

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

HERBERT BROH

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Josey G. Fisher  
Date: October 15, 1999

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Gratz College  
Melrose Park, PA 19027

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HB - Herbert Broh [interviewee]

JF - Josey Fisher [interviewer]

Date: October 15, 1999

*Tape one, side one:*

JF: 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.

HB: 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... [sounds as though tape stopped].

JF: Can you tell me your mother's maiden name?

HB: My mother's maiden name was Pinkus, P-I-N-K-U-S...

JF: Ok.

HB: ...And they were--my grandparents--well, my grandmother, was sent to Auschwitz but my grandfather died of natural causes.

JF: This is your mother's...

HB: My mother's mother.

JF: On your mother's side?

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

JF: What kind of work did your father do?

HB: My father was working for a recycle, so to speak, not a recycling place but rebuilt machinery; in other words, they'd take old machinery and they rebuilt it and then they'd 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 said, 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.

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

HB: He was earn--yeah, he was able to earn a living and during the time of the Crystal Night or the Germans call it *Kristall* Night, *Nacht--Kristallnacht*, he at that time, they were gathering male, all males--not all males but certain males at random and they were sent through 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.

JF: How did he know to escape or had he been warned?

HB: I cannot recall that, but I remember, I was a child of eight, yeah, 1938 that was the *Kristallnacht*. I really don't know. He had a 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 first name was Max. "You better do something. Hide somewhere." That's the way I recollect and...

JF: That something...

HB: Because they were pick--they knew, his gentile friends knew that they were picking up men for forced labor.

JF: And they knew this after *Kristallnacht* had already happened or as...

HB: No, no, this was before *Kristallnacht*.

JF: Before *Kristallnacht*.

HB: Before, yeah.

JF: Ok...

HB: Because I remember, I was a child, I didn't know where my father was going. He was going on a trip. I thought he was going on a business trip...

JF: Ok.

HB: You see. But actually in reality he was escape this phase of the, well it was a phase of first type of concentration camp.

JF: Do you remember *Kristallnacht* for...

HB: Yeah...

JF: ...yourself?

HB: Of course.

JF: Can you describe it?

HB: I was seven years old when they, I was going to a public school in Germany, Berlin, Germany.

JF: Umm hmmm.

HB: And I was the only Jew in the classroom. And I'll tell you, I was seven years old and they kicked me out because I was Jewish and I was transferred to a parochial school. The parochial school was in the back of a synagogue. And...

JF: Do you remember which one?

HB: Yeah, it's the Rieckestrassen, the Rieckestrassen Synagogue, and I was, it was a combination of religious school and parochial school. Well, it was a parochial school, and at the time of Crystal Night, 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. That same night, I remember when they were smashing, the Nazi's were smashing all the Jewish shops and for these derogatory remarks for the Jews, Jews, Jews and...

JF: Where were you when you witnessed this?

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

JF: Did you hear anything from your home? Could you...

HB: I, No, no...

JF: ...hear sounds?

HB: We were living in the suburbs, so we weren't. We were away from business establishments.

JF: So you did not know that there was...

HB: No, I did not know really, but the day that I went to school, the next day...

JF: Right.

HB: That's the, that's the thing. The day that I went to school, I passed shops that were demolished and ...

JF: Do you remember how you felt?

HB: I don't know how I felt. I felt numb. I, because there were some previous incidents, I used to play, where there was a park close by where we lived. It's called, it was called the Friedeichshain Park and I used to go and, by myself. I had a buddy that was not Jewish. He lived in the same apartment building. See we didn't have these, in those days hardly anybody had houses. We only, we lived in apartment buildings, and all of a sudden people, hordes of kids, threw stones at me and called me "Jew, Jew!" And, of course, that discouraged me from going to the--that was very hurtful--because you know, I didn't know really the concept of why, why, you know--Jew, you know. I didn't know the concept of why they were throwing stones at me, and I don't 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, about Jew, they're devils, and, as a matter of fact...

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

HB: I don't think so. I don't think so. 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--it's 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, of 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 that this is the devil's--the devil roams in these grounds.

JF: Your teacher said that?

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

JF: Had this teacher ever treated you differently?

HB: No, no, he didn't.

JF: He knew you were Jewish?

HB: Umm hmmm.

JF: And had you, before this time--before this attack in the park...

HB: Yeah.

JF: ... had you experienced any kind of...

HB: Not really. No. I really didn't. No.

JF: ...discrimination?

HB: But I was so innocent, so naive about these things. As a matter of fact, they gave out these little pamphlets of Hitler, and I was, in my mind, oh my, I wish I could join the Hitler Youth.

JF: Ah. Did you get one, too?

HB: Yeah, yeah, yeah. They were distributed on the street, I mean they were, you know, and really I--you know, funny when asked you interview me, I, this, 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 it would be nice to join Hitler. I used to play with German soldiers, you know these little figurines. They looked just like...

JF: The little toy soldiers.

HB: Toy soldiers, toy soldiers. Of course, I had a Mercedes Benz, I guess. That's what Hitler drove around in. That open Mercedes Benz. I had that.

JF: You mean a toy.

HB: A toy, a Mercedes Benz. Where you know, a figure, an image of Hitler was--and SS troops you know. I played with those.

JF: You had these toys...

HB: I had these toys.

JF: With an image of Hitler in...

HB: An image of Hitler and an image of these SS troops and SA troops and what have you. And I was six years--I was seven years old.

JF: These were the miniature--Were they iron or...

HB: They were...

JF: Or rubber?

HB: What was it? What are they made of, like clay or not clay, it would break easy but...

JF: They would break.

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

JF: Did your family know that you were playing with these?

HB: Sure they did.

JF: Did they say anything?

HB: No, nothing until--No, I didn't, no, no not at my recollection.

JF: Did they...

HB: But then, like I said when I was seven, that was 1937. You figure 1937, we never thought it was--it would come to the Crystal like in Crystal Night and...

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

HB: Not really. Only I was concerned about that night, the Crystal Night and I didn't finish, actually as I was after...

JF: No, please.

HB: The way it 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 in, behind the school and the courtyard. So I visualize the courtyard and I seen the books and *Torahs* being in the middle of the courtyard, and the caretaker, he was not Jewish, he had a bloody face and, of course, there was no school, like I said. And that visualize and I never will forget that. The *Torahs* were on the courtyard. They weren't burned yet, but they were intending 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 because he knew or he had the, what's it called hindsight?

JF: He had foresight.

HB: Foresight, I got mixed up.

JF: [laughter]

HB: He had his foresight that something is going to happen and...

JF: How did it feel when you saw the *Torahs* in the courtyard? What was that feeling before you left, turned around and left?

HB: 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, I afterwards, in China that where we really went into it--the *Torah*.

JF: Was your family observant in anyway?

HB: No, 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...

JF: But you had a sense that these were holy books?

HB: I had a sense that they were holy books, and I could not understand why they were thrown in the courtyard. I didn't have no conception why, why, you know? 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 didn't have no, I, no conception at all, no conception at all.

JF: When you went home, what happened?

HB: 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. There was--it was shortly. My dad had, and anyway, my dad came back after it cooled down and I...

JF: Were you worried about where he was at that point?

HB: No, I thought he was on a business trip, but then it was, I was told to me later. They didn't tell me to keep, they didn't want to worry me too much, so they--you know it kind of reminded me, funny--it kind of reminded me of this movie *Life is Beautiful*, did you see that?

JF: Yes.

HB: And like I say, I, they made it so that everything is going to be ok. You know everything is no problems, you know. We'll go to it, try different places, to beautiful places. We go to Shangri-La, whatever and a...

JF: So that's how your parents...

HB: They believed 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. They didn't want to take any chances and Shanghai--well 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, so, but South America never materialized.

JF: And the South American plan was the only other plan that you know that your father might have pursued?

HB: Yeah, yeah, it was Brazil, Brazil, as a matter of fact, he--Brazil or Bolivia. Now I'm not quite sure. One of these. Because I remember an uncle of mine went to Bolivia, [unclear]. That's, I think it was Bolivia, because in 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.

JF: And when you got home, your mother was there?

HB: Yeah, as I can recollect.

JF: Did she explain anything to you?

HB: Not really. No, that's what...

JF: At that point? They really were protecting you.

HB: Protecting me, exactly.

JF: And it worked.

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

JF: When did you leave?

HB: We left Germany April of 1939. As a matter of fact it was the day of Hitler's birthday.

JF: April 20<sup>th</sup>?

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

JF: The Brenner Pass.

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

JF: How were you traveling?

HB: By rail. By rail and, like I say, I as a kid had a ball.



JF: Do you remember any difficulty in...

HB: No I didn't...

JF: ...in leaving?

HB: No, no difficulty. When I went with my mother to get all these permits and visas and, 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...

JF: They thought she was German and not Jewish.

HB: Exactly, and I, funny I remember that, and then I, later on I when she told me that they took her because she did not look I know--what is Jewish looking, I mean what is Jewish looking I mean, now a days it's kind of ridiculous, you know. But somehow you have this instinct of a refugee has a certain mannerism that you can just guess. Later on I can tell you a story where my guess was right, and they were refugees in California that I met. Their daughter I met here. It was a bizarre story.

JF: Ok.

HB: Ah.

JF: So here you are on the train, with your parents?

HB: With my parents going through the Brenner Pass...

JF: Any brothers or sisters?

HB: No, no I was the only one.

JF: And your grandparents?

HB: 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 lost.

JF: So you didn't, there wasn't family money to get your...

HB: There was, if you had money, sure there was family, but there were certain people. You know, anybody that had a chance to get out of Germany, could get out.

JF: To?

HB: To wherever they wanted to go. At that time, of course, Shanghai was the only open port.

JF: Yes.

HB: Yeah, so but you still have to have a certain amount of money to get out of Germany.

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

HB: No, it's just...

JF: Is that what you're saying?

HB: ...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. My dad, my, like I said, my grandfather died of natural causes; then my grandmother somehow did...

JF: She was deported.

HB: She was deported later on. Where? We don't know. I assume it was Auschwitz, but where we don't know.

JF: When did you find that out?

HB: Well, after the war.

JF: After the war.

HB: After the war. Sure because they, my parents corresponded with my grandmother. It had to be proofread by German authorities, all letters that came went out of Germany.

JF: Right.

HB: Yeah, and they found out after the war. There's no trace of her. No trace.

JF: So the train ride--Let's...

HB: Yeah.

JF: ...not lose the journey...

HB: Ok, sure.

JF: ...was exciting.

HB: To me it was.

JF: Yeah.

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

JF: Could you feel their anxiety?

HB: Not really.

JF: Ok.

HB: I was so enthused about being on this train, and whenever I smell, what is it 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 travel, and, yeah, no, it was a pleasant...

JF: It's a pleasant...

HB: A pleasant journey for me. To me it was. It was not a pleasant journey for my parents.

JF: When...

HB: But the anxiety of whether we were 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 G-d...

JF: When you talk about your parent's anxiety, when do you think you became aware of that? Of their anxiety, of what their concerns were?

HB: Their anxiety?

JF: Yeah.

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

JF: After the fact?

HB: After the fact, you know, after the war.

JF: After the war. As you look back.

