

One, two.

This is an interview with Mr. Herbert Broh in Philadelphia at the reunion of the Shanghailanders in October of 1999. Mr. Broh, can you tell us where and when you were born and a little bit about your family?

Yeah, sure. I was born in Berlin, Germany in 1930, and my family lived in Berlin most of their lives. My dad was born in Frankfurt, and my mother was born in Dresden, Germany. But we lived in Berlin. And--

Can you tell me your mother's maiden name?

My mother's maiden name was Pinkus, P-I-N-K-U-S. And they were-- my grandparents-- well, my grandmother was sent to Auschwitz, but my grandfather died of natural causes.

This is your mother's--

My mother's mother.

On your mother's side?

Yeah. But my parents-- my father's parents did pass away a previous-- in the '20s, late '20s.

What kind of work did your father do?

My father was working for a recycle-- so to speak, not another recycling place, but we built machinery. In other words, they'd take old machinery and rebuild it, and then they sell it. So he was more or less a salesman for this company, as my memory recollects. The name was Kohls, K-O-H-L-S, and also a Jewish firm.

And like I say, my dad was a salesman for those people. Reconditioned machinery-- that's what it was, reconditioned machinery. And later-- and when people had to give up their businesses before the Crystal Night, Mr. Kohls was also being relieved by so-called Aryan individuals, so he can run the business. But my father was still employed with this firm until he migrated to Shanghai.

So he was able to earn a living during that time.

Yeah, he was able to earn a living. And during the time of the Crystal Night, or-- and Germans call it Kristall Night, nacht, Kristallnacht, nacht. He-- at that time, they were gathering male, all males-- not all males, but certain males at random, and they were sent to the first phase of concentration camps, forced labor.

But my father somehow escaped that, and he went to relatives in Dresden, where my mother was born. And he hid there until this was over. And they never picked him up.

How did he know to escape, or had he been warned?

I cannot recall that, but I remember I was a child of eight-- yeah, in 1938, that was the Kristallnacht. I really don't know. He had probably a hunch that-- he heard maybe-- I think he heard of others. He had a lot of Gentile friends, and they were telling them that, you better watch out, Max. His name was-- his first name was Max. You'd better do something. Hide somewhere. That's the way I recollect that. And--

That something--

Because they were pick-- they knew. His Gentile friends knew that they were picking up men for forced labor.

And they knew this after Kristallnacht had already happened?

No, no, that's before Kristallnacht.

Before Kristallnacht.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

OK.

Because I remember, I was a child. There's no way my father was going. He was going on a trip. I thought he was going on a business trip.

OK.

You see? But actually, in reality, he was-- escaped this phase of the-- what was it? It was the face of-- the first type of concentration camp.

Do you remember Kristallnacht for--

Yeah.

--for yourself?

Of course.

Can you describe it?

I was seven years old when they-- I was going to a public school in Germany, Berlin, Germany. And I was the only Jew in the classroom. And I tell you, I was seven years old. They kicked me out because I was Jewish, and they-- and I was transferred to a parochial school. The parochial school was in the back of a synagogue. And--

Do you remember which one?

Yeah, it's the Rykestrasse, the Rykestrasse Synagogue. And I was-- it was a combination of religious school and parochial-- no, it was a parochial school. And at the time of Kristallnacht, we weren't-- I wasn't going to school. That was the night before-- the day before, we had school, and then I came back. They went home. And that same night, I remember when they were smashing-- Nazis were smashing all the Jewish shops and put these derogatory remarks on the-- Jews, Jews, Jews. And--

Where were you when you witnessed this?

I didn't actually see the smashing of the glass, but I've seen the demolished-- after. Next day, when I went to school.

Did you hear anything from your home? Could you hear sounds?

No, no, no. We were living in the suburbs. So we were away from business-- business establishment.

So you did not know that there was--

No I did not know, really. But I-- the day that I went to school, the next day--

Right.

--that's the thing. The day that I went to school, I passed shops that were demolished. And--

Do you remember how you felt?

I didn't know how I felt. I felt numb. I-- because there were some previous incidents. I used to play with-- there was a park close by where we lived. It's called-- it was called the Friedrichshain Park. And I used to go by myself. I had a buddy that was not Jewish, who lived in the same apartment building. See, we didn't have these-- in those days, we didn't have-- hardly anybody had houses. We only-- we lived in apartment buildings.

And all of a sudden, people, the hoards of kids threw stones at me and called me Jew, Jew. Then, of course, that discouraged me from going to the-- that was very hurtful because I didn't know, really, the concept of why, why? Jew? You know, I didn't know the concept why they were throwing stones at me.

And I think those kids knew why they were throwing stones at me-- because their parents probably threw stones at me. I mean, they told them to avow-- Jews-- they're devils, and they're-- as a matter of fact--

You don't think the kids knew what they were doing?

I don't think so. I don't think-- they were my age, eight years old, maybe seven, eight years old. I remember we took a field trip when I went-- before they kicked me out of the public school. We were on a field trip, and-- funny how you remember-- and I still have a school picture, which I don't have with me, of the school where I went to, the public school. And we went-- we passed a Jewish cemetery.

