

Tape two, side two:

JF: You were telling me where the ship stopped.

WS: Yeah. After Port Said we sailed to non-stop to Ceylon.

JF: So...

WS: No, we didn't even stop in India. After Ceylon, then we stopped, Singapore...

JF: You went...

WS: No, first we stopped in, yeah, Singapore, and then in Manila and Hong Kong. And the only thing what happened on the way was we could always go from the ship. But when we came to Hong Kong, they didn't let us go, and I heard this already, overheard it in the night; it was so hot. And we came in the night, in the middle of the night we came to Hong Kong, by the way, one of the most beautiful places in the world. And I was going on, I was the only one, I went up on the deck and was sleeping there, on a deck chair, and I saw the sunrise. It was out of the world. When you haven't seen it, you haven't seen nothing, and that's where, the sun comes out over Hong Kong.

JF: Why didn't they let you get off in Hong Kong?

WS: Yeah, and then when the sun was out, I heard when the British came and brought the British commission, and they were talking to the first officer. I stood up on the deck, and they were talking down. And I heard something, which I knew already, and he told them the story, and that a family had left the ship illegally in Manila. And he told him that.

JF: Ano-, from another ship?

WS: From mine.

JF: Oh, from your ship.

WS: From our ship. I knew the people. And when we sailed off Manila they were missing. These were four people. Two couples of a, they were related. One was the brother from the other lady or so some. And they had their nephew there. And he said he can stay here with me. And they stayed, but they found out, and they were illegal. And they came one day after we came, they were already back in Shanghai. But the company has to pay for that. It's the rule. That's the rule of the sea. When people like that skip the ship, the company has to pay for their transportation because they are responsible. So when they *Norddeutsche Lloyd* had to pay their transportation.

JF: So that's why the company wouldn't let you disembark in Hong Kong.

WS: Yeah. So they told the British officer what happened. So they decided that everybody with a "J", you know we had the "J" in the passport, cannot leave the ship. So, but we didn't stay so long and this wouldn't be worthwhile to leave the ship because we were in a rush. You see, we sailed during monsoon time. You know monsoon time? There is a straight wind that comes from Africa across the Pacific, and that makes the ships going about two days quicker than normal. And they had to keep up their schedule. We were

only, na, ja, also, we came in the night. We came about twelve hours. We were twelve hours there, but during the day we wouldn't really have much time to go out from the ship. So they didn't let us go. This was the only thing what happened. But when we then came to Shanghai, you see, I'm, maybe I am exceptional, I don't know. And most people was already on the ship moaning, "Ohhh, it was terrible, now it's over and we come to Shanghai." And I say, "The, what, what what is it? What can happen? Let's see." And the change from the looks of the liner to Shanghai, that is an experience, no?

JF: Tell me about it.

WS: Yeah. I will. It was very difficult to explain this to somebody who didn't see. You see, I came from the ship. I had already a cousin there. That was, by the way, one of the reasons why I went. He went about six weeks before me, and he wrote back and said, "It is not so bad, and people say come here." So I went. And he, he came with all his family to the ship to greet me. And we went down. And you see as it is when you're three weeks on a ship, we were three weeks on a ship, I, I like it. I would like three months on a ship. But you will go a little bit, hmm? You will exercise your legs. So we went. And as always, in all cities of the world, wherever it is, the part, the district on the harbor is always a dirty district. You know that. So it was very dirty there, and the people were begging. But after about five or ten minutes, I stumbled about something. This was wrapped in straw. And my cousin said, "Eh, don't look at that." I, I knew already what it was. It was a dead body.

JF: Wrapped in straw?