HB: As I look back. There are certain things that my mother told me.  
JF: Ok.  
HB: That I, that I know that they had to live full of anxiety even during the Shanghai ghetto.  
JF: But they were able to keep you optimistic during that time?  
HB: Yeah, 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, Shanghai Jewish Youth Association School, or Kadoorie School...  
JF: The Kadoorie School?  
HB: ...And it was before the war. It was heaven for us. Of course the, the living standards were not up to par.  
JF: Let's, before we get to...  
HB: Yes.  
JF: Before we get to Shanghai...  
HB: Ok, we are, we're still on the train...  
JF: Let's talk about the train and make sure that we have all of these memories about that...  
HB: Ok, the train. We luckily--we passed the Brenner's Pass. Then we went through Italy and we ended up in Rome. And from Rome, I remember we took the train to Naples.  
JF: Ok.  
HB: And from Naples we boarded a shi--a combination passenger and freighter, a Japanese passenger and freighter--the *Kaptori Mare* and that took us to Shanghai.  
JF: Did it go directly to Shanghai? Did it make stops?  
HB: Yeah, it's 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.  
JF: Can you, I would love if you could describe that trip for me.  
HB: Oh that trip to me was like heaven. We were third class. See we had, it was a class, First Class, Second Class, Third Class. So we were Third Class. The only time, 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, whatever it was. It had Japanese waiters. Second--I mean people were traveling in style. They were not traveling they weren't traveling like refugees. They were traveling in style.  
JF: Were the people all refugees?  
HB: All refugees. All from Germany.  
JF: Ok. All German refugees.  
HB: Well, yeah that's, to my collection, yeah. And Austria, to Austria.  
JF: Ok.  
HB: Austria and Germany. And I remember I was sitting at the edge of the, where the, and I watched the entertainment. I was jealous, why can't we be there. We were

Third Class. We were down a hole, you know, so to speak and by the, at the portholes, you know? And the Second Class they had very nice state rooms...

JF: Oh my.

HB: ...And we had to share bunk beds. The women were separate and the men were separate. Not the Second Class. They were you know, men and women were together.

JF: So you weren't in and just with your family? You were...

HB: Yeah, oh, we were, well, my mother and women were in a separate cabin. You know, they have these wooden bunk beds. And as a matter of fact, one of the fellows--one of our passengers left the porthole open and water just shhhhish 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.

JF: So you were with your father?

HB: I was with my father.

JF: Ok.

HB: And another fellow, Dr., he was a medical doctor, Dr. Wolff. He was, I, funny I remember him and a...

JF: Do you remember his first name?

HB: No. Dr. Wolff and he gave me in, well that was later. All the diseases that was, 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.

JF: Now before you were on the boat, was their any attempt to inoculate you? Or was there...

HB: No, well we were inoculated in Germany, as I remember, you know for...

JF: Before the...

HB: For smallpox, yeah sure.

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

HB: Because of the trip.

JF: So you were inoculated for smallpox.

HB: For smallpox. They usual when you go overseas you know?

JF: Ok.

HB: See my dad had a valid passport.

JF: Ok.

HB: That passport was good until 1941. I think that's what it says, I still have it here. 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...

JF: Take him.

HB: Take Germans.

JF: Your mother had a passport as well.

HB: Yeah, of course, yeah.

JF: And what about you?

HB: 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.

JF: Your name is...

HB: ...Because I was underage. I was not 10 years old.

JF: Ok.

HB: If I would have been 10 years and over, I would have had a passport also.

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

HB: And view the Second Class, yeah.

JF: But was there any kind of planned activity for the Third Class passengers or was it...

HB: I don't remember. I...

JF: ...or was it informal?

HB: It was very informal.

JF: Yeah.

HB: We just, the only activities that I remember were just cafeteria style, we ate, and the Second Class had their dining rooms.

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

HB: No, not with us.

JF: Ok.

HB: He went, he went ahead of us...

JF: Ok.

HB: ...to China. On a different boat. A lot of people went on Italian liners, and we had to go on a Japanese freighter.

JF: What were the Japanese like who were running the boat?

HB: Oh, they were terrific. They treated us just like regular passengers. And no, there was no [unclear]. I did not know as a child, I did not know that they were at war with China already.

JF: Ok.

HB: And they gave us a beautiful--and I was so mad I had to give it up--beautiful Japanese flag, you know made out of silk.

JF: Because you were on the boat?

HB: 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, they might, who knows, you know? So I had to give it up and somebody else--you know that, excuse me, I think the boat went to China and, I think, went to Japan also.

JF: You had to give it up before you left the boat.

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

JF: Ok.

HB: No I didn't have to give it up.

JF: I see.

HB: Oh no.

JF: I see. It was your parents' suggestion.

HB: My parents suggestion, "You better!", I had no idea, no inkling why I had to give it up. But then I found out later on, then I realized they were at war with the Chinese since 1937.

JF: Now when you...[tape one, side one ended]

*Tape one, side two:*

HB: So when...

JF: This is Tape one, Side two of an interview with Mr. Broh.

HB: Ok, now in Bombay, we stopped in Bombay. We stopped in Columbia. That's, isn't that Indonesia? [unclear] was it also India. I cannot [unclear] but I know in Columbia I was pic--I have a picture, I was pictured on a rickshaw, you know with the native. My mother was standing, and then in Singapore, Hong Kong, we stopped there.

JF: So you were able to get off the ship and...

HB: Of course. Yeah, yeah.

JF: What...

HB: ...like tourist, like regular tourist.

JF: What do you remember from those stops?

HB: The stops? I remember in Singapore that people came up to the ship and tried to sell Persian carpets, and because they were a lot of Indians, too, East Indians. And there were a lot of, a lot of East Indians, as a matter of fact boarded, they boarded the--whether it was Bombay or Singapore, I cannot 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 some sections. And we had a lot of East Indian Sikhs. They were policemen in China and they're nice people. And during the war, those Sikhs, one of the Sikhs came to the house and sold milk. They had their own cow, like *Fiddler on the Roof*, reminds me of. And it was expensive, very rare, my mother bought milk, but once in a while we use to get butter from this Indian family.

JF: So these stops were positive? They were...

HB: Oh yeah, definitely, yeah we were treated like tourists. And I was, as a child I had a ball.

JF: What...

HB: I did not, you know I was not old enough really to enjoy the concept of tourism cause I was just, you know...

JF: Wide-eyed.

HB: ...just gazing all over. I mean with such an amazement.

JF: Yes.

HB: Such amazement. And I remember the carts in Hong Kong and Singapore and of course, Hong Kong, my conception of was very dirty and...

JF: At the time, when you saw it?

HB: Yeah, when I saw it. Also, Naples was very dirty. Naples, very dirty. And they had these carts and the donkeys and mules. Everyone had mules.

JF: Had you any preconceptions about what these places would look like before you got there?

HB: Not really, no. I did not.

JF: So it was all very new...

HB: Very new, very new, yeah. Like I said a lot of peop--I remember people came up to the ship and tried to sell Persian carpets. I remember, my parents never bought one. But they were, I remember we were to watch out for them. "They are conniving people. You had better watch out. And watch your money and watch your belongings, you know, when they come on board."

JF: Were there other children that you met on the boat?

HB: No, funny, you know, no, no, not really, not that I remember. I was the only, I was the only child, unless they had really infants but yeah, I was the only child. There were not too many passengers, cause it was a combination freighter. To me that was fascinating to watch them take the cargo off the ships and then loading the cargo back from all these places. To me, I was watching them for hours, to do that. I remember the noise of the cranes. As I'm speaking to you...

JF: Yes.

HB: I just, I never think about these things. Now that I am speaking to you, I remember the noises of the cranes, of these, you know, of these...

JF: Fascinating machines...

HB: Fascinating machines at that time, yes. Yes.

JF: Could you, did you re-enact any of these things that you were seeing? Did you play on the boat?

HB: I was, no, no. I was, it must come from these probably, when I lived in China, I use to have a board. It had a hole in it, kind of a--I use to put in underneath my bed, my bedsheet and I would pretend I was on a boat. I was in a porthole room. That was my porthole.

JF: The board...

HB: That was strange, the board, I have...

JF: The next year yet...

HB: I have the board like a, like a yeah. I put the cover over it, but there was enough space to see out, to see out in the room, you know? That was my little hide-a-way, that was my little boat...

JF: Oh.

HB: That was a, you know?

JF: That was a safe place?

HB: Safe place, exactly.

JF: This boat...

HB: That boat, how funny, funny, I never think about this, now with talking about, yeah...

JF: So there was, you made a hole in the board?

HB: No, no. It was already, it was already in there, you know two boards nailed together on a, I don't know what we used it for. To stand up on something, you know stand



up like a, like a step stool more or less and I take this to bed and put, there was a space like this, you know?

JF: Like a couple inches...

HB: And I, yeah, a couple inches and that was my little hide-a-way, my little boat.

JF: How long did you do that?

HB: Maybe until I was, probably nine years, nine years or so. I still, yeah, I was crazy. That's what it was. Yeah, I felt safe there.

JF: Very safe.

HB: Very safe.

JF: Did you think back to the boat at other times or was it, the board was...

HB: The board was a...

JF: Represents.

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

JF: Do you remember the day that you arrived in?

HB: Yeah, the day was...

JF: In Shanghai.

HB: In Shanghai, it was in 19--well the day, we left in April so it took four weeks, so it must have been some time in May.

JF: Of 1939?

HB: Of 1939, yeah.

JF: And can you tell me about the day that you arrived, what it was like.

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

JF: Your parent's suggestion?

HB: My parents suggested that I give this, because some people were going farther, were going to Japan...

JF: Oh.

HB: You see? Some of people were, yeah...

JF: Some of the refugees were...

HB: The refugees were going--then later on they had to come back but, and also there were a certain amount of Japanese passengers. And they went to Japan from--and that was my big disappointment, I had to give up the flag. And, I know, I do not have much recollection, as we got off the boat, the plank there, that--'cause 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, what is it called, the...

JF: Where the refugee organizations were?

HB: Yeah, I think HIAS<sup>1</sup> and all these refugees organizations were interviewing, and people were sent to these--people who didn't have any money or didn't have any means of any, how should I say--they were sent to these homes, to these *Heims*, you know? To these...

JF: But your family...

HB: But my family, see, I do not remember. I'm trying to think because my uncle must have already bought the house because they were, oh yes, they were ahead of us. So they, he already had a house.

JF: They meaning your uncle...

HB: My uncle, my dad's brother.

JF: Yes. And was any of his family?

HB: Yeah, my cousins and his two kids were, my cousin, my male cousin and I had a female cousin, his sister, he had a sister. And...

JF: They were about your age?

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

JF: And your aunt?

HB: My aunt...

JF: Was there?

HB: Yeah.

JF: Yes, ok.

HB: Sure. The whole family...

JF: So this four, family of four was...

HB: Of four, and then he rented out, we, each family had one room.

JF: This is your father's brother.

HB: Brother.

JF: Ok.

HB: He was in the textile business...

JF: Right.

HB: ...in Germany and he had a little bit money.

JF: So he had a house...

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

JF: Seward. Yes.

HB: Seward Road.

JF: And which section was Seward Road?

HB: Hongkew.

JF: In Hongkew. Ok.

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<sup>1</sup>Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. HIAS is the oldest international migration and refugee resettlement agency in the United States. HIAS was founded in 1880.