And I remember vividly when our teacher said-- we made a detour around the cemetery. We didn't go past the cemetery because he mentioned, well, this is the devil's-- the devil roams in these grounds.

Your teacher said that?

My-- the teacher-- the devil roams in these grounds. And I didn't know what he meant. I had no conception of what he meant. And, of course, then a couple months later, I was kicked out anyway.

Had this teacher ever treated you differently?

No. No, he didn't.

He knew you were Jewish?

Mm-hmm.

And had you, before this time, before this attack in the park, had you experienced any kind of--

Not really at all.

--discrimination?

No. I really didn't, no. But I was so innocent, so naive about these things. As a matter of fact, they gave out these little pamphlets of, you know, Hitler. And I was-- in my mind, oh, my, I wish I could join the Hitler Youth.

Did you get one too?

Yeah. Yeah, they were distributed on the street. I mean, they were, you know-- and really, I-- funny. When-- as you interview me, I-- it comes back to me. And, of course, before, I was being-- before I realized that they were throwing stones at me in the park-- that was before that-- I really thought that it would be nice to join Hitler. I used to play with the German soldiers, these little figurines. They looked just like--

The little toy soldiers?

Toy soldiers, of course. And I had a Mercedes Benz. I guess that's what Hitler drove around in, that open Mercedes Benz. I had that.

You mean a toy?

A toy Mercedes Benz. They were-- the figure-- image of Hitler was-- and SS troops, you know. I played with those.

You had these toys?

I had these toys.

With an image of Hitler, an image--

An image of Hitler, the image of these SS troops and SA troops and what have you. I was six years-- I was seven-- well, seven years old.

These were the miniature-- were they iron figures or rubber?

They were-- what is it? What are they made of? Like clay or-- not clay. It would break easy. But--

They would break?

Yeah, probably iron. Probably iron, yeah. And I don't know what happened to them.

Did your did your family know that you were playing with these?

Sure, they did.

Did they say anything?

No, nothing, until-- no, I didn't. No, no, not to my recollection. But then-- like I said, when I was seven, it was 1937-- you figured-- in 1937, we never thought it was-- it would come to the Crystal Night, like the Crystal Night, see. And--

Did you have a sense, before then, that your parents were concerned about Hitler coming to power, that they were being affected?

Not really. Only I was concerned about that night, the Crystal Night. And I didn't finish-- actually, as I was-- after whatever happened, I went to school. Now, that's when I really realized what was happening. I was going to school, and like I said, the synagogue was-- it wasn't behind maybe a school. And the courtyard-- I visualized the courtyard. And I'd seen the books, the Torahs being in the middle of the courtyard. And the caretaker-- he was non-Jewish. He had a bloody face, and, of course, there was no school.

It was-- and that visualize-- I never forget that. The Torahs were in the courtyard. They weren't burned yet, but they were intended to burn. So I just went home right away. And-- so then I realized that-- and then, of course, at that time, my dad was in Dresden, and-- because he knew that he had this-- what was it called, hindsight.

Foresight.

Foresight. I got that mixed up. He had this foresight that something's going to happen. And-- how did it feel when you saw the Torahs in the courtyard? What was that feeling before you left, turned around and left?

The feeling-- I really didn't have a feeling at that time because I didn't know the concept of the Torah, per se. We didn't

really study the Torah or the-- now, afterwards, in China, that's where they really went into it-- the Torah.

Was your family observant in any way?

Not too-- no, not too observant. My dad did do the Friday night kiddush. That's about it. But I never-- no, no, we weren't observant.

But you had a sense that these were Holy books?

I had a sense they were Holy books, and I could not understand why they were thrown in the courtyard. I didn't have that conception-- why, why? And-- until I was-- like I said, I was eight years old then. And finally-- and why was this caretaker being injured, you know? I did-- had no-- I had no conception at all, no conception at all.

When you went home, what happened?

I went home, and my-- you know something? It's kind of a blank because I was with disbelief that something like this can happen. I mean disbelief. And then I stayed home, I guess, until-- I never went back to that school again, never went back to that school until we migrated to China. That was shortly-- my dad had-- my dad came back after it cooled down. And--

Were you worried about where he was at that point?

No, I thought he was on a business trip, so then I-- it was told to me later-- they didn't tell me to keep-- they didn't want to worry me too much. So they-- it kind of reminded me-- funny, it kind of reminded me of this movie, Life Is Beautiful. Did you see that?

Yes.

And like I say, I-- they made it so that everything is going to be OK. Everything is no problem. We'll get-- we'll go to different places, which are beautiful places. We go to Shangri-La or whatever. And--

Ah, that's how your parents--

They made me believe that-- as a matter of fact, my dad had an opportunity to go to South America. He had two opportunities. So that visa somehow did not come through yet, so they didn't want to wait. He didn't want to take any chances. And Shang-- my uncle had-- he was in the textile business in Germany. And he had a little money, and he helped my dad with a fare to come to China at that time. But South America never materialized.

And the South American plan was the only other plan that you know that your father might pursue?

Yeah, it was Brazil, Brazil maybe. He-- as a matter of fact, he-- Brazil or Bolivia-- now, I'm not quite sure. In one of these because I remember an uncle of mine went to Bolivia, truth being. That's-- I think it was Bolivia because Brazil, they speak Portuguese, and I still have a Spanish-German dictionary at home, so it must have been Bolivia. It must have been Bolivia.

