretty good to the United States because I always made a good living. And I don't have time for this. I don't have time for this to--

You're very healthy.

In this respect, yes. Often I like to talk about the past, yes, conversation with other friends. And when I go out, I want to have lunch, an appointment with clients, and so far. Sometimes they say, you speak with an accent. So I say, well, I speak probably with a Chinese accent. They say, why? I say, I lived over nine years in China.

So it's very fascinating to those people. Whoever I come in contact-- you lived nine years in China? Tell me about it. So very briefly I explained that I was-- emigrated from Germany and so forth and so forth.

Are you more comfortable talking about your experiences with people that you're close to or with strangers, family, friends?

I don't mind to talk this even-- to talk this over even to non-Jews, even more so. They should know. They should know that not everything was rosy that time, that I had a very bad time and after the war a pretty good time.

I have a special reason for asking this particular question, and tell me if this applies to you or if it's very different. I know in my family it was forbidden to talk to my father about what he went through. My mother always came to me and said, don't ask your father. Do you find yourself-- do you protect your relatives?

No, not at all, not at all.

So you're open with them--

Why was it in your family like this?

Oh--

I can't condemn anybody who ran a concentration camp, he became a kapo or an officer. They put him in charge, you do this, and beating up on their own Jewish people. And some people overdid it, of course. If you're putting somebody in charge, they feel superior, and, of course, they're being watched by SS and by the SA.

I can't condemn anybody because I don't know how I would act if I would be in the same position, but I know a lot of people here who were-- you understand what I mean by "kapo"?

Yes.

By "kapo" in concentration camps. We know them. They're being questioned here in America. They've been kicked around by their own people, but they made it possible of managing.

And today, after 37, 38 years, almost 40 years, they don't give a damn anymore. They're forgetting. They became somebody in our society here, even. They're forgetting it.

Are they? I wonder what's happening [BOTH TALKING]

Yes, yes. I don't know.

But you have no nightmares or anything of that nature at all? Did you go through a period earlier, maybe years back, where you did and that's gone?

Well, I'm sure that there was nightmares the time we were in China. We had a bad experience in China, in the ghetto, and so far. When I was beating-- beating up by Korean and Japanese people I, too. But I believe, as the year goes by, had left me.

What kind of hopes and plans do you have for your future?

By now?

Yeah, by now.

Well, if my-- well, I think I made myself-- I was very active in music here and made myself a name in this community.

To be healthy and--

And be healthy and have a long life. A future to climb up, become a star or became Liberace-- this is out of my system. I always had in mind to become very, very famous. But I'm satisfied that I became famous in this community, be recognized, and gain recognition, and being busy in my profession. But