HB: We arrived. There was the occupation, there was Japanese occupation already. Some people left for the French Concession and the British, for the French, yeah, and the British settlement.

JF: But your uncle had bought the house.

HB: Bought a house in Hongkew, yeah. That was outside the, you know, the perimeter of the ghetto, so to speak.

JF: What was it like? He, you got off the boat and you...

HB: 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 and toilet, 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, when on my ninth birthday, it was 1939, 1940. On my ninth birthday, my parents decided to enroll me into a religious school, just like you send your kids here to relig--to Sunday School. A relig...

JF: A religious school.

HB: Yeah.

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

HB: Yeah, I know--that's blank.

JF: That's blank.

HB: That is completely blank.

JF: Are any sights or smells or sounds or things that...

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

JF: How did it feel?

HB: To me as a kid, it was something new. It didn't bother me. Really, it didn't.

JF: It was again exciting?

HB: It was exciting. To me it was exciting, yes. Something new.

JF: Scary at all?

HB: Not, no, not at all.

JF: Not a bit.

HB: 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, these panhandlers and all this kind of stuff that, later on of course, when I witnessed all of these beggars and all of these--you know the British, they established a shelter house there, but they never would stay in the shelter house.

JF: So the beggars were...

HB: They were professional beggars.

JF: From where?

HB: From Shanghai.

JF: They were Chinese.

HB: Oh yeah, Chinese.

JF: They were Chinese beggars.

HB: Oh yeah, of course, you know. They were Chinese.

JF: Ok. When you got to this house, how many rooms did you have in this house with...

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

JF: In the whole house?

HB: In the whole house. Four rooms and with the entr--well, including the entrance. He partitioned the entrance, my uncle did. So he bought another rental. So he had three people that were renting from him. My parents, I don't know if there was any monetary changed. I would have no idea. I don't know.

JF: Right.

HB: And then he rented to a shoemaker, and then he rented to a young couple.

JF: So did each family have it's own bedroom? Is that how it worked?

HB: No, no, no...

JF: There were that many rooms?

HB: Yes, no, oh yes, that's it. That's it. We had, we just partitioned with curtains, you know. There was nonexistent a room and a bedroom.

JF: Ok.

HB: We used the same toilet. No. Same bathroom.

JF: So your family had one room.

HB: One room, yeah...

JF: Ok.

HB: Yeah, yeah.

JF: ...And then there was a one WC for the...

HB: For the whole, for the whole house.

JF: ...for everybody, and a kitchen...

HB: And a kitchen.

JF: ...for everyone. And how, was the kitchen equipped with...?

HB: Yeah, gas. Yeah, it was gas. We did not hardly cook with charcoal. Later on we did charcoal, the charcoal bit.

JF: Did you have heat? Did you need heat?

HB: Heat? That's when we used the charcoal furnace. I mean for heat, yes. But you see when the proclamation came, when despite this was Hongkew. It was outside the perimeter--my uncle had a choice, to sell the house or exchange the house with somebody that lived inside this perimeter of the--I hate to say ghetto, I can't use that terminology again...

JF: So this house was not within the ghetto perimeter...

HB: Not within the ghetto. It was outside the ghetto.

JF: Ok.

HB: So he exchanged the house for the, he was lucky, with a Japanese family. It was very clean, and then he did some little minor renovation, and then so he could divide again, each one had one room. And but we didn't have a WC, unfortunately.

JF: Oh. Once you went into the ghetto area.

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

JF: The honey wagon?

HB: Yeah. I used to come, oh gosh. We used to watch and we...

JF: It was actually a wagon?

HB: A wagon on two, on wheels, yeah, they picked it up every morning...

JF: Did they pushed or...

HB: They pushed. Well, one fellow pushed it.

JF: And they picked up the slop pots.

HB: Yeah, the, yeah, the slop pots. Then the women, the Chinese women. We were--ok, we were living in, 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 you, when you walked out of the gate, then you were on a main street. So we lived--we were the only foreigners in that particular lane. So we never, I never felt when the terminology of the ghetto, we lived with Chinese, how could you, you know. And when this honey wagon came in the morning, we could see the Chinese women cleaning their little pots, you know, floating down the, down the, down the...

JF: Down the street?

HB: Down the, it wasn't sewerlike, down the street.

JF: Now, when you were living on Seward Road in the first house.

HB: The first, yeah, yeah.

JF: Were you living among refugees?

HB: Well...

JF: Also a mixed population...

HB: A mixed, it was mixed. A mixed population, you bet. Yes.

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

HB: About, approximately, yes.

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

HB: Not really, no. I was--the only time I would explore the streets were when my cousin, and as I told you before, like we went to the wharf and watched the boats come in and that was fascinating to me then...

JF: The boats were boats of refugees or...

HB: No, no. Freighters...

JF: The other boats. Freighters.

HB: Freighters

JF: Because it was a port city.

HB: Of course, it was a port city.

JF: So you got to watch them...

HB: Watch them. But then I watched the junks. We used to go to the particular area when we, where people, the Chinese use to live in those junks. That was fascinating to me.

JF: Oh.

HB: And, well you 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...

JF: Before the war.

HB: War. We crossed the Whangpoo River to Pootoong, was farming country. That was fascinating.

JF: What was it like?

HB: Was like. It was, that's where a lot of Chinese people bury 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 the old, the old custom and when--I remember we had a funeral in our lane and every house was decorated except our house, and it interrupted this decoration, these like, like these silver paper, [unclear], I can't think of it now.

JF: These were, the Chinese decorated their homes?

HB: The Chinese decorated all their homes except ours, because we were the only foreigners there. And then they had a big feast, a big funeral. So that must be one of the...

JF: One of the customs.

HB: Well yeah, the customs. It was a very prominent citizen, probably prominent person, that they did perform the funeral with.

JF: Now 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, the other Jewish communities as well?

HB: Jewish community? Yeah, of course. Like I said, my parents enrolled me in that so called Hebrew school. And little did they know that was a brain-washing institution.

JF: Now this was the Shanghai...

HB: Shanghai.

JF: Shanghai Jewish Youth Organization.

HB: No, no, no. That was the *cheder*.

JF: We're not talking about the regular school.

HB: No, I went to regular school in the morning, and I went to *cheder* [religious school] in the afternoon.

JF: Ok. So that the...

HB: You know, just like you send your kid to Sunday School. But little did they know, it was a brain-washing institution.

JF: Now we're talking about the *cheder*.

HB: That was before the *yeshiva* [upper level Jewish religious school] came in.

JF: Who ran the *cheder*?

HB: 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, what was his name, Rabbi Perlmutter, was a tough cookie. And I mean very strict.

JF: So he was from Austria.

HB: He was from Austria but in, what is it called, Galicia, have you ever heard of that? He was from that area.

JF: Ok.

HB: Then we had another teacher from Germany, also religious person.

JF: So the Russian refugees...

HB: No, there were not any Russian refugees.

JF: Or the, from the earlier period.

HB: Oh, from the 1914-15.

JF: Yeah.

HB: Yeah. There were two ladies I hear from. They were Russ--they were born in Shanghai, as a matter of fact.

JF: But the Russians had supported this *cheder*. They established the *cheder* but it was staffed by people...

HB: By refugees.

JF: Refugees. Ok.

HB: Yeah, sure.

JF: And what, when you say that it was brain-washing...

HB: Brain-washing. Like I mentioned--my, oh I didn't maybe mention this. 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 and...

JF: A hat, a *kippah*, or a hat?

HB: No, no a regular hat.

JF: Even a hat.

HB: Even a hat, you know.

JF: Even a hat.

HB: And you're not supposed to you're supposed to have all this, some type of a head gear when you go out. So they said it is not proper to do that. So of course, I start to

wear a *kippah* and I start to wear these undergarments--*tsitsis* undergarments<sup>2</sup>. And I drove my mother crazy because I took all her dishes and went to the Temple or to the *shul*, over there where the *cheder* was and I so-called *kasher*ed them...

JF: Oh.

HB: And we...

JF: She...

HB: I remember we use to wait in this big wok-type thing and put a glowing iron in there to make sure it was boiling.

JF: So this was in a wok, in a...

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

JF: She didn't mind?

HB: She didn't mind, no.

JF: You said you drove her crazy.

HB: Well, I say that very cynically now.

JF: Ok, ok.

HB: I assume I...

JF: She didn't object to you doing this.

HB: I didn't object of doing that, no.

JF: Ok.

HB: See my cousin did the same thing, and he is a very Orthodox rabbi now. He continues to...

JF: It really lasted.

HB: Oh definitely, I'm a--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 conduct services, you know if I want to.

JF: It really changed your direction then?

HB: My direction? Well...

JF: In terms of observance?

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

JF: When...

HB: But then, in a way, when--well there's another story, a beautiful story when the Lithuanian refugees came from Kobe, Japan, the complete *yeshiva* came too.

JF: The *Mir Yeshiva*.

HB: The *Mir Yeshiva* came. I went to this *Mir Yeshiva* but not the main *Mir*. I went to the *Yeshiva K'tanah*. It's the, one step down from...

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<sup>2</sup>Ritual fringes worn by male Jews.



JF: *K'tanah* [small].

HB: Yeah, *K'tanah*, and my, now my cousin continues to it and he went to the, he had received the *semichah* [rabbinic ordination], I mean he was...

JF: So he stayed and studied with the *Mir Yeshiva*.

HB: With the *Mir*, yeah. He's in Australia now and he's a teaching rabbi. He's semi-retired now. But he has, *kayn ayen hore* [knock on wood], 23 grandchildren. [laughter] I don't have to tell you--and I asked my cousin's wife, you know, I says, how many are you going to have? He says whatever, this is not enough. That's their attitude.

JF: Now was the *K'tanah* group not as a...

HB: Well, they were--it's a previous--no, they were just as strict.

JF: They were just as strict.

HB: But it's just a step before you enter the...

JF: The *Mir*.

HB: The *Mir Yeshiva*.

JF: Ok.

HB: I have a picture of the *Mir Yeshiva* in that book there.

JF: Now how long did you stay involved with them?

HB: I start, I stayed involved with them until I was about--until I left Shanghai but I was not going to, see, I quit Kadoorie School. Actually I quit the Kadoorie School, how old was I? 12, and I went almost full time to *cheder* at that time.

JF: Is that why you quit?

HB: Yeah, I, yeah, pretty sure--I was young, you know, I, before my Bar Mitzvah, I was--I did quit, maybe I was 14 years old, so 12, 14 years old, 12 or 14, I cannot recollect.

JF: It was before your Bar Mitzvah?

HB: I think, well I don't know now. If I did quit, not before, because I remember I was so preoccupied with my teach--my learning about being Bar Mitzvah'ed. And I was--I'm pretty sure I was full time in *cheder*--morning and the afternoon.

JF: And that's why you quit?

HB: 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, do 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 a stipulation, I had to continue to go to this *yeshiva* and I had a one-to-one tutor in the *yeshiva*. I was tutored by a different, from a *Mir* Rabbi and, but I was working, so I was working in this store but I had to, so I was 14 or 15.

JF: This was, you were an apprentice in order to sell, to make jewelry?

HB: Oh no, watch repair.

JF: Watch repair.

HB: Watch repair. I never adopted to that trade anyway. I hated it later on. I tried when I went to Minnesota. I tried it again but I hated it, I just hated it.