WS: Mmm. Was a dead body. I, but I didn't get afraid because I, I was awaiting something like that. You, but after all I had read about Shanghai and the Far East. So, I would say I came in the home, huh? In a refugee camp. First we, all, everybody came there, so I said, "Form a school." And now you have also to keep in mind that that was [phone rings], you have to keep in mind, that that was just two years, or not quite two years after the Japanese invasion. You remember that after the incident on the Marco Polo Bridge and everything? And they had occupied Hong Kew [also spelled Hong Kyu or Hung-K'ou], this part of Shanghai. And there was much, much destroyed. I would say one third of all the houses were burned down. This was a terrible situation when you're coming right from the first class of this luxury liner. And on the way from the ship, this was maybe to walk twenty, twenty-five minutes, I stumbled at least over five, six, kind of bodies. And the, the Chinese are so, they are real poor, the Chinese. They cannot bury their dead.

JF: So they wrap...

WS: So they wrap them up and put them on the street. They wrap...

JF: They are wrapped in straw.

WS: Yeah.

JF: And they just lie on the street.

WS: Street. And they pick them up, like, they have special cars for that, a special department, sanitary, where they come and pick them up. And as far as I know, they also make for every, mostly they put also name on when they know who it is, from the family,

they put on a label with a name. But everybody they find will be a, will have an autopsy. They make out of the cannot be a crime, hmm? So they make that. So we were walking. And my cousin was so afraid. He was always looking at me. I say, "You can't look at me like that. I am not afraid. I will tell you something. I'm convinced that half of them died already of cholera." It was the worst months in Shanghai, July. This was the worst month with cholera. There were about...

JF: Cholera.

WS: Yeah. There were about, in that month were about, Shanghai alone, two to three thousand cases of cholera. When you imagine that here in America somebody says, "There is in San Francisco a case of cholera," everybody would tremble here, hmm? And there, I got used to that in five minutes. And there were people who never, never, never who could overcome this, never. I, I knew a lot of people, I would say maybe five percent of the immigrants, who never left their district. The nearest [unclear] they never left. They were so afraid in all the years.

JF: The cholera was in this, primarily in Hong Kew, in this section?

WS: Yeah. These kind of things happened mostly in the poorer regions of the city, but on the other hand, they had very, very fine districts there. Shanghai you have, when you read that book, you will mostly I think I can always. I give you that book. You can have it, hmm? You can have it as long as you want. Here you find about these things, the most important things.

JF: You're referring to the book by David Kranzler on *Japanese, Nazis and Jews*. [Yeshiva Univ. Press, 1976]

WS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. There are many things not quite so as they were. Misleading, and something is wrong, I would say. He writes for instance about my father, that he was fighting against the Zionists. This is not right. My father was not a Zionist, but he was not fighting against them. And also my father was not Reform. The only thing what he did, was, what he connected him with the Reform was that the rabbi in Berlin from the Reform synagogue was a friend of his, from his studying years. And he invited him once to speak in the synagogue, on a Sunday. So he says my father want change the *Shabbos* on the Sunday. So far as my father not didn't go so far in his reform or liberal opinions. He cites my name I think also sometimes as a reference. But then, of course I had to start a new life.

JF: You were living in this refugee, uh, building that was a school?

WS: Oh, I lived there about three weeks.

JF: What was it like there?

WS: It was like a barracks in the military or so. It was a school, a former school, which was a, a, you see a lot of people left Shanghai, Chinese people, when the Japanese came in, and so it was empty. So the city of Shanghai gave it to the Jewish refugees. I don't know if they paid for or not. You see the American Joint gave a lot of money at that time, the Shanghai Jews, every organization, *B'nai B'rith*, and from all this was this renting.