And when-- when you got home, your mother was there?

Yeah, as I can recollect, yeah. And--

Did she explain anything to you at that point?

Not really. No, that's--

They really were protecting you?

Protecting me, exactly.

And it worked.

And it worked. And it worked. With this kind of a mentality, we left China, too, with this kind of an attitude, so to speak. We had a ball. I mean, the-- my mother-- I mean, the anxiety of my parents-- you see, we had to cross. So we went-- we left Germany.

When did you leave?

We leave-- we left Germany April of 1939.

OK.

As a matter of fact, it was the day of Hitler's birthday.

April 20th.

No, April-- and I don't know what date it was, April. I think I have my dad's passport. I think that might be-- and we had to cross Switzerland. We had to cross the Swiss-German border. Brenner-- you ever heard of Brenner?

The Brenner Pass?

The Brenner Pass. And my mother-- they were-- they took a certain amount of jewelry with them, and she was scared.

How were you traveling?

By rail, by rail. And like I say, I, as a kid, had a ball.

Do you remember any difficulty in leaving?

No, no difficulty. And when I went with my mother to get all these permits and visas from the German consulate-- I went with my mother. And my mother never looked Jewish, per se. So when I went with my mother, they took her first because they thought she was not Jewish. She was Jewish.

They thought she was German, not Jewish.

German-- no, exactly. And I-- I remember that. And then, later on, I-- she told me that they took her because she did not look-- what is Jewish-- Jewish-looking? I mean, what is Jewish-looking? I mean, nowadays, it's kind of ridiculous, you know.

But somehow, you had this instinct of just a refugee, you have-- you have a certain mannerism that you can just guess. Later on, I could tell you a story, where my guess was right, and they were refugees in California that I met. And I met-- their daughter, I met her. It was a bizarre story.

OK. So here you are on the train with your parents?

With my parents, going through the Brenner Pass.

Any brothers or sisters?

No, no, I was the only one.

And your grandparents?

My grandparents, unfortunately, stayed behind, and they tried very hard to also get them out of there. See, you had them-- the way I remember, they had an amount of business people, and they arranged these trips. If you didn't have any money, you were lost.

So you didn't-- there wasn't family money to get.

There was not. If you had money, they was sure, there was family. But there's certain people-- anybody that had a chance to get out of Germany could get out--

To?

--To Wherever they wanted to go. At that time, of course, Shanghai was the only open port.

Yes.

So-- but you still have to have a certain amount of money to get out of Germany.

So the fact that your grandparents didn't get out was a financial one?

No, it's just- well, I don't know. I really couldn't say. But they were so close and yet so far away, when we were in Shanghai, to get them out.

Oh.

My dad-- my father-- like I said, my grandfather died of natural causes. Then, my grandmother-- somehow--

She was deported.

She was deported later on. Where, we didn't know. I mean, I assumed it was Auschwitz, but where, we didn't know.

When did you find that out?

Well, after the war.

After the war.

After the war. Sure, because they-- my parents corresponded with my grandmother. And it had to be proofread by German authorities-- all letters that came out of Germany. And yeah, they found out after the war that there was no trace of her, no trace.

So the train ride-- let's not lose the journey--

OK, sure.

--was exciting.

To me, it was.

Yeah?

Yeah. Not for my parents because they were full of anxiety.

Could you feel their anxiety?

Not really. I was so enthused about being on this train. And whenever I smell-- what do they put on these-- tar, whenever I smell tar, you go to any railway, when I-- it kind of reminds me of my childhood. That's when I traveled.

And yeah, no, it was a pleasant journey for me. To me. It was not a pleasant journey for my parents. But the anxiety-- because whether we're going to get through or not. See, they were afraid that something might go sour, and then they might have to be deported back or something. But thank god.

When you talk about your parents' anxiety, when do you think you became aware of that, of their anxiety, of what their concerns were?

Aware of anxiety?

Yeah. I never really-- I never felt that-- I knew that they were afterwards, after the fact.

After the fact?

After the fact-- you know, after the war.

After the war, as you look back.

As I look back, there's certain things my mother had told me that I know that they had to live in-- full of anxiety, even during the Shanghai years.

But they were able to keep you optimistic during that time?

Oh, yeah, definitely. I would say-- I would even say, as far as I was concerned, that these were my best years of my life in-- living in Shanghai because I went to school, the Shanghai Jewish Youth Association School, called Kadoorie School.

The Kadoorie School.

And, of course, before the war, it was a haven for us. Of course, the-- the living standard was-- were not up to par.

Let's-- before we get to Shanghai--

OK, we--

--let's--

We're still on the train.

--talk about the train and make sure that we have all of the memories about that.

OK, the train-- luckily, we passed it, Brenner's Pass. Then, we went to Italy, and we landed up in Rome. And from Rome, I remember we took the train to Naples. From Naples, we boarded a combination of passenger and freighter, a Japanese passenger and freighter, the Katori Maru. And that took us to Shanghai.

Did it go directly to Shanghai? Did it make any stops?