JF: When you were in the Kadoorie School, what was that like for you?

HB: To me?

JF: Yeah.

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

JF: And Chinese, too?

HB: Chinese was not compulsory, no. I didn't know how--I can double talk Chinese, however I can double talk almost any language. Remember Sid Caesar [laughter]...

JF: Yes, yes. I do. [laughter]. But Japanese was actually, was the mandated course?

HB: It was mandated course. We had a Chinese teacher, I mean, a Japanese teacher and she was not much of a discipl...

JF: A disciplinarian?

HB: A disciplinarian, and so unfortunately made a bad impression to the Japanese, but they, because we were kids, we were, you know. She was very mild.

JF: It was a bad impression, meaning you were not...

HB: Well, to the Japanese [tape one, side two ended]

*Tape two, side one:*

HB: This is better...

JF: This is Tape two, Side one, with the continuation of an interview with Mr. Herbert Broh. And Mr. Broh is showing me his report card from the Shanghai Jewish Youth Association School, and I'm looking at a term ending the 9<sup>th</sup> of July 1943 and signed by...

HB: Hartwich.

JF: It's Lucy Hartwich...

HB: Lucy, yeah.

JF: ...and Mr. Gossenheimer [phonetic].

HB: Yeah.

JF: Yes. Do you want to tell me a little bit about this?

HB: Well, as you can see Japanese was not my best subject.

JF: No.

HB: ...And this is a better one, well, I was two years prior and we didn't--I don't know, I just didn't, I didn't really care much for school. I was the joker. I was the joker of the class. I think I was the joker of the class, and did it say more talkative, does it say on this one? Anyway, there is one of them that says I was very talkative.

JF: Well, this one says you could do much better.

HB: Do much better, yeah.

JF: ...you should study more and be more attentive.

HB: More attentive, right, right. [laughter] This is an earlier much better one, but so, no, I had a ball there, I mean I was carefree, so to speak, and I had made a lot of friends there.

JF: Tell me about that, tell me about your friends.

HB: My friends? See I had two types of friends. Friends from this school here were, did not go to *cheder*, did not go to the *yeshiva*, so consequently they were a different breed of people, so to speak. I don't know if that's the right terminology or not, but they were, some of them were non-observant, I mean, just like--and then I, of course, the transition all takes place when I had [unclear] friends in *cheder*, so from one extreme to the other.

JF: Did you have both groups of friends at the same time or...

HB: Yeah.

JF: ...or did you move?

HB: No, when I was Bar Mitzvahed, this was 1943. Evidently I must have had friends on both at the same time, yes. We had a fellow that, I don't know his last name, too bad, and he went to Australia. Very good friend. Name is Willy, and he was half-Jewish, and his mother was not Jewish, or somebody wasn't Jewish, and best friend, one of my best

friends, you know. It did not make any difference to me at that time whether somebody was religious or non-religious, you know. To me, personally.

JF: What impact had this all had on your parents in terms of how...

HB: Oh, they were...

JF: ...your home was, you say your cousin had also become...

HB: Oh yes.

JF: ...observant and wanted to keep kosher.

HB: Sure.

JF: So that meant the whole household changed.

HB: The whole household, yeah. Not the people that he rented, the other people that my uncle rented, no they were--to my recollection they were not that observant, no.

JF: But the kitchen had been koshered.

HB: Oh, well the kitchen, everybody was on their own. We usually sometimes cooked separate. And we cooked, you know, we had our own pots and pans.

JF: OK.

HB: You know? So there was no, the only time we, sometimes we ate together just a family but not the other people.

JF: Did your parents then also become more observant?

HB: My parents? No, not so much. My uncle did though, became more observant, but not--no, I don't think so. I didn't go to, he never went to the *Shabbat* services with me. I went. To me it was compulsory, obligation, to do that, you know. And I was sometimes ashamed, which was, which is wrong, I mean so ridiculous. Sometimes my dad wouldn't wear a hat, so he would go on one street and I would go on the other street. G-d forbid one of my rabbi's should see me you know with my dad, you know, I was embarrassed. I was embarrassed actually, and this is wrong sometimes when you, when they teach kids, well if it has something to do with, no you can break this commandment "Thou shalt honor your parents", you know. You can break this commandment only in certain circumstances, when it was, when it pertains towards Judaism. And it was wrong, you know. I realized it later in years. I mean it was ridiculous. Why should I be ashamed to go with my father on the street? So, so anyway it's--then I later on I changed myself. I changed. So in order to comply to, I can be--like I said, I can be acclimated to any surroundings, to any community. I can mix in easy with secular people, you know. I can act the same ways, you know, to respect.

JF: Do you attribute this flexibility in any way to your experience in Shanghai?

HB: No, it's my own feeling.

JF: It's just your own personal...

HB: My own personality, my own personal feeling. I learned and I'm very tolerant and, a lot of adversity happened in my life after I left Shanghai, and I do not have any, just like Rabbi Kushner I am, what happens to...

JF: Good things happen...

HB: Good things happen, well, what happens to bad...

JF: Bad things happen.

HB: Bad things happen to good people, yeah. I feel the same, I mean I have this tremendous faith, you know and , things you know. Like I said, to me personally Shanghai was the best years of my life. And the adversity came after I came to this country in certain things.

JF: Oh boy.

HB: I mean it's silly, but the things were happening in this country that you know. I was married, sick wife, and I lost a son at 40, and all these kind of things and it seems like my cousin despite, I mean he has 23 grandchildren. Sometimes I get a little bit jealous because this, their life--well they live in a different world in, you know, they don't face reality sometimes [unclear]. But they live in their own little, like *Fiddler on the Roof*, they're contented and--so, sometimes I wonder, well, is this a good life or not, you know, but--so I go back and forth sometimes, you know. But in general speaking, no, no, I'm a pretty happy-go-lucky fellow.

JF: So you had this ability as a kid to be friends with these...

HB: Oh definitely.

JF: Guys and girls as well?

HB: Not so much with girls, no. I, see that, again, I sure looked at girls, you know. I mean you had this feeling for girls. When I was a little older, 14, you know you had this--but that was again, taboo.

JF: Because you had become more identified with the traditional...

HB: Identified with the traditional way, yeah. I'll tell you a little humorous story about taboo now. On Yom Kippur, there is this *Torah* portion of the--all these commandments, thou shalt not do this, and thou shalt not do that, and thou shalt not, it's all in the, you know we studied this in *Torah* and thou shalt not lay with any, doesn't say cohabit, but lay with any beast or with any animal. It just said lay. So I asked the Rabbi at that time, what does it mean? "*Geh weiter*," go on he said, "go to next page."

JF: [laughter]

HB: You know, wouldn't explain anything. I mean so you were so na?ve. So we had a cat in China, and that cat, [laughter] yes, you guessed it, was laid on my bed all the time. Ever since that portion I've learned I shushed him away, cause I was not supposed to lay with him, you know? [laughter] So that's how, in a way, it's kind of a comic, but that's how they teach you, you know. Until later on in years, when you went to *yeshiva*, you went to the big *yeshiva*, you knew more about the facts of life, but I was so naive about the facts of life even when I, when I left Shanghai I didn't even know the facts of life too much.

JF: Now when you dropped out of the Kadoorie School around the time of your Bar Mitzvah.

HB: Yeah, I think I was about 14, I can't conceive I was 13 here.

JF: At that point, did your friendships change?  
HB: No, no.  
JF: Were you still kept...  
HB: We still kept in touch, yeah.  
JF: ...your relationships. Ok.  
HB: A lot of people left Kadoorie School for some reason or another. I don't know why. But no, even the people who did not leave Kadoorie School. No, we always came, we were in contact.  
JF: Do you remember any contact with the children of the Jews who had lived in Shanghai before you got there? The Sephardic community, the Russian community?  
HB: No, no. The only contact that I had was my English teacher. I don't even know if I can see her name here or not.  
JF: Was that?...  
HB: Excuse me.  
JF: Would that be L.B. or would that...  
HB: Could be L.B. Could be.  
JF: Her initials might be L.B.  
HB: Could be, pretty much. Could be.  
JF: And she was from one of these communities?  
HB: Yeah, she was from, she was Sephardic. She was from Iraq. And I didn't have much contact otherwise, except we had, later on they had a combination of with the *cheder*. They had a whole group of *Bet Ya'akov* girls and they were, I remember this one girl, she was from Iraq. Her name was Sima and I had a little crush on her.  
JF: And she was...  
HB: And that was about...  
JF: So she was from one of the, from the earlier...  
HB: From the earlier...  
JF: Sephardic families who joined the *Bet Ya'akov* School.  
HB: Exactly, yeah. Of course, I met one Russian individual. He was from, he lived in China since the, you know. He came, one of the wealthy Russians, every Hanukkah he gave us shoes. Yeah, he donated shoes for us, every Hanukkah.  
JF: In the, when you were in the school.  
HB: Not in the school, in the *cheder*.  
JF: In the *cheder*.  
HB: The Russians didn't have much to do with the Kadoorie Schools.  
JF: Ok. The Sephardi did?  
HB: Sephardi? I don't think so either.  
JF: Ok. They just...  
HB: They had their own little community. Their own schools. I didn't come in contact with too many Sephardic Jews.

JF: When you had your Bar Mitzvah...

HB: Yeah.

JF: ...Can you describe what it was like?

HB: Oh, it was a feast. It was a feast...

JF: And this was during the war.

HB: During the war, 1943. It, I was taught, at the Bar Mitzvah, I was taught by another refugee who was specializing in teaching boys Bar Mitzvah. His name was Amsterdam, and he lived on, in one of these homes, these *Heime*, I forget which one it was, Chaoufoong Heim or Ward Road Heim, I don't know, one of these and he--it was a heck of a way of living, you know, because he had no privacy in those homes.

JF: These were the camps.

HB: Camps, well, camps.

JF: They were "in quotes."

HB: Yeah.

JF: It was a communal.

HB: Yeah right, but they all slept in one big auditorium. They had these bunk beds, you know. And there was no, hardly any privacy there. And you know, these were the, that particular tape of Mr. Hepner. He described these and I think he lived in one of those camps and...

JF: But you were always able to live in this house...

HB: In a house, and then after my uncle had changed this house, we lived in another house and...

JF: And you did not find...

HB: I did not find...

JF: Your food was not limited?

HB: Was not, no, no. No, maybe a repetition of foods, like rice, and we had, yeah I remember rice and little bits of meat, you know? That goulash-type thing and kasha. We had a lot of kasha and eggplants. I remember eggplants. Loved, plentiful of eggplants and tofu, lot of tofu, and we had eggs, plentiful eggs, I remember and.

JF: You don't remember any limits of...

HB: I don't remember actually any limits. As a matter of fact, my mother sent me out for bread to the bakery. So my cousin and I went for bread. I mean, let's put it this way, it was not that it was plentiful, but it was sufficient. So we used, we took a rickshaw ride and guess what? Instead of--we didn't have any money-- so we gave the coolie our bread for our rickshaw ride. Of course, I never heard the end of it. [laughter] So that day we were out of bread, but we had a rickshaw ride. I don't know, I forget how old I was, 12 or whatever.

JF: [laughter] That's wonderful. Now you said, when you had your Bar Mitzvah, this was within the *yeshiva* at this point.