JF: Who was in charge of organizing this kind of refugee [unclear]?
WS: The most important figure it was Sir Sassoon, Sir Victor Sassoon.
JF: Victor Sassoon.
WS: You heard his name? He was a Sir, and he was at least, if he was the richest, or at least one of the richest men in Shanghai. You heard about him?
JF: Was he there before this all started or he...
WS: Oh you know this is a old, old, this is Arabic Jews. They came from where the name says.⁵ And the other one was Sir Kadoori. I forgot his name. His son, who is also already over 70, was who came to that meeting. And...
JF: That name, could you re-...
WS: Kadoo-, em, na, I say it is, no, I forget it. [unclear]. [Tape goes off then on] I don't know if a K or a C. I think it's a K. K-A-D-O-O-R-I or so. Kad-, you never heard the name?
JF: Kadoorie.
WS: Kadoorie.
JF: And these were early settlers, Sephardic.
WS: Oh, I would say two, three generations already or maybe longer. Sassoon, people say one-third or one-quarter of India belonged to him. And Kadoorie had his most also possessions in Hong Kong. The whole harbor on these ships and everything, the cotton and, everything was on that, his possessions.
JF: So they organized the Jewish refugees...
WS: Yeah, organized. They gave a lot of money.
JF: Buildings? They gave money.
WS: Yeah.
JF: And organized.
WS: But then of course the Jewish people alone had the organization or administration, huh. This was mostly German, Austrian, Czechoslovakian people.
JF: You're talking about the refugees themselves organized the caretaking.
WS: Yeah.
JF: Was there much contact with the Jewish community that had lived there before the refugees came?
WS: There was, and there was not. There was, I would say, only in the religious way, because they had a chief rabbi there, and he was extreme Orthodox, and he was, eh, Ashkenazi⁶ was his name. And he was very, very afraid that the Jews from Europe, from Middle Europe, would bring in like a liberal, uh...
JF: Ideas?

⁵Originally emigrated to India from Iraq and later on spread out in the Far East.

⁶According to David Kranzler, Rabbi Meier Ashkenazi, appointed by Russian-Jewish community in Shanghai in 1920's, had previously served eight years in Vladivostok, recognized as a spiritual leader by Orthodox among Sephardim and Polish refugees, a scholar, member of Lubavitch Hassidic group, was in forefront of humanitarian communal activities in Shanghai.

WS: Ideas, and they had a big, big lot of trouble with him. I knew that from my father. I went many times to his synagogue, all the rabbis there, they interpreted to him. And they had to make a concessions, especially for divorces. He would always have the last word in a divorce.

JF: And he was the chief rabbi of the whole town.

WS: Yeah, but he was not a rabbi in our sense. He was in a, he had a real big knowledge of Jewish things of course, was a Talmudist all right, but he was not by profession originally a rabbi. He was a trader in Manchuria. And the Jews from the Far East they didn't have somebody else. They made him the chief rabbi.

JF: So he never went through the usual training for a European rabbi.

WS: No, he went, no, no, not European. He went maybe in some yeshivas. There he was. He was a Russian originally. And then, of course, was the English rabbi. His name was Brown. He was a, and he was officially also Orthodox, but he wasn't that Orthodox. He was more what we call Conservative. He was for the English, they had, let me think, they had about four big synagogues.

JF: For English Jews?

WS: For the inborn. For the old [unclear].

JF: For the natives.

WS: Yeah. These were there Ashkenazi, and their Brown, and the other ones I cannot remember them all. There was one synagogue in Hong Kew. This was a exclusively Jewish, em, Russian, with all the old Russian rites and so. This was more or less Hassidic—but the connection was, of course, mostly in religious ways. First of all in the cemeteries. The immigrants had to use the cemeteries. And just in the beginning there were many, many dead. I would say every day on average four to five people died.

JF: From what causes?

WS: Yeah, mostly because they couldn't stand the climate.

JF: The climate.

WS: Here is, for instance, a boy, I say boy, he is 52 years old already. But at that time when he came to Shanghai, he was about 10, 11 years old. And he is of my home province. And my father knew his family very well. He is professor in Montreal. I saw him last year again in Washington. We met here, too. And I remember when this was a, at that time I was already one year in Shanghai. And I was waiting every day for my parents. But this was also in the summer, so it was very hot. And he came with his parents, and he was about ten years and his younger brother was eight years, and the mother was maybe 32, very young, beautiful woman. And she died in the first week.

JF: Mmm.

WS: She got some kind of a typhus and they couldn't...

JF: A typhus?

WS: Yeah. Had some kind of typhus. It was so strong she couldn't make it. She was dead in one week and the father was there with these two boys.