Yeah, well, it-- no, no, no. It stopped in Bombay, and it stopped-- it was a freighter. It took about four weeks from Naples to get to China, four.



Can you-- I would love if you could describe that trip for me.

Well, that trip, to me, was like heaven. We were third class. We were-- you see, it was a class, a first class, second class, third class. So we were third class. The only-- the only-- what I remember, the second class had a party. We were invited for this party. I don't know what kind of party-- probably a cocktail party or whatever it was. They had Japanese waiters. I mean, people were traveling in style. They were not traveling-- they weren't traveling like refugees. They were traveling in style.

Were the people all refugees?

All refugees, all from Germany.

All German refugees?

Well, yeah, to my collection, yeah. And Austria.

OK.

Austria and Germany. And I remember I was sitting at the edge of the-- where the-- and I watched the entertainment. And I was jealous why I can't be there because we were third class. We were down the hall, so to speak, by the-- at the portholes, you know. And there's-- the second class, they had very nice state rooms.

Oh, my gosh.

We had to share bunk beds. The women were separate, and the men were separate. But the second class, they were-- men and women were together.

So you weren't in just with your family.

Yeah.

You were--

I-- oh, we were-- yeah, well, my mother and-- but women were in a separate cabin. They had these wooden bunk beds. And as a matter of fact, one of the fellow-- one of our passengers left a porthole open, and the water just came down to-- I was soaking wet. And my dad, I guess, he got mad, and he had a few words with this individual who left the porthole open.

Oh, so you were with your father.

I was with my father and another fellow, Doctor-- he was a medical doctor, Dr. Wolff. He was-- I'm-- funny I remember him. And-- do you remember his first name?

No. Dr. Wolff. And he gave me-- well, that was later. Because I had-- I had all the diseases that was meant-- I mean that we were-- we got in China, I had from malaria to typhus to typhoid and what have you, but mild because we were inoculated, you see. We were inoculated.

Now, before you were on the boat, were there any-- was there any attempt to inoculate you, or was--

No. Well, we were inoculated in Germany, as I remember. Yeah, for--

Before--

--smallpox. Yeah, sure.

Now, was this part of the regular regimen, or was this because of the trip?

Because of the trip.

So you were inoculated for smallpox?

For smallpox, the usual when you go overseas, you know.

OK.

See, my dad had a valid passport.

OK.

That passport was good until 1941. I think that's-- I still have it here. And so he was German, but he was Jewish. So there was a big J on it, but I mean, he could have gone with his passport anywhere in the world, providing they would--

Take him.

--take Germans.

Your mother had a passport as well?

Yeah, of course. Yeah.

And what about you?

I didn't have a pass-- I was with my mother's, on my mother's, but I didn't have a picture. See, they had a picture. So I was with my mother's-- on my mother's passport. You know, I wasn't--

Your name is?

Under age. I was about 10 years old.

OK.

If I would have been 10 years and over, I would have-- I would have had-- I would've have had that passport also. So.

So you were not allowed-- when you were on the boat, you were able to sneak up and view this very--

Well, you were in the second class-- yeah.

Yes. But there was-- was any kind of planned activity for the third class passengers? Was--

I don't remember.

-- it informal?

I really-- it's very informal, yeah.

Yeah.

We just-- the only activities that I remember were just to-- cafeteria style we ate. And the second class had their dining

rooms.

Now, in your family group, you had mentioned your uncle. Did he go with you?

No, no. Not with us. He went-- he went ahead of us--

OK.

--to China. We're on a different boat. And a lot of people went on Italian liners, and we happened to go on a Japanese freighter.

What were the Japanese like who were running the boat?

Oh, they were terrific. It was just like-- treated us like regular passengers. And no, there was no-- I did not know, as a child, I did not know that they were at war with China.

OK.

And they gave us a beautiful-- and I was so mad. I had to give it up-- a beautiful Japanese flag. It's made out of silk.

Oh, because you were on the boat?

On the boat, yeah. They all gave us one flag. And-- but they told us, better not take it to China because they are at war. If somebody sees us with this Japanese flag, and they want to-- who knows, you know? So I had to give it up, and somebody else-- you know, excuse me-- some-- I think the boat went China and went to-- I think went to Japan also, as I understand it.

You had to give it up before you left the boat?

Well, I didn't have to give it up, but under the advisement of my parents.

OK.

No, I didn't have to give it up.

I see.

Oh, no.

I see.

It was your parents who suggested--

My parents suggesting, you'd better-- I had no idea, no inkling why I had to give it up. But then I found out later on, and I realized that they were at war with the Chinese since 1937.

Now, when--

[AUDIO OUT]

This is tape 1, side 2, of an interview with Mr. Broh.

OK, now, in Bombay-- and we stopped in Bombay. We stopped in Colombia. Isn't that Indonesia? Colombia? That was also India. I can't-- right now, it's just--

But I know, in Colombia I was-- I have a picture. I was pictured on a rickshaw with a native, with my mother was standing. And then in Singapore-- Hong Kong-- just stopped there. So you were able to get off the ship.

Of course, yes. Yeah. Like tourists. Like regular tourists.

What do you remember from those stops?

The stops?

Mhm?