HB: Yes, within the *yeshiva* compound, yes. Well, it was the *cheder* compound and in that same *shul* that we were brought up--we learned in the morning, we learned in the, well, actually in the morning I went to school everyday but...

JF: And what was the name of the *shul*?

HB: Ohel Moshe, Ohel Moshe School. It was within the perimeter of the quote, unquote - ghetto. That's, the *shul* was built by Russians also. As a matter of fact, the *shames* [sexton] was [laughter], the *shames* went, was a Russian and a, you know what a *shames* is?

JF: Yes. Of course. What was it like, was it, the day of your Bar Mitzvah?

HB: The day of the Bar Mitzvah--first of all, they complimented my dad. They wished my dad, oh what a good job he did, oh what a good job, what a good job, but little did they know that my mother pushed me to go to *cheder*.

JF: Ah [chuckle]

HB: See, they always gave credit to the men, and it was a little bit, it was not too fair. You know, there are prayer books nowadays where it says, "Blessed be Thou oh Lord our G-d, who has not created me as a woman." And then the woman says, "Blessed be Thou Lord G-d of the Universe, who created me according to thy will." So these Orthodox prayer books don't have that, you know. So it's kind of a little bit prejudicial statement but then...

JF: Did you feel that at the time?

HB: No, no, no, I, no. Not really, but later on in years I, you know, I elaborate these things, you know, no, I didn't...

JF: But it was your mother who had pushed you.

HB: Yeah, my mother always pushed me and encouraged me to go, yeah. My dad worked anyway.

JF: What kind of...

HB: All during the--my dad was working for a Japanese or a Chinese factory. He was a watchman, and it was managed by Japanese. They made bolts, nuts and bolts.

JF: You are showing me a picture that you drew on the back of one of your report cards.

HB: [laughter]

JF: Do you want to describe it?

HB: 1941. I don't even know what that is.

JF: Ok.

HB: It's just a scribble.

JF: Ok.

HB: Like how old was I, 11 years old, 11 years.

JF: Your father was able to work the entire time that you were in Shanghai.



HB: Well, yes, he did, and he worked for this Chinese factory and it was managed by Japanese. I'm sure that these nuts and bolts were not going for any civilian use. I'm sure it was going...

JF: It was going for the war effort?

HB: It was going for the war effort. I'm sure.

JF: Ok.

HB: But he had a job there.

JF: Do you know whether or not, he was able to work out a way of getting any money to Shanghai before you left?

HB: I don't know. I think the, I remember he hid some American money...

JF: Go ahead.

HB: ...after the war in suitcases because it was against the law to even have American money during the tremendous inflation that they had. It was against the Chinese government to even own any--people were doing black markets. But that's the only kind of money that I remember.

JF: Where do you think they got the American money? In, do you think they brought it with them?

HB: No, they probably--well, he was, no, he worked for the American Army, too, after the war.

JF: Oh, in Shanghai.

HB: In Shanghai.

JF: Ok.

HB: Yeah.

JF: What were, not to lose...

HB: Yeah.

JF: Some of the story...

HB: My Bar Mitzvah, we were talking about...

JF: Let's, yes.

HB: Yeah, and like I said, they complimented my dad, and it was a regular feast and...

JF: That your mother prepared? That the...

HB: No, the people [unclear] from my mother and my aunt and the whole community almost, the whole did prepare for--we were all within the spectrum of this *cheder*. Not the people that were associated with this school, but people that were associated with the *cheder* and the *yeshiva*. They all made these preparations and...

JF: Special foods?

HB: Oh, I do not remember.

JF: But it felt like a feast.

HB: It felt, yeah, it felt like a feast, yeah and--I attended a wedding there. My cousin was married, I mean my cousin's, female, my female cousin...

JF: Yes, your, the older...

HB: Not girl cousin, the older one.

JF: Yes, yes.

HB: Was married there, and I attended all the *sheva berachot*, you know, the seven blessings. Every day they had a feast. That was during the war and they had *schnapps* and the vodka and all kinds of stuff. I mean...

JF: Were you?...

HB: It was, it was available there.

JF: It was there.

HB: It was there, if you had the money to purchase.

JF: Were you aware of the difficulty that the other refugees were having?

HB: Yes, we were aware of--we ate, a lot of times we ate in this community kitchen. It was, I mean you talking about scar--I mean not all the time, it was plentiful. I mean, at that time we had to go to this community kitchen and then we got our meals and then we had some sad, poor, I mean sad-looking people sold their practically the shirt off their back in order to survive there. Yes, I seen those. I was one of the lucky ones that did not go through that, and I'm sure Mr. Hepner was one of the unlucky ones, what I gather from his video. I have to talk to him here, I'll probably meet him here, that you know, that we're in the same category [unclear].

JF: Did you have any idea who was running these community kitchens, where the help was coming from?

HB: The help was coming partially from the religious Jews, because it was managed by *mashgiach*<sup>3</sup> to make sure it's kosher, yeah.

JF: So this particular kitchen was a kosher kitchen?

HB: It was a--yeah. It definitely was a kosher kitchen. Now I don't know if there were other kitchens or not. I have no way of recollection.

JF: Ok.

HB: The people that lived in these *Heime*, I don't know if they had their own kitchen or not. But that particular kitchen my mother went to and I went to, was a kosher kitchen, yes.

JF: You mentioned before that you had every illness possible.

HB: Yes, yes.

JF: Can you tell me about...

HB: But I was lucky. I was inoculated. We all were inoculated for all these-- and I was sent to a--first, I had malaria and recurrent every year, recurrent, and this Dr. Wolff happened to be in our cabin. I remember when we came to, when we sailed to Shanghai. He had a, that he brought from France evidently, he was in France, too, a what is it called, an inoculation?

JF: The vaccine?

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<sup>3</sup>Person who supervises ritual preparation of food.

HB: The vaccine. He had a vaccine that's supposed to have cured malaria and he gave me this vaccine. I think he donated it to me somehow, cause I remember, cause, and ever since then I never had a recurrence. That's what's weird.

JF: Were you in the hospital?

HB: Not for malaria. Yeah, maybe I was, too, but was not an isolation hospital. It was the local hospital that was established by the refugees, yes, and then I...

JF: Do you remember the name of the hospital?

HB: No, I don't.

JF: It was the special hospital that was...

HB: It was not special hospital. See there was a, when I had, when I acquired this typhus and thyphoid, they, I was sent to an isolation hospital that was outside the ghetto, so to speak, and as we were--I was taken by ambulance and I could look outside the ambulance and I remember very vividly that there was a ship at the Bund, you know the Bund thing, you've heard of the Bund. The...

JF: The avenues.

HB: Yeah, but the Bund was right by the White River. There were all these bank buildings that were built by a certain, by Sassoon families. There was the ship laying on its side. I don't know what it was so I--it was the Conte Verde, I think. It was an Italian luxury liner and the Italians sank it--intended to sink it. So the Japanese intended to salvage it for the war effort, and I remember the big chains around the big bank buildings in order to keep it afloat on its side.

JF: The Conte Verde.

HB: I think it was the Conte Verde. Now I could be wrong, but I think it was the Conte Verde, an Italian luxury liner, and that's on the way to the hospital, and all these pictures, I mean I have it in mind, yeah. And then I came, I was in the hospital maybe for a week or so, and, gosh, I've seen so many people die of cholera. I mean, there was a big auditor, a big ward. The ward was, you know...

JF: Now this hospital where you were you isolated, was this...

HB: It was a Chinese hospital.

JF: It was a Chinese hospital, ok?

HB: ...And it was, they call it the isolation hospital. People with these communicable diseases had to be there. People like I say, people were, I might see one person two beds away from me, and next time, he passed away. So that was a bad experience for me, seeing these...

JF: You were a child.

HB: Sure, I was 12, 13, I was 12 and that was a bad experience for me.

JF: Were you...

HB: No, 12, 13, maybe I was 14 years, 14.

JF: Were you scared about what would happen to you with the diseases?

HB: Not really, because I know I was being inoculated. See the reason why so many Chinese died, they disregarded the inoculation. It was initiated by the Japanese, to be inoculated. Although the Chinese didn't care, you know, just didn't go for it. So what is the consequence of, if they acquired disease, then there wasn't a chance to survive it.

JF: Did the Japanese make the inoculations available to the community?

HB: Yeah.

JF: At no cost?

HB: At no cost, right.

JF: But it was just a matter of whether they decided to follow through on it.

HB: Decided, yes, exactly, yeah. No, it was mandatory to be inoculated, but then who can control mandatory Chinese. [unclear] So...

JF: What was the experience like in the other hospital? You said you had gone to the refugee hospital.

HB: Yeah, well I wasn't stay there too long, with just malaria.

JF: And that's when you got the vaccine from Dr. Wolff?

HB: Whether there or not, I do not remember. Maybe I got it there, maybe I got it at home. I do not remember, yeah. But evidently I know that certain, that vaccine I got.

JF: Did you know of any family members, did you have the experience with family or with friends who died from the illnesses or any other causes?

HB: No, not family members but I've, there was a refugee, I don't know his name--two beds away from me, and he passed away.

JF: This was in the...

HB: And he talked to the Chinese nurses in German, so they would understand him, so he was already--so, unfortunate individual, I mean very...

JF: Now this was in the isolation hospital?

HB: Yeah, it was in isolation hospital.

JF: And he died...

HB: I never experienced any bad effect in the other hospital, no.

JF: When the war started, how did you know? How did you find out?

HB: Pearl Harbor?

JF: Umm. Hmmm.

HB: Well, it was in the paper. We had our Shanghai Jewish Chronicle.

JF: And that's how you found out.

HB: Yeah, sure.

JF: And what was...

HB: During the war, to tell you the truth, instead of seeking shelter, when the B-29's flew over Shanghai to bomb Japan, my cousin and I--all these houses had roofs, like flat roofs. We went up the roofs and watched it. Never went to a shelter.

JF: Watched them fly.

HB: Fly--and most humorous account which I was, we had a marine school that was behind our house. There was a Japanese marine school, and they tried to get these planes with rifles. People were killed more by shrapnel than by, by anti-aircraft, you know by shrapnel than bombs. Well, as you recall, you probably heard from somebody else, there was one day, I think it was July 17, 1945, before the war, we were bombed and then [tape two, side one ended]

*Tape two, side two:*

JF: This is Tape two, Side two, with an interview with Mr. Herbert Broh. We were talking about the bombing of Hongkew.

HB: Yeah, Hongkew, yeah. Yeah that's, I remember that episode. I was roaming around, there was a place called SACRA.<sup>4</sup> That was heavily damaged, this building. People lived there. It was not a camp like the Ward Road Camp or the--we used to play around. We used to play there quite often. We were kids. And we stuck plenty--we became alienated from the time of the bombing, you know. We were evacuated.

JF: You became alienated?...

HB: Alienated in respect to, we had the same friends that always met there, you know that just, and then somehow we became dispersed, we were dispersed after, because we were going in different directions. I don't know why. I have no explanation why.

JF: Your experience meant that you had to separate.

HB: We had to separate, yeah, because we were evacuated, we put--that particular place was heavily bombed, was heavily damaged. The, our house where we lived was not shockproof anymore, so we were evacuated temporarily to the Kadoorie School.

JF: Ok.

