

Oral History: Israel Blass, August 1996

Israel Blass, born April 19, 1904 in Warsaw, Poland, describes: having prosperous grandparents and parents; belonging to an Orthodox religious community; having one, much younger, sister; all the family being well educated; anti-Semitism among the Polish population; joy in the Jewish community at the ascendance of Marshal Pilsudski in 1926; a poor but vibrant Jewish community; believing Hitler's excesses during the 1930s would not extend to Poland; the Polish army fleeing from the German invasion; Blass himself fleeing to the countryside and purchasing food from peasant farmers; being thrown from a truck by a Polish anti-Semite but being taken by a sympathetic person to a hospital; many people returning to German-occupied Warsaw after the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact but (Blass) going instead to Vilna, Lithuania; being treated well by Lithuanian Jews; paying for transit to Vladivostok via Moscow; spending five weeks in Moscow followed by three weeks on a comfortable train to Vladivostok; traveling by ship to Kobe, Japan; moving on to Shanghai, where he was able to live luxuriously until 1942, when he was forced by the Japanese into a ghetto; the ghetto populated mostly by eastern European and German Jews; not knowing anything about the war until after it ended, and then people not believing reports of atrocities; being liberated by the Americans; remaining in Shanghai for an additional three years to engage in business; learning from a relative in Israel about the death of his family in Warsaw; traveling to Haifa via Gibraltar and Genoa; settling in Tel Aviv; meeting his wife and having children; suffering business reverses in Israel and deciding to emigrate to Australia.