I remember, in Singapore that people came up to the ship and tried to sell Persian carpets. And, because there, they were a lot Indians, too, East Indians. And there were a lot of East Indians, as a matter of fact, boarded-- they boarded the-- whether it was Bombay or Singapore, I can't really recollect-- boarded the ship. And they were-- they booked to China. And as my recollection was, the British at that time used the East Indians for police in their section. And we had a lot of East Indians-- Sikhs.

Mhm?

They were policemen in China. And they're nice people. And even during the war, the Sikhs were-- one of the Sikhs came to the house and sold milk. They had their own cow, like Fiddler on the Roof.

Mhm?

Reminds me of it. And it was expensive-- very rare, my mother bought milk. But once in a while, we used to get butter from this Indian fellow.

So these stops were positive there.

This, oh, definitely. Yeah. We were treated like tourists. And of course, as a child, I had a ball. [LAUGHS]

What--

So I did not-- you know, I was not old enough, really, to enjoy the concept of tourism, because I was just, you know--

Wide-eyed.

--just gazing all over. I mean, with such an amazement.

Yes.

Such an amazement. And I remember the carts in Hong Kong and Singapore. And of course, Hong Kong-- my conception was, it was very dirty and the crowds.

At the time when you saw it.

Yeah, when I saw-- also Naples was very dirty. Naples-- very dirty. And they had these carts and donkeys and mules and what have you.

Had you any preconceptions about what these places would look like before you got--

Not really, no. I did not.

So it was all very new?

Very new. Very new. Yeah. Like I said, I remember, people came up to the ship and tried to sell Persian carpets.

Mhm?

My parents never bought one.

Mhm?

But they were-- I remember we were, watch out for them. They're conniving people, you know-- better watch out and watch your money, and watch your belongings, you know, when they come on board.

Were there other children that you met on the boat?

No. Funny, you know, no, I really-- not that I remember.

So you were--

I was the only-- I was the only child, unless they had really infants.

Mhm?

But yeah, I was the only child. There were not too many passengers, because it was a combination freighter-- to me, that was fascinating, to watch them take the cargo off the ships and then loading cargo back from all these places. To me-- I was watching them for hours, to do that.

I remember the noise of the cranes. [LAUGHS] As I'm speaking to you, I just-- I never think about these things. Now that I'm speaking to you, I remember the noises of the cranes, of these-- you know, as they're--

Fascinating machines.

--fascinating machines, [LAUGHS] at that time, yes.

Yeah. Did you reenact any of these things that you were seeing? Did you play, on the boat--

I was-- no, no, no, I was-- it must come from these, probably when I-- when we lived in China, I used to have a board. It had a hole in the-- kind of a-- used to put it underneath my bed, you know, my bed sheet and pretend I was on a boat. I was in a porthole. That was [LAUGHS] my porthole.

The board--

A strange--

The board like, next to your bed--

With the board-- I have a board like a-- yeah. Was, I put the cover over it. But there was enough space to see out-- to see-- to see out in the room, you know? And that was my little hideaway. That was my little boat. That was a--

Oh. That was a safe place.

A safe place, exactly. [LAUGHS]

This boat--

That boat. [LAUGHS]

Oh.

How funny. I mean-- funny-- I never think about this. Now I was talking about-- yeah, that was--

So you made a hole in the board? Or--

No, no, that was already-- it was already in there.

There was a little--

You know, two boards were nailed together on a--

Yes.

And I don't know what we used it for--

Mhm?

--to stand up on something-- you know, stand up like a-- like a step stool, more or less.

Mhm?

And I'd take this to bed [LAUGHS] and put-- there was a space like this, you know?

A couple inches.

Yeah, a couple inches, more or less. And that was my little hideaway, my little boat.

How long did you do that?

Maybe until I was probably until about nine years old, nine years or so. I still-- yeah. I was crazy. But that's what it was. Yeah, I felt safe there.

Very safe.

Very safe.

Did you think back to the boat, at other times? Or was it-- the board was--

The board was a substitution of that boat, yeah. And I was sad that the trip was over, in a way, at that time. You know. But we could walk freer in China. I mean, you know, there was other things that-- other adventures. I remember, I went with my cousin. I went to the wharves and watched the boats come in and go out.

Do you remember the day that you arrived in--

Yeah, the day was--

--Shanghai?

--in Shanghai-- it was, well, the day. We left in April. It took four weeks. So it must have been sometime in May.

Mhm? Of 1939.

Of 1939, yeah.

And can you tell me about the day that you arrived-- what it was like?

The day that I arrived, I had to give up my flag, unfortunately.

Your parents' suggestion--

My parents suggested I better give this, because some people were going further-- were going to Japan.

Oh.

You see? Some people were, yeah, also.

Some of the refugees were--

The refugees were going-- then, later on, they had to come back.

Mhm?

And also, now, there were some certain amount of Japanese passengers, and they went to Japan from-- and that was my big disappointment, that I had to give up that flag.

Mm.

And-- you know, I do not have much recollection. As we got off the boat, the plank there, that-- because what I see in pictures, they were being put on trucks, some of the refugees were put. And then they were going to a center, a-- what is it called, the--

Where the refugee organizations were?