HB: Which was in bungalows. They had built bungalows.

JF: Where, the Kadoorie School where you had gone.

HB: Yeah. Now the first...

JF: The one you had attended as a younger child.

HB: Yeah, as a younger child. I was 15 then. Excuse me--and the--so we were evacuated to the Kadoorie School because there were these bungalows. So we lived there just like the *Heimes* and bunk beds. So I had experienced too, how it feels to live not in a house but in a community-type, it was exactly like the way we lived in these *Heimes*, these camps.

JF: So what was that experience like for you?

HB: For me, it was exciting [laughter]. I don't know, it was different. We had a big courtyard, a big yard, and you know, we had bungalows, a big yard. The most, so, but the adverse experience, of course I had was the bodies that we found. They pile them up just like wood, the Chinese. And I think we lost 30 some or 40 refugees, and they are 300 over [unclear], you know. And they had all the marine school that was behind us was damaged, too. That's why our house was kind of not shockproof anymore. So then, all of a sudden capitulation came, and the day of the, when Japan capitulated, we had an aircraft flying low over the Kadoorie School and dropping leaflets with the signature of General Wiedmeyer. I think he thought it was a POW camp. I think the plane, he did not probably

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<sup>4</sup>Shanghai Ashkenazi Collaborating Relief Association.

realize it was just us, humble refugees. And it says, "Don't despair," I remember that, "Don't despair, the American forces will be coming your way," blah, blah, blah.

JF: How did that hit you?

HB: That, I was kind of aware of what was happening. OK, now take this scenario here. OK, around the Kadoorie school, there were ammunition dumps, and I've seen it, I still see it. I know people who remember it. I see the Japanese soldiers guarding these ammunition dumps with fixed bayonets yet. Now the war was over the day of the capitulation, and they were guarding these ammunition dumps, it would be. If they would not have guarded ammunition with Chinese going in there, it would have been devastation. Chinese were throwing crackers, you know their firecrackers. That was their New Year's, Chinese New Year's. They like the firecrackers--but here that was a risk that they did, because here was still armed Japanese. But they didn't harm them, so that same day, the day after the capitulation, some, I think they were the first servicemen that came to the shores of Shanghai, all of a sudden I seen big fellows, I think they must have been Swedes, and they were the flyers of the--and they were coming to apologize to some of the people, who were wounded, and I never forget this in my life. If I would have had at that time a camcorder, that would have been something, or a camera. A fellow, one of our refugees, had an American flag hidden all through the war years. Raised up the American flag and us kids, we were 15, you know, and we sang *God Bless America*. I can still feel the tears coming in my eyes. That was such an emotional day--unbelievable, unbelievable, and so then they went around all these companies, bungalows, and introduced themselves. I never met them personally.

JF: These were Swedes and Americans...

HB: No, I am saying they were like Swedes, I'm just making a comment. I don't know what, I don't know what...

JF: They were--oh they looked, Ok, they were American troops?

HB: Of course.

JF: They were definitely American troops?

HB: American flyers. American Air Force people.

JF: During the war, how did you perceive what was going on? What, how did it change you?

HB: I, the feeling of the war, I, did I mention earlier that I worked in this jewelry store?

JF: You had started to talk about that.

HB: I was working in this jewelry store as an apprentice and I was going to *cheder yeshiva* in the afternoon, or late in the evening, and it was damaged during the war, I mean during this bomb raid. But before that, we had to build, we had to, I helped my boss, well I can't think, what do you call it when, bunkers, not bunkers.

JF: A bomb shelter?

HB: Bomb, not bomb shelter. Excuse me. There were troops going to the hole, fox holes like. Like a fox hole.

JF: Ok.

HB: Ok, so they went, what Japanese expected was street fighting actually. That was in 1944, late 1944. And they expected street fighting, so we had to make their fox holes for them.

JF: They expected street fighting with the Allied troops.

HB: Yeah or with the Chinese, or with the Allied troops, who knows. And we had to...

JF: You built the fox holes.

HB: Fox holes for them and each store had a fox hole, yeah.

JF: What were the Japanese like towards you?

HB: To me?

JF: Yeah.

HB: Here, my boss had his main clientele were Japanese and religious people.

JF: Religious Jews?

HB: Religious Jews.

JF: And Japanese?

HB: And Japanese. Japanese colonels came and bought watches, and short colonels came, Japanese soldiers, you know colonels, captains, I don't know. They showed pictures of their wives in Japan. You know, it's very strange, never felt that the animosity that--I never felt any animosity, I'm sure they--my dad, I mean his boss really was Japanese.

JF: And so your family did not experience...

HB: He had, never ever experienced any except when he had to go to get the special pass from, in order to go to work for this Mr. Ghoya.

JF: Yes, what was that like?

HB: Well he, I never went, well I did go to, I sought a pass to go somewhere to be an apprentice in a prosthesis factory, a prosthesis.

JF: To make prostheses?

HB: That would have been a good thing, but then somehow it didn't work out.

JF: OK.

HB: So it didn't work out.

JF: But the...

HB: So but then...

JF: That was the day you needed to get a pass to go there.

HB: Yeah, yeah. That was the day, and I think they were Germans. See, that's why they could be outside; they were in a French Concession. I had to work with a French Concession [unclear]. That was their business. And after the war, well I'll tell you then.

JF: But did you meet Ghoya that day?

HB: I, no, no. It was his partner Kubota. Ever heard of him?



JF: And was that different?

HB: Yeah, Kubota was a different individual altogether.

JF: Ok.

HB: I've heard that now and I've heard different stories since yesterday. I heard that Kubota was a fellow that gave out the passes just like that, without any--and I heard later on that he was an American counterspy. So, now then I hear that Ghoya was an American counterspy and he didn't have any choice but to show authority, or humiliation against the refugees. Now I don't know. I...

JF: You heard this when?

HB: Just yesterday.

JF: Oh, just yesterday.

HB: But I have, I don't know. I don't know.

JF: Your father though had experiences with Ghoya.

HB: Yeah, yeah but he had a lengthy pass but he didn't have to go there everyday.

JF: Ok.

HB: You know, he had a lengthy pass to go to his place of employment.

JF: By and large, when you were working in the jewelry store, you were inside the restricted area.

HB: Yeah, yeah inside, that was right. All the shops, all the refugee shops, I mean you had a provision store, you had a leather goods store, you had--we had pretty well self-sufficient stores. I mean, you know they were all refugees, and I met a lady downstairs and by coincidence, I knew their, her parents had a leather goods store next to the jewelry store. I met them in Santa Monica. I'd never met this lady. She's about ten years younger than I am. A shudder came to me and I stayed over at their house in Santa Monica by coincidence because I met them in a bus. I was taking, I had three days off from my work, you know, and I intended to go to the beach by myself and do a little strolling, walking down the beach, and I ended up in Santa Monica with her parents, and I stayed overnight there, never did do the beach.

JF: Too much to talk about.

HB: Too much, yeah real bad. They had a button store in Santa Monica.

JF: Now when you talk about this exhilaration when the war ended, when you saw the American troops...

HB: Yeah. Well, the American, well the American troops I seen later on, fewer maybe a few. First the Chinese troops came in, the Nationalists, the Chinese troops came in, occupied Shanghai.

JF: And what was that like?

HB: They were poor looking soldiers with straw boots and straw, I don't know how in the world they survived on the battlefield, very poor equipped soldiers, World War II, World War I cannons. All the Japanese had World War I cannons too. Then later on,

little by little, the Navy came in and the Armed Forces came in. Then of course my dad did work for the Armed Forces as a carpenter, I think it was.

JF: And that might be where he got the American money, you said...

HB: Yeah, it could be, could be, yeah.

JF: The experience after the war in terms of deciding or trying to make plans to leave, do you recall that?

HB: Yeah, sure. Well, we went through HIAS, and HIAS, my dad was lucky because he had the German quota. At that time they go, went by quota systems. I guess they still do today, I imagine. And people from Austria, they were not so lucky. They had to seek refuge, I mean they had to seek other places to go, because the United States would not take any people from Austria. See, my cousin that was married in Shanghai, her husband was Austrian, so he couldn't come to the United States. So he went to Australia, Australia. Now my cousin, her brother, came to the United States.

JF: Your friend, the cousin who you...

HB: My cousin, the her.

JF: The male cousin...

HB: Male cousin.

JF: ...That you were good friends with.

HB: Yeah.

JF: Yes.

HB: Yeah, he came. Now he joined the *yeshiva*. I mean he was in the *yeshiva* and the whole, the complete *yeshiva* went to Canada first, and then they came to the United States.

JF: This is the *Mir Yeshiva*?

HB: The *Mir Yeshiva*. I'll tell you another, that was a remarkable story. Just take this scenario, the *Mir Yeshiva*, they were ready to leave Shanghai. They were on the boat and the rest of the secular people, I mean the, oh there were a lot of these from the *cheder*, the teachers from the *cheder* and the Lubavitchers, a lot of the Lubavitcher people were, there were a mixture of the Lubavitcher and the Lubliner people. See they never starved, these Lubliners, the Lubavitcher.

JF: How did you understand that they didn't starve?

HB: Because I was there. I mean I did...

JF: You just, you observed them.

HB: They had, they were observed, yeah, because I went.

JF: You watched them?

HB: I ate with them. I dined with them. I...

JF: How do you understand that that...

HB: Well, the thing, the only thing that the Rus--Orthodox Russian Jews support them, and that's the only solution I have. If you become religious, you were pretty well

off. If you remained unobservant, you were losers, so to speak. I, it sounds not too fair that way but...

JF: So when you talk about the Lubliners, you're talking about the *yeshiva*...

HB: There were just a handful of them.

JF: ...from the big *yeshiva* in Lublin.

HB: Yeah, yeah. Right. Well, they came from there years ago...

JF: Originally.

HB: Also the Lubavitch, some of the Lubavitch, they came from, they were from Lithuania also. I think that's where the Lubavitch came from originally. Mir, Mir were more modern Orthodox. They were not *chasidims*, they were called *misnageds*.

JF: The *misnagdim*.

HB: The *misnagdim* [also called *Mitnagdim*; opponents of the *chasidim*].

JF: Yeah.

HB: So, but they were, of course, religious. See they were more maybe learned, or they took their studies very seriously, whereas the *chasidims* and the Lubavitcher were more of the spiritual--dance a lot, sang a lot. I don't say that about, they're very, I'm sure they're very--studious. I mean they know about--but, anyway, I was trying to get away from it. See, I joined Toastmasters, and that's when I--my father's good for one story, go to the middle, and then go back to the first one. So take, so here were the people from the *Mir Yeshiva* up there, my cousin was there. And here, we were the rest of us. Now can you picture this turmoil on this wharf, you know, people you know, rickshaws, and what have you. We started out to sing *Ani Ma'amin*.<sup>5</sup> *Yim Kol ze Ani Ma'amin*. is the song. Ever heard of it?

JF: *Ani Ma'amin*?

HB: *Ani Ma'min*, you could have hear a pin drop. Like a miracle! You could've hear a pin drop. They started it, we started it. That was something else. So that was one of these highlights of Shanghai that I never will forget. You know the one where they raised the American flag, and singing *Ani Ma'amin* to the parting *yeshiva*.

JF: Now this--The *Mir Yeshiva* left before you did?