JF: How did the resident community of Jews look upon the refugees? How did they see...

WS: Oh they were very nice. You mean the Chinese?

JF: Yes.

WS: Oh yeah.

JF: But, no, the natives, the Jews who had been there for some time.

WS: Oh the Jews?

JF: Yes.

WS: This was very different. You see, in a way he, he isn't bringing well out here in that book really as it was.

JF: Kranzler doesn't mention this.

WS: He is maybe afraid to say it. There were, first they were neutral. But then, when they found out that a whole lot of Jews made business there, they were afraid of the competition. And that is what brought up that they closed official the harbor. They went behind the whole thing. It is a shame but I have to tell you that. The Jews were that. The native Jews.

JF: What did they do?

WS: They went to the Japanese. The Japanese were in power at that time, in the city of Shanghai. And they said, "What should happen when there are more and more and more Jews come in? And there were already over 20,000." You see, there were Jews from Germany and Austria and there we were. They opened pharmacies. And there were a lot of Jewish pharmacies, so they were afraid. And then they, the complete domineer-do-, I would say as a important was the fur, fur, in the city furriers, the Russian furriers, who made the pelts, furriers, furs, furs.

JF: Fur, oh, furs.

WS: Yes.

JF: Yes. Furs.

WS: And there were a lot of Jews in the, in the same thing. And they were afraid, and then they some jewelers, and so, in every kind of business, that they were afraid. They were not afraid for their own, for the poor people...

JF: They were afraid of the wealthy Jews and the professional Jews.

WS: Professional Jews, and the doctors, and so on.

JF: Mmm hmm. The big competition.

WS: They went to the heads of the, you know there were four, Shanghai had four parts. That's why we came in. Shanghai was the settlement, the international settlement. This was made up from English, American, Scandinavian, and German. Germany was also in. And the Japanese. They were the ruling people from the settlement. Then all the French settlement. This was ruled by the French and Italians. But completely different. And then was the real Chinese thing. The real Chinese, which belonged to Shan-, to the Chinese land, to the Chinese country itself, to the China...

JF: That was not under the Japanese control.

WS: No, no, this was comple-, to that I come. And this part of the city was separated. You heard about the Berlin wall? But this is not the first time that happened. Shanghai was divided...

JF: Was also divided.

WS: Not the wall, it was a gate.

JF: The-, all of these sections were divided by a gate?

WS: No, no, only the Chinese.

JF: The Chinese section was divided.

WS: The real old Chinese city was th-, you couldn't go in. And nobody could go out.

JF: Were there also Chinese in the other sections? Or just in...

WS: Ya, ya. Between most of them. They were all Chinese. Shanghai was, I think, Shanghai had at that time eight million people.

JF: But from the old Chinese section, no refugees...

WS: No, no, Chi-...

JF: Or Europeans.

WS: Chinese also couldn't go.

JF: Why was that section kept separate?

WS: This was separate. This was all these in the run of the wars they had, the fightings and the revolutions there. This was close, by the way, I have seen it. The gate you could look through, but I never, never, never, was behind that.

JF: But that remained under Chinese control, the Chinese section?

WS: No. When, you mean, then we come to the end of the Second World War, then there, they changed this. Then, of course, they changed this. But not during the war.

JF: During the war it was under whose control?

WS: No, this was before already, I don't know how long. So, in the first part, this was the unofficial part. And this was the Japanese occupied, Japanese occupied, part of the settlement. This was only one or two years before I came after this, after the Japanese invaded Shanghai.

JF: This was Hong Kew?

WS: This was Hong Kew.

JF: Yes.

WS: I don't, yeah, little more than Hong Kew. And this was divided from the other cities through their so-called Soochow Creek. [also Su Chou] And there was the big, big bridge over, the so-called Garden Bridge. And we could go. Everybody could go except the Chinese. The Chinese had to have a passport.