Yeah, I think HIAS and all these refugees organizations were interviewing, and where people were sent to these-- people that didn't have any money or didn't have any-- didn't have any means of-- of any-- how shall I say-- or they were sent to these homes-- to these Heims. You know, to these--

But your family--

But my family-- see, I do not remember-- and I'm trying to think, because my uncle already must have bought the house. Because they were--

Oh, yes, they were ahead of us. So he already had a house--

"They" meaning your uncle--

My uncle, my dad's brother.

Yes. And with any of his family?

Yeah. My cousins, my-- his two kids were my cousin-- my-- my male cousin and a female-- I mean, his sister-- his sister. And--

They were about your age, your cousins?

Yeah, my cousin is one year older, and his sister is about five years older than I.

Mhm? And your aunt--

My aunt--

--was there?

Oh, yeah.

Yes.

Sure. The whole family--

OK, so this family of four--

Of four--

--was already--

--and then he rented out-- my-- my-- we-- each family had one room.

This is your father's brother.

Brother.

OK.

He was in the textile business--

Right.

--in Germany. And he had a little bit money.

So he had a house--

He had a house. He bought a house on Seward Road, I remember. I hear that so many times, you know?

Seward. Yes.

Seward Road.

And which section was Seward?

Hongkew.

In Hongkew.

We arrived-- that was-- that was the the-- there was Japanese occupation already. Some people left for the French concession and the British-- for the French-- yeah-- and the British settlement.

But your uncle had bought the house--



Bought a house in Hongkew. Yeah. That was outside the perimeter of the ghetto, so to speak.

What was it like? You got off the boat and--

Well, the living standard-- we had a-- let's put it this way. We had all the conveniences of Western living. We had a WC-- a regular bathroom, a toilet-- flushing toilet. And we-- I went to-- and then, of course, I was enrolled in the Kadoorie school, later on, about a month or so later on, I imagine. So--

And then my-- and when on my ninth birthday, it was 1939, 1940. On my ninth birthday, then, my parents decided to enroll me into a religious school, just like you send your kids here to Sunday school, a religious, you know.

A religious school.

Yeah.

Before we go on to that, can you tell me whatever you remember about those early days. You think it's possible that your uncle met you at the boat? Or do you remember how you got--

You know, I--

--to Hongkew?

--that's blank.

That's blank. OK.

That is completely blank.

Or any sights or smells or sounds or things that--

The sights were turmoil-- was turmoil. You can just picture yourself-- all the coolies and all the beggars and the coolies. It was fairly new to me. And things that the-- it was not as clean as we left Germany, you know. And--

How did it feel--

To me, as a kid, it was something new. I-- didn't bother me, really. It didn't.

It was, again, exciting?

It was exciting. To me, it was exciting, yes.

Scary at all?

Something new. Not-- no, not all.

No-- not a bit. OK.

Not a bit, no. No. It's the noise and the-- I wasn't used to it, but it was exciting, yes. It was exciting. And people-- the panhandlers got, and all this kind of stuff that-- then later on, of course, when I witnessed all these beggars and all these.

You know, the British, they established a shelter house there. But they never would stay in the shelter house.

The beggars were--

They were professional beggars.

--from where?

From Shanghai.

They were Chinese?

Oh, yeah, Chinese.

They were Chinese beggars.

Oh, yeah, of course, yeah.

OK.

They were Chinese.

When you got to this house, how many rooms did you have in this house, with--

There were about-- let's see-- downstairs, a smaller room, and upstairs-- I would say, four rooms-- four rooms, actually.

In the whole house.

In the whole house. Four rooms and with the-- with the-- well, including the entrance-- he partitioned the entrance, my uncle did. So he got another rental. So he had three people that were renting from him-- my parents-- I don't know if was any monetary exchange. I have no idea. I don't know.

Right.

But he, then he rented to a shoemaker, and then he rented to a young couple.

So did each family have its own bedroom? Is that how--

No, no, no, no.

There were that many rooms.

Yes-- no, that's it. That's it. We just partitioned with curtains, you know.

So--

That was nonexistent, a room and a bedroom. [LAUGHS]

OK--

We used the same toilet.

Mhm?

You know--

So your family had one--

--the same bathroom.

--had one-- had one room.

One room, yeah.

OK.

Yeah. Yeah.

And then there was one WC for--

For the whole--

--for everybody--

--for the whole house.

--and a kitchen for everyone.

And a kitchen.

And was the kitchen equipped with--

Yeah, gas.

Mhm?

Yeah. Was with gas. We did not hardly cook with charcoal. Later on, we did charcoal, the charcoal bit.

Did you have heat? Did you need heat?

Heat? Well, that's when we used a charcoal furnace. I mean, for heat, yes. But, you see, when the proclamation came, when despite this was Hongkew-- it was outside the perimeter of-- my uncle had a choice-- to sell the house or exchange the house with somebody that lived inside the perimeter of the-- I hate to say "ghetto." I hate the terminology of ghetto.

So this house was not within the ghetto perimeter.

Not within the ghetto-- was outside the ghetto.

OK.

And so he did-- he exchanged a house with a-- he was lucky-- with a Japanese family.

Mhm?

It was very clean.

Mm.

And then he did some little, minor renovation, so he could divide-- again, each one had one room. But we didn't have a WC, unfortunately.