HB: Yeah, before, yeah. They left maybe a year before we did.

JF: When did you leave?

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<sup>5</sup>*Ani Ma'amin* -This Hebrew song, written in the twelfth century, is by Rabbi Moses Ben Maimon, also known as Maimonides, who was a great religious philosopher. His Talmudic Psalm Number Twelve from *The Articles of Faith* entitled "Ani Ma'amin" (I Believe) was later sung by many Jews during the Holocaust, even as they entered the gas chambers. Maimonides' descendants clung to his words for hope for the future and for humankind.

Yiddish

Ani Ma'amin

Be'emunah Sh'lema

Be'viyat Hamashiach.

V'af al pi, she'yitma-me-ah,

English

I believe, with a complete belief,  
in the coming of the Messiah.

And even though he may tarry,

I will await him, each and every day.

HB: 1947.

JF: And you came...

HB: Then we went to Minnesota.

JF: You came directly...

HB: Oh no, not directly but we [unclear] to San Francisco, see that's...

JF: You were able to go to the United States in 1947.

HB: Right, yeah. So my, yeah that's another thing. My first experience in, my first luxury, there was no luxury in Shanghai, by no means. But my first luxury, cause we had to--for one thing, you could not drink water from the faucet. You had to drink water, you had to boil it first. It was cheaper to buy boiled water from the vendor, than boiling water yourself. Gas was too expensive then. I never recalled doing, although we had gas, we never used the gas. We used the charcoals. That's the only way of, cheapest way of doing. So anyway, the first, so the first luxury I had, when we went on this ship called, former troop transporter, Marine Adder, I hit the water fountain and drank from the water fountain. To me that was the biggest luxury in life. Just to, we went back and forth. Milk, same thing with milk, you know. I came to San Francisco, I remember we bought milk from the store, you know, get milk from the store, in the refrigerator. Now I don't drink enough milk. I don't drink enough water. But the things we take for granted, oh.

JF: During that time, did you have any information about what was going on in Europe?

HB: Yeah, after the war, of course. We had a special...

JF: No, during the war.

HB: No, not during the war. I had no conception...

JF: You had no idea what was going on?

HB: No conception. No conception, no.

JF: ... going on with Hitler or...

HB: The concentration camps.

JF: ...the camps...

HB: Not to my knowledge. Maybe my parents knew, but not to my knowledge.

JF: It wasn't discussed.

HB: It wasn't discussed, no. I don't think the news were, it was only in the Japanese Theater. There was not too much of a, well, sure there was news of Europe, but never, I don't think there was, maybe somebody remembered here, but I sure didn't. See I did my thing. I went to *cheder*. I went to this and I worked in this jewelry store...

JF: And that was it.

HB: That was it.

JF: Yeah.

HB: And you know, we did *davening* [saying prayers] three times a day. That was another little--this fellow was *shomer Shabbat* [Sabbath observant], you know, Mr. Brenner, he was owner of the jewelry store, and so he was a little bit of a hypocrite, and

here comes one of these rabbis from, I don't know whether he was a Lubavitcher, or he was and he bought something from me. And it was late in the afternoon and he asked me--he used to call me Herschel, you know, can you speak Yiddish? And he said in Yiddish, "*Herschel du hast shon gedavent Mincha?* [Have you said the afternoon prayer?] I said, no, I didn't. He said, "Oh take your eyes off and *daven Mincha.*" I know just to make me...

JF: To go, to *daven* and...

HB: *Mincha* in the afternoon, to show this fellow that he was strict with this; he never cared about every day. He cared less whether I did *Mincha* every day, you know, who cares, but just because he was standing there buying some, intending to buy some merchandise.

JF: I see.

HB: He was standing to the other room...

JF: So you did speak Yiddish?

HB: Yeah, that's how we learned in *cheder*, in *yeshiva*.

JF: You didn't, not from Germany.

HB: Not from Germany, oh no, no.

JF: And your family did not speak Yiddish.

HB: No, no of course not.

JF: But the *yeshiva*...

HB: The *yeshiva*, that's how we learned. It was humorous to see some, well some students when they have to give a lecture or you know, an essay of some sort, a lecture of some kind, of what we learned, we spoke in a very High German. Some people could not adapt to the Yiddish. It was, we were laughing at them, because we were, we were speaking with High German. But like I said, I did have a grand time there, all through the years. I never had any regrets, never. I wish I could go back sometimes, you know. A lot of people went back there, too, but it was one of my best years, without reservations.

JF: What do you think about that, affected the rest of your life?

HB: The rest of my life? Being, well there was always a rub-off of Judaism. I was thankful. And indirectly, which I didn't mention before, indirectly I have to thank Mr. Sugihara for my higher learning in Judaism, because due to him the *Mir Yeshiva* came to the, came to, well, they went to Kobe, then they went to, I have his book by the way. I bought his book. His son is lecturing all over the United States.

JF: Yes.

HB: And...

JF: So thanks to Sugihara, you got the Jewish education that you got.

HB: A real Jewish education. A real Jewish education. And they were pushing, these people were pushing me toward this education, you know, and despite the Russian Jews were, you know, religious people. Rabbi, Chief Rabbi was Russian. He was Rabbi Ashkenazi. He was this chief Rabbi, and so, but you know, but they did not mix too much

in this, in the ghetto, the ghetto area. But, you know--but it was through them, it's obvious, *Mir Yeshiva* was there.

JF: This was the most significant piece...

HB: The most significant, yeah. I would say the most significant aspect of, that's why I am a cantor now. I'm a cantor in Sun City, California.

JF: So you studied here, or you...

HB: No, I said, I remember, I remember...

JF: ...was from your learning there...

HB: Yeah, I to conduct services there, I primarily learned from Shanghai. Now there are certain prayers that as a matter of fact, when I was hired, so to speak, I was working, and then I did this part-time. I went down to Fairfax Avenue, you know where that is in Los Angeles? I bought a training, cantorial training records.

JF: Ok [chuckle].

HB: That was 22 years ago, and I'm there 22 years in that Congregation. And I don't have any [unclear] so I made a tape, on 78 records I made it, you know, cassette tapes, and then it came back more or less. I had the biggest, the scariest part was the *Kol Nidre*. I want to have it, make it perfect, you know. So I even took Perry Como's rendition of *Kol Nidre*, that's a pretty good rendition and, actually I took it between him and between another cantor on that record, so, I did ok.

JF: Is there anything else you would like to add, before we stop?

HB: Well, I never had any remorse being there. To me, it was an exciting time and it was, we had, it was, I only can't speak for my parents, they're the ones that lived in anxiety, didn't know about the results of this, hadn't even heard of this doctor so called, Meisinger that came, and from the Butcher of Warsaw, wasn't it, and tried to annihilate us. But the bottom line, the biggest irony is--you couldn't say that the Japanese rule was an antisemitic rule, because the simple reason, the Russian Jews lived outside the ghetto, like free people. The Iraqi Jews were in turn like with the rest of the internees and were treated the same way, not as Jews. So we were the so-called stateless refugees, which were primarily Jews. In order, in my evaluation, in order to pacify the Germans, the Japanese had to do something. Remember the *Fiddler on the Roof*, in order to pacify the Czar they made this disturbance during the wedding. The same thing. And so I never, I myself never had any animosity against the Japanese. Now my cousin that lived here in Philadelphia, they wouldn't even, I don't think now, I don't know how the attitude changed, but they wouldn't buy a Japanese car. People had bad experiences with some Japanese people and so is war, I mean, you know. The Marines did bad things to the Japanese, too, I mean, but again, I mean, there is no comparison. The Bataan march, I mean the atrocities that they did. I seen atrocities against the Chinese, when I was there before the war, before the, no, before the American war.

JF: You saw this?

HB: Yeah, you know they hit the Chinese, [unclear] you know, then we had these, I don't know whether I mentioned this already or not, we had a French *gendarme*, and a Japanese *gendarme*, and an American soldier, and a British soldier guarding the guard bridge, and, of course, the Chinese, when they crossed over, they had to bow to the Japanese, and in case they didn't bow then they would butt the rifles. I've seen that, so they treated the Chinese very badly, you know. That's the only time I, but I didn't see severe atrocities, and beggars, that was a common sight. And a common sight during the wintertime, not our people, but the refugees and the Chinese used to pick them up like a garbage collector on a pitch fork, I've seen that. That's the only thing that kind of...

JF: That stays in your mind...

HB: Stays in your, in my mind, the... [tape two, side two ended]

*Tape three, side one:*

JF: This is Tape three, Side one, of an interview with Mr. Herbert Broh.

HB: I said that--I started to say what I've learned and what my reaction was living in China, if there was any aftereffects, did it affect me in later years? No, it didn't, but I've learned lessons, many lessons. One lesson I mentioned is that human life was, there was no value in human life, primarily among the Chinese people in those days and...

JF: You mean the, when you said there was no value, you mean this is how the Japanese perceived it or the Chinese?

HB: Well, among themselves even, among the Chinese themselves there was no, the Japanese had at least made it mandatory that the Chinese were inoculated in order to, not to spread disease, but the Chinese would never had done that, and so--survival was, of Chinese beggars, the ones that couldn't make it, survival was on the minimum, and of things that is in my mind again, is that the starving Chinese people were, especially among the beggars, they died on the street and they--even the people that were not beggars, had the infants, they wrapped them around and let them freeze to death, or maybe they were dead already in their straw mats, and I've seen that, and I could not, well I could not figure out why, and at the end of a week or so, then a truck came and they had pitchforks. They picked up those corpses like garbage cans, I mean like garbage collectors. Now that sticks in my mind, yes, but it did not affect me per se.

JF: But it's something that you remembered.

HB: Something I, something that I remember. Of course, the primitive living that we lived during the time, I remember, when we did not have all the luxury we had in our first house, of course. But again, we survived that. It was no problem.

JF: You mentioned before about Mr. Meisinger...

HB: Yeah, I had no inkling about that until after the war.

JF: What was your understanding of what that was all about? How do you understand? How did you understand it at the time?

HB: Well, that was already after the war and you know, because I guess he was, according to the paper then, they described all the Treblinka camps, and they had a whole series in our local paper and all, and I could not believe that the Japanese would do that, would annihilate the Jewish population, including the Russian Jews.

JF: When you were aware when he came to Shanghai?

HB: I was not aware, no.

JF: Ok.

HB: I was not aware.

JF: So were you aware that there was some talk about whether or not there was a plan?

HB: Nah ah, no I have, until after the war I've learned it. I learned it after the war.



JF: And...

HB: As a matter of fact, I did not learn it after I came to the United States.

JF: And when you learned it, how was it described to you? Was it described as an actual plan to annihilate the Jews in Shanghai...

HB: That's right. That's right.

JF: Or that it was a hoax?

HB: No, no. I thought it was a hoax, but they were, the rumors were, I don't know, I cannot confirm that, that they were starting to build already preparation for a concentration camp.

JF: This is what you heard?

HB: That's what I heard, yeah. I cannot confirm or deny either that they was starting to, and then miraculously the, I guess the atom bomb was bombed and the war was over. Now...

JF: And then in the concentration camp was to be a death camp or...

HB: A death camp, yeah.

JF: It was to be a death camp?

HB: It was supposed to be a death camp, yeah.

JF: So your understanding of it, was that there was an actual plan.