JF: But, let me just clarify one thing. The Chinese, the old Chinese section of the town that was separated from the rest, this was still during the years that you were there, this was under Chinese control?

WS: Yeah. At that time it was, of course, how should I explain that, it's very difficult to explain. This was under the Chinese government, but the Chinese government was in the control of Japanese, of the Japanese government. You know? The, *de nomine*, I would say, in the name of the law, they were Chinese.

JF: O.K.

WS: But they had nothing to say.

JF: I understand.

WS: It was really, this was the same thing the Japanese didn't tell you, hmm?

JF: If they were...

WS: Yes, at that time, you remember, there were two Chinas, North China and South China. North China was under Wang Ching-Wai [Japanese "puppet" in Nanking]. And South China was under I forgot the name.

JF: O.K.

WS: [unclear].

JF: Were most of the refugees who came at this time in Hong Kew?

WS: They came all through Hong Kew.

JF: All through Hong Kew.

WS: Yeah. There was the harbor. The harbor from the whole place was Hong Kew.

JF: But did they also settle in the other sections?

WS: Yeah. And that what I did also. There were who, any, in any way could manage that went out from Hong Kew.

JF: Hong Kew was the poorest.

WS: The poorest, and the sanitary conditions were so...

JF: And this is where the diseases were.

WS: Yeah. The diseases were other where too, but the danger was here ten times worse.

JF: I see.

WS: So as soon as I got my money from that friend back from Paris, it was about three weeks, I went over, and also was awaiting a friend I would make up some business with him, and he should come later, but this is a story in itself. I went in the French sector and that, a woman in the boarding house. And I stayed there as long as my money was holding out, [laughs] say six, seven months and then I had to quit there, and to go back to...

JF: Hong Kew.

WS: Hong Kew. And that was the way, I would say, eighty percent of all the immigrants did. There came for everybody a time when they ran out of money, with some exceptions. People who came really with money to Shanghai, I mean real money, and I don't mean as riches, but, say, some thousand dollars. Two thousand American dollars was a fortune in Shanghai. And who had ability, and the fortune, to make some good business.

JF: Could you, did you try to start a business while you were living in the French sector?

WS: I started, yeah. There were, I cannot tell you that, because that has not really to do with that. He had some, he worked with the Finnish company in Berlin, and they gave him his representation, for then it came to war, so he couldn't take it. He started working and the war came.

JF: Mmm.

WS: So he ended very poor later. I lost his tracks. I think he went later to Israel. Yeah, and then I always had in mind, of course, to go from Shanghai to America.

JF: Now you were living for what period of time in the French quarter? The French section?

WS: The French section, eh, six, seven months.

JF: And you then moved back to Hong Kew.

WS: Yeah.

JF: Again to these barracks that you had described? Or what kind of living situation?

WS: No, no, I had also a room...

JF: A room.

WS: In a, with a Jewish family. They rented out, you know. They, I told you, when we came in, there were all the ruins from the destroyed houses burnt up. They fixed this. They got some money or they had some—very cheap, say for \$100, you could build out this house and you had it for nothing, because there were nobody that said you can't take it. So maybe they paid a little tax in a year, that was all. And they built up the houses, the family. And they had five, six rooms, and the rest they rented.

JF: Was there any kind of community life that you can describe to me?

WS: Yeah.

JF: Cultural life among the Jews?

WS: It was beautiful. I say sometimes I miss it.

JF: Can you describe it?

WS: I really miss it. No, I cannot describe it in this way because, you know, that was like we had it in Germany or in Austria. You had your coffee houses, huh?

JF: This was there.

WS: Yeah.

JF: In Hong Kew?

WS: Yeah.

JF: And all over.

WS: This was all over.

JF: All over.

WS: They made it, but especially, of course, later in Hong Kew because most of them lived there. Or they came exactly from the French over to meet friends and sit in the coffee house, play cards, and so. And we had theaters and cabarets...

JF: You had theater.

WS: Yeah.

JF: What kind of theater?

WS: Hmm?

JF: What kind of theater?