Ah. Once you went into the ghetto area--

Yeah, we didn't-- maybe some people had, but, in that particular house, they didn't have it. We had the old-- we used to call it a "honey wagon," every morning--

"The honey wagon."

--yeah-- used to come-- oh, gosh. We used to watch-- and--

It was actually a wagon?

A wagon on wheels, yeah. They picked it up every morning.

--that they pushed? Or that was--

They pushed.

They pushed. And they--

One fellow pushed it.

And they picked up the slop pots?

Yeah, the slop pots. Then the women, the Chinese women-- OK, we were living in this-- the street was called Yuhang Road. But there was-- we lived in a lane, so there was actually a street within a street.

And we lived in this lane, so to speak. It's like a little, tiny street. But it was a lane, so when you walk out of the gate, then you were in a main street.

So we lived-- we were the only foreigners in that particular lane. So I never felt then the terminology of the ghetto. We lived with Chinese people.

Mhm?

How you could, you know? And when this honey wagon came in the morning, we could see the Chinese women cleaning the little pots. And you'd see it all floating down the-- [LAUGHS] down the--

Down the street?

--down the-- it wasn't sewer like, yeah, down the street.

Now, when you were living on Seward Road, in the first house--

In the first, yeah. Yeah.

--were you living among refugees--

Well--

--or also a mixed--

A mixed--

--population?

--was a mixed population, you bet, yeah.

And you had about a month before you started school, you said.

About-- approximately, yeah.

Approximately. And what did you do? Were you able to explore, during that time? Do you remember that period before school started, for you?

Not really, no. the only time I would explore the streets were with my cousin. And I told you, before. Like, we went to the wharf and watched the boats come in, and that was fascinating to me. And--

The boats were boats of refugees-- No, no--

--or-- the other boats.

Freighters. Freighters.

The freighters. Because it was a port city.

Of course it was a port city.

Yeah. So you got to watch them--

Watch them, and then I'd watch the junks.

Uh-huh?

We used to go to the-- that particular area where the Chinese used to live in those junks. That was fascinating to me.

Oh.

And-- well, you've seen them in Hong Kong, you know. They live on the river. And as a matter of fact, we took a taxi junk, my family did, once. That was before the--

Before the war.

--war.

Mhm?

And we crossed the Whangpoo River to Putung. It was farming country. So that was fascinating.

What was it like?

Was like? It was-- that's where a lot of Chinese people buried their dead. All the, they were burying them-- instead of in the ground, they were burying them on top of the ground. They had these-- I don't know if they're still doing it or not, but it must be their old custom.

And I remember, we had a funeral in our lane, and every house was decorated except our house. And we interrupted this decoration, these like, these silver paper-- these-- can't think of it now.

These were, the Chinese decorated their homes.

The Chinese decorate-- no, all their homes, except ours because we were the only foreigners there. And then they had a big feast with a big funeral. So that must be one of the--

One of the customs.

Well, yeah, the custom was, a very prominent citizen, probably prominent person, that they-- that they did perform the funeral. Yeah.

When you had this opportunity to roam the streets, to go to the wharves, were you aware of all of the different peoples who were living there at that time--

Oh, sure.

--the other Jewish community, as well?

Jewish community? Yeah, of course. Like I said, my parents enrolled me in that so-called Hebrew school. Little did they know that it was a brainwashing institution.

Now, this was the Shanghai--

Shanghai--

--Jewish Youth Organization-- Youth--

No, no, no, it was the cheder.

Ah. We're not talking about the regular school that you went to.

No. I went to regular school in the morning, and I went to cheder in the afternoon.

OK. So the--

You know, just like you send your kid to Sunday school. But little did they know it was a brainwashing institution.

Ah. Now we're talking about the cheder.

That was before the yeshivas came in.

Who were the cheder?

The cheder were supported by Russian Jews. And the teachers were primarily refugees from Austria-- religious people. And one of the rabbis that was my teacher was-- his name was Rabbi Perlmutter. He was a tough cookie.

[LAUGHS] Mhm?

And, I mean, very strict.

So he was from Austria?

He was from Austria, but in-- what is it called-- Galicia. You ever heard of that?

Mhm.

Yeah. He was from that area.

OK.

And then we had another teacher from Germany-- also a religious, a very religious, person.

So the Russian refugees--

No, there were not any Russian refugees.

Or from the earlier period.

Oh, from the 1914-15.

Yeah.

Yeah, there were two ladies I hear from. But they were born in Shanghai, as a matter of fact.

But the Russians had supported this cheder. They established--

Oh, yes--

--the cheder, but it was staffed by people--

By refugees.

--refugees. OK.

Yeah. Sure.

And when you say that it was brainwashing--

Brainwashing.

Yes.

Well, like I mentioned, my-- oh, I didn't even-- my parents were not too observant. And due to the fact that I've learned and they teach you, well, it's not right to-- see, my dad never wore a hat on the street.

Mhm?

And they--

A hat, or a kippah, or a hat?

No, no, a regular hat.

Even a hat.

I mean, even a hat.

Mhm? And you're not supposed to have always some type of a headgear when you go out. So-- [COUGHS] excuse me. So they said it's not proper to do that, you know? So of course I start to wear kippahs, and I start to wear these undergarments, tzitzit undergarments.