HB: A plan, exactly. But, not I learned, not until even I came to the States and it wasn't, wasn't even discussed at Shanghai, some reason or another.

JF: You don't think your parents were aware of it or it was...

HB: I don't know. I really don't know. I don't know. I never was discussed. It never, I just heard it from other people.

JF: And then what stopped it was the fact that the war ended.

HB: That the war ended, yeah.

JF: Ok.

HB: Now, I talked to a Russian woman here that came to this reunion, and she says that the plan was to annihilate all Jews, and, you know, and due to the atom bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima, she was saved. I mean her life was saved. I still kind of, I'm still in disbelief that this would have had happened, because my conception of the Japanese was that they respected religion because they, did you ever hear of the Amshenower<sup>6</sup> Rebbe? He was, well, I guess, the Amshenower, he was from the town of Amshinov<sup>7</sup> somewhere in Poland or Lithuania. He had a beard. He looked like Peter, I mean, he like Moses himself. He could live outside the perimeter of the ghetto. He had his own, his own horse and wagon.

JF: Now was he, was he a refugee?

HB: He was a refugee like everyone else, but they respected him so much and he was respected by others, too. He was almost like a saint, like a miracle worker, almost

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<sup>6</sup>Amshenower Rebbe - Rabbi Shimon Kalish.

<sup>7</sup>Amshinov, also spelled Mszczonow.

like the Rabbi Schneersohn here. That's why, how he was. And I know some people think that Rabbi Schneersohn is probably the Messiah, but that--anyway, I don't want to say...

JF: But this particular rebbe from the town of--can you spell the town?

HB: I only know that his, I cannot even spell it. It's Abarron, Abba [phonetic], I just said it, Abrumshike [phonetic]. Oh G-d, I can't even spell it. Abrumpshike [phonetic] whatever, Abrumpshire, Abrumpshire... [phonetic]

JF: Ok, but he...

HB: ...something like that...

JF: He was that special?

HB: You go back to the tape, I probably said it very clearly. But he was, yeah he was, right. And as a matter of fact he was blessed. He, my cousin that became a rabbi, was blessed by him. I remember being, visiting us in that Ohel Moshe Synagogue.

JF: Yeah.

HB: Yeah.

JF: Now when you came to the United States...

HB: Yeah.

JF: ...You did not stay with the watch repair work...

HB: I did, I went, I worked for Jewel--Goodman Jewelers and tried to re-establish my, but I hated every minute of it. Then I went to University of Minnesota for a year, and then I dropped that. Then finally I came, I was married there in Minnesota and went to, came to the United States. I came to...

JF: LA?

HB: ...Riverside, California, and then I worked for a company for 40 years in Quality Control. I liked this job, and then I acquired this job as a cantor 22 years ago. That's so, I'm still doing it and, by the way, you know, when we were sponsored, the way we came to the United States, we were sponsored by a pretend cousin of ours.

JF: Ah!

HB: I don't know if you know that. If you are aware of that.

JF: A pretend cousin?

HB: A pretend cousin. In other words, a cousin, I forgot his name, but his family lived in Cleveland and supposed to be improvised cousin of ours sponsored...

JF: Did you know...

HB: Yeah, no.

JF: You knew of them.

HB: They were strangers, but you, in other words, the stipulation, the conditions was that we were not supposed to be in touch with. In other words, they were sponsoring us, and that was it. It was a pretend cousin in order, to quicker, to sponsor to come to the United States.

JF: Who organized that?

HB: The HIAS.

JF: This was through HIAS. Ok. And they were getting backers, anonymous backers...

HB: Backers, yeah, anonymous backers, yeah, right.

JF: Basically, so you never...

HB: But I thought they told us not to come in contact with them.

JF: And did you?

HB: No, we didn't. We never had any reason to, any reason to.

JF: Ok. Is there anything else that you want to add at this time?

HB: Well, I can't think of anything except the emotional aspect that I experienced in Shanghai, like I told you about, and I'd like to visit Shanghai sometime again. I, well I have a little, I have friends, Chinese people now, that they are almost *mish-poche* [family] with me. I'll tell you why. Met them in this, met them here, and I have a friend, my friend--I have a friend that I live with. She always wanted these--let's put it this way, she was a friend of the family, and I am staying with her now. Since I had heart surgery, I'm staying with her, and she had a graduate student, that she rents out a room for a graduate student. She lives right close by the University of California, of Southern, University of Riverside, Cali--Southern California, Riverside, U-C-R, and this Chinese, it happened to be a Chinese girl, and she was born in Shanghai, and she, her parents are still in Shanghai, and she graduated, and she, so there was a common bond between her and I. We talked about streets and so on, and, unfortunately why I never learned to speak Chinese. When I was in the Korean war, I would have had it made if I would have known Chinese.

JF: Oh.

HB: Because I would have been an interpreter then. But unfortunately I never adopted that language, because we didn't need to. We had our own language.

JF: You learned Yiddish. [laughter]

HB: Between Yiddish, between Yiddish, German and English, you know. So [laughter], anyway, so she fell in love with a fellow from Taiwan, very unique, and they were married. They have two kids now, and we were so-called, this lady and I, we were her adopted parents, so to speak. On her wedding, we were invited to her wedding in Fremont, California. So I, she asked me if I wanted to be the entertainer, because I play the musical saw. This is carpenter saw, and I play on my harmonica. [laughter] So I did, and I--they want to hire somebody else, a fiddler or somebody, and then they, she heard me and she went, "Hey Herb, why don't you do this?" So I did and I [unclear]. So I do double-talk, and I said would they be offended if I would double talk Chinese, you know in a satire way. So she said no, no, no, and the master of ceremony, who was her friend, I asked the same question and she said, no, go ahead. So I did and what I've learned about China and Shanghai and so on, so forth. And I played some, I played a tune, a Chinese tune which I had no idea what I was playing because I just adopted the hearing, you know the sound, and would you believe that people, old-timers, were humming that tune. I had no idea what I was playing.

JF: But it stayed with you?

HB: It stayed with me, yeah. So, anyway, I saw that there were not [unclear] this on their wedding. He was, her husband worked for pharmaceutical. He also went to UCR, and he works in statistics, a very good job for the pharmaceutical company. So anyway, so they have, so they had a child. They have two children now, and they called me Poppy, that child, and they called my friend Bubby, so, and anyhow, they, one of these days, I might marry this woman and who knows, you know, and now they have another child, and we are so close, so close. So when, if I go to Shanghai, before, oh, she wanted to bring her parents to this country and she is, you know, she still wants to. But I like to go there when they are still living in Shanghai. I mean I have a good place to go, and they want, they had some pictures I want to show you. They have some pictures that they took presently of Hongkew.

JF: That would be a wonderful way for you to go back? Wouldn't it? Yes.

HB: Yeah, it would be. Before they would come to this country, you know. So that's--and I have, remarkably, we have so many Chinese--their friends, and it's coincidental that she prefers, that she had an American student now, but she prefers Asians. Why? Because they are just like family, because they don't have anybody here, and they are just like family, and all the Asians that she had in her rental, they all contact, they e-mail to her and everything. They still contact with her. That's beautiful, so anyway it, China gave me a good optimistic, a good, not optimistic, but a good attitude and a good, not an adversity, by no means. We've seen a lot of anguish, a lot of things that stay with you, of course, but personally I never regretted it and I would do it over again.

JF: Mr. Broh, thank you.

HB: Oh, you're welcome. I...

JF: So much...

HB: I sometimes, I can't think. You know, you want to say things that I can't express...

JF: You have said a great deal, and I thank you.

HB: Oh, you're welcome. Thank you.

JF: This is an additional memory that Mr. Broh would like to add to his testimony.

HB: While I wanted to show Josey Fisher some Shanghai pictures, I came across a picture of my mother here, that, when she was working, and I forgot to mention this in the tapes. She was working all through the war years for the kindergarten, used to be the Komor<sup>8</sup> kindergarten. I think Komor, I don't know, is he related to the Kadoories or the Sassoon family somewhere?

JF: No, he worked with them, but he was separate.

HB: Oh, oh, he was separate. Was he Iraqi also? Was he an Iraqi Jew? Was he...

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<sup>8</sup>Paul Komor was a Shanghai businessman of Hungarian origin.

JF: No, I don't believe he was.

HB: I don't remember. I don't remember but anyhow it was Komor.

JF: K-O-M-O-R, I believe.

HB: K-O-M-O-R, yeah, and it's kindergarten, and as I can see, there are some ruins in the background, which was the ruins from the 1937 war with Japan, and this particular kindergarten was rebuilt. It was in the backyard of the, I use to hang around there quite a few times, and this picture is with the staff. And this is my mother. This here is my mother. She was a cook in this kinder, in that particular kindergarten.

JF: Now she was able to do this throughout the time...

HB: Throughout the war years, yes, yes.

JF: Because this...

HB: Just like the Kadoorie School existed during the war years, which, of course, all the English teachers, all the were British subjects, whoever can recall to...

JF: Because it was outside the ghetto?

HB: No, no, well, yeah, but no. But this, no, that was within the ghetto.

JF: It was within the ghetto but it still functioned during the war.

HB: It still functioned, yeah. But no, the Kadoorie School, now there was some contradicting statements that was made yesterday. Now, I'm not sure if the bungalows I mentioned in the tape were built after the proclamation. I think, I think now, as I vaguely remember, because the original Kadoorie School was in a big building, like any other school, any other high school, and I'm pretty sure we could, the continuation, the continuancy, I guess, of the Kadoorie School was that they build these bungalows, within the area, within the, because somebody said, "No the Kadoorie School was outside the perimeter of the ghetto. Then I said, "No, the Kadoorie School was within." So I must have gone to the Kadoorie School before they built--funny, I do not remember that too well. I only remember the bungalows.

JF: But it was the same school that you had gone to?

HB: The same school, exactly, exactly, the same school.

JF: The same school that you had gone to before you had to move into the...

HB: To move.

JF: ...restricted area.

HB: Yeah, yeah, right, right.

JF: But both, the Komor School...

HB: So the same [unclear] this kindergarten existed, but that happened to be within the district anyway.

JF: Right.

HB: And yeah, so that existed.

JF: Wonderful. Ok, thank you.

HB: You're welcome.

JF: Mr. Broh is going to describe one more photograph for us.

HB: This photograph that was sent by friends that I have in Shanghai, they're Chinese, and they photographed this memorial and there was, there's an inscription here, in Chinese, and in English, and in Hebrew.

JF: And this was erected by...

HB: By the Chinese government.

JF: By the Chinese government.

HB: And the description states, it's a [unclear] so I am going to try to, the best I can. "The designated area for stateless refugees from 1937 to 1941. Thousands of Jews came to Shanghai, fleeing from Nazi persecution and Japan. Japanese Occupation authorities regarded them as stateless refugees and set up this designated area to restrict their residence and business. The designated area was bordered on the west by Gonch Koping [phonetic] Road. It says here G, it's a probably they changed the name, Kungpin Road on the east side of Topching [phonetic] Road and to the south of Hunning [phonetic] Road and the north by the Zuet-si [phonetic] Road. I don't know, I hope I pronounced that. Hongkew District People, Government." That's what it says, Hongkew District Government.

JF: Thank you.

HB: You're welcome. [tape three ended]