Uh-huh?

And I drove my mother crazy, because I took all her dishes and went to the temple or to the shul--

Uh-huh?

--to over there where the cheder was, and I so-call kasherred them. And I remember-- I remember, we used to wait in this big wok-type thing and put a glowing iron in there to make sure that it was boiling.

So this was in a wok, in a--

In a-- yeah, in a big wok, you know? So we all-- a lot of kids did that to their parents, at that time, where all the forks and knives. My mother didn't mind, you know?

She didn't mind.

She didn't mind, no.

But you said you drove her crazy when you--

Well, I mean, I say that very cynical, now.

OK.

OK.

[LAUGHS] I assume I--

She didn't object to you doing it.

No, didn't object of doing that, no.

OK.

See, my cousin did the same thing. And he is a very Orthodox rabbi, now. I mean he continued--

It really lasted.

Oh, definitely. Because of Shanghai, to tell you the truth, I'm a lay cantor in Sun City, California. I did it for the last 22 years, because I know how to conduct-- I can go to any temple and contact services, if I want to.

That really changed your direction, then.

My direction? Well--

In terms of observance, at that--

Observance, yeah, I used to really be observant. Now I'm kind of drifting away from the observance, you know, of Judaism. Well, until I get-- if I go to a synagogue that's Orthodox, I can acclimate myself so easy. I mean, I feel at home, so to speak. But at home I'm not too observant, you know. I kind of drifted away a little bit. And so--

Well, and in a way, when-- well, there's another story, a beautiful story. When the Lithuanian refugees came from Kobe, Japan, the complete yeshiva came to--



The Mir--

--the Mir yeshiva came--

Mhm?

And I went to this Mir yeshiva-- but not the main Mir. I went to the yeshiva K'tanah. That's just one step down from-- K'tanah.

--yeah, K'tanah. And now, my cousin continued to-- and he went to the-- he had received the semichah.

Ah!

I mean, he was--

So he stayed and studied with the Mir yeshiva.

Mir yeshiva.

Yeah, he's in Australia now, and he's a teaching rabbi of a-- he's semiretired now. But he has, kenahora, 23 grandchildren now. [LAUGHS] I don't have to tell you. Asked my-- [LAUGHS] and I asked my cousin's wife, you know, I says, [LAUGHS] how many are you going to have? He says, whatever is, is not enough.

Ah.

That's their attitude, or that's their--

Now, was the K'tanah group not as strict?

Well, they were-- it's a previous-- no. It was just as strict.

They were just as strict.

But it's just a step before you enter the--

The Mir.

--the Mir yeshiva. I have a picture of the Mir yeshiva in that book, there.

Now, how long did you stay involved with them?

I stayed involved with them until I was about-- until I left Shanghai. But I was not going to-- See I quit the Kadoorie school. Actually I quit the Kadoorie school-- how old was I? 12? And I went almost full-time to cheder, at that time.

Is that why you quit?

Yeah. Yeah, pretty-- yeah, I was young. You know, I was before my bar mitzvah. I was maybe-- I did quit-- I was maybe 14 years old or so, 12, 14 years old. 12 or 14. I cannot recollect.

It was before your bar mitzvah.

I think-- well, I don't know now if I did quit or not before. Because I remember that I was so preoccupied with my learning about being bar mitzvahed.

Mhm?

And I was-- I'm pretty sure I was full-time in the cheder, morning and the afternoon.

And that's why you quit.

Yeah. And then I was 15-- 14 or 15. This Rabbi Perlmutter said, I'm not the studio type, so to speak. I should become a-- you know what [? baal melakha ?] is? It's a tradesman, a tradesperson. And he got me a job-- this rabbi got me a job in a jewelry store, as an apprentice, as a watch-- but I had to-- with the stipulation, I had to continue to go to this yeshiva.

Mm.

And I had a one-to-one tutor in the yeshiva. I was tutored by a different-- from a Mirrer rabbi. But I was working, so-- I was working in a store, but I had to-- so I was about-- I was 14 or 15.

And this was-- you were an apprentice, in order to sell, to make, jewelry, to--

No, watch repair.

Watch repair.

Watch repair.

OK.

I never adapted to that-- to that trade, anyway. I hated it, later on. When I went to Minnesota, I tried it again, but I hate it. I just hated it.

When you were in the Kadoorie school, what was that like for you?

To me?

Yeah.

Just like any other school. The only course I flunked was Japanese. It was forced. We were compulsory, you know, to learn Japanese.

And Chinese, too?

Chinese was not compulsory, no.

Oh.

I can double-talk Chinese, if I [LAUGHS]-- I can double-talk almost any language. Remember Sid Caesar type of thing.

Yes. Yes, I do. [LAUGHS] But Japanese was actually-- was a mandated course.

It was mandated, of course. We had a Chinese teacher-- I mean, a Japanese teacher. And she was not much of a--

A disciplinarian?

--a disciplinarian. [LAUGHS] And so, unfortunately, it made a bad impression to the Japanese, because we were kids. We were-- you know, she was very mild.

It was a bad impression, meaning you were not--

Well, to the--