

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

HARRY METHNER

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Gerry Schneeberg
Date: October 15 and 17, 1999

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HM - Harry Methner [interviewee]

GS - Gerry Schneeberg [interviewer]

Date: October 15 and 17, 1999

Tape one, side one:

HM: ...in Berlin on July 21, 1922 and my name is Harry Methner.

GS: This is tape one, side one of an interview conducted by Gerry Schneeberg with Harry Methner, and this is October 15, 1999. Mr. Methner, can you tell me when and where you were born and something about your family?

HM: I was born on July 21, 1922 in Berlin, Germany, and I was the first born of a Jewish couple that had married in 1921 after my dad had returned from the First World War, as a POW of the French forces in Romania. His term of service lasted until 1920. And I have one brother. My dad by profession was a cook. My mom by profession was a housewife. They were childhood sweethearts, both of them coming from a very prolific family, on father's side 11 siblings, on mother's side 10 siblings, and the original place of birth for these people was a Polish corridor near Frankfurt on the Oder River. This part of the country that was deeded to Poland in the Versailles Treaty and because of that they acquired in 1924 a Polish country quota which made it nearly impossible to get to the United States which was one of the desires that they had when Hitler came to power in 1933.

GS: Excuse me. When did your parents first think of emigrating, of wanting to leave Germany?

HM: 1933, I had a cousin, a son of a sister of my dad's who worked for RCA, Radio Corporation of America, and I remember-- I was 11 years old then-- that that young man urged my dad to leave Germany and when the quota question came up that was near impossible to break. That cousin of mine was also born in Berlin. He has perished, he perished in 1941, with a family.

GS: Can you...

HM: He didn't go quite far enough away from place of birth.

GS: Can you tell me something about your early life?

HM: I went to public school. I finished public school at age 16 in 1938 and the last six months before our departure on December 26, 1938, I was very active with my, in my parent's store because further schooling for me was prohibited by the new laws that the Nazi regime had empowered. Because dad was a pow in the First World War on the German side, I had at least the, shall I say, the pleasure of graduating from what is the equivalent of American high school at age 16, wanting to go to a junior college and then to a regular college, which never came about. Dad had a, by profession a cook, he worked into a four store chain and became a well-known butcher and sausage manufacturer in the city of Berlin and when he...

GS: Excuse me. Did you say that he also had a store when you were living in Poland?

HM: We were, we never living in Poland. I was born and he was...

GS: In this Corridor.

HM: He was born in the Corridor and the family moved, the grandparents moved in 1901 or 1902 from the Polish Corridor to Berlin...

GS: Right.

HM: ...and established a poultry business which is chicken, geese, ducks. An uncle of mine raised pigeons or squab as a delicacy. It was a well-to-do business; they had an outlet on the Berlin city market. In fact, my mother's parents also had an outlet but my father's parents were supplying my mother's parents with [chuckle] merchandise. Well this was going way, way back, talking 1910, 1915...

GS: So both, both families...

HM: [unclear]

GS: ...had the...

HM: ...had poultry stores?

GS: ...poultry stores that were big poultry...

HM: Poultry stores on a city market...

GS: Right.

HM: Was not a store; was a stall, open air.

GS: Right.

HM: No refrigeration, [unclear] [chuckle] very, very primitive, ancient by today's standards.

GS: But it provided...

HM: It provided...

GS: ...some...

HM: Yes. My grandfather was also the head *shamas* at a, at the largest temple in the center of Berlin. No one else [telephone ring, tape interrupted] [unclear] ...

GS: Your grandfather was the *shamas*...

HM: At the *shul* called Heide-reutergasse...

GS: Would you spell it for me?

HM: H-E-I-D-E...

GS: Right.

HM: ...R-E-U-T-E-R-G-A-Double S-E and that's an English spelling of, of a German word.

GS: I know transliteration, the best we can do.

HM: Okay.

GS: All right, were your parents religiously observant? Did they...

HM: My father brought home 10 dollars since age six from singing in the choir and all functions of a *shul* that my, his father, that started in East Berlin, and had a pretty

good voice which I inherited, and I also was a cantor, functioning in China after having had a four years of voice training.

GS: We're going to get to that.

HM: All right.

GS: But this earlier period your father sang in the *shul*, your parents attended, I assume.

HM: Both houses were *glatt* kosher...

GS: Certainly an observant family.

HM: With Sabbath observance and all the trimmings. Passover dishes separately, the whole bit.

GS: Aside from the religious affiliation was there any connection with any other Jewish organization, any Zionist activity or other Jewish...

HM: Yes, my...

GS: ...activity?

HM: My teen years, my teen years were as a competition to the Brown Shirts of the Nazis. The Berlin Youth Organization of the Family Services equivalent that we had in Germany promoted Zionism very much, and we were wearing white shirts with blue ties, and I was very active in that movement which also led to some clashes with the Nazis, normally now called in today's genre, gang fights.

GS: And what was this group, that you were part of?

HM: It was a, it was just a bunch of people that wanted eventually to create under Herzl's star a Jewish state as a [unclear].

GS: So it was Zionists, Zionists youth group?

HM: Definitely a Zionists youth group.

GS: And did it have a specific name?

HM: I couldn't recall a name.

GS: All right.

HM: It was very, very short time.

GS: Right.

HM: [unclear] for me, at age 16.

GS: When you were a teenager.

HM: Yeah.

GS: 16. All right, now you went to school in Berlin, I assume?

HM: I finished high school in Berlin, grade school and high school.

GS: Right.

HM: With a full equivalent of 10 and ½ years.

GS: Right. And when, can you recall when you were first aware of the threat from fascism, the Nazi movement?

HM: Yes, I remember distinctly the very first indication was. We had a, when I say we, my dad had a sausage manufacturing facility which had a five people creating hot

dogs as a sample and all kinds of other fancy sausages. The foreman or the crew chief of that group had a 12-year-old son who at one time came home and told his dad, "Dad, you got to quit working for the Jew or else I cannot be promoted in the Brown Shirt, Hitler Youth," equivalent of a boy scout and maybe get a medal for his achievements as long as his father was working for a Jew. And I believe this to be 1937, maybe the summer of 1937, about 15 months before we actually left.

GS: So it's the first time that this came...

HM: That, that-- well, I, I had an awareness where the father, I think, told his son that he was making a damn good living and he wasn't about to quit the job because he, as a teenager, was telling his old man what to do; and I believe that the, that discussion was relayed to my father in my presence while we worked.

GS: Right.

HM: All right. So and that was one of the first indications, that I recall, that my dad seriously considered to do something.

GS: Before that, after the Nuremberg laws of '35, do you recall what impact that had on...

HM: On me?

GS: On you and your family life?

HM: I wouldn't say, I was 13 then, and at 13, I was very much involved with my Bar Mitzvah...

GS: Of course.

HM: ...which was a preoccupation. And I, at a, sorry...

GS: It didn't actually affect you personally.

HM: No, no, no...

GS: Right.

HM: I only know, I only know or recall that in the German public school system, religion was taught as part of the curriculum and we were only three in my grade class. There were Jewish people in 1937 that still had...

GS: Instruction?

HM: ...tutoring from a separate teacher would come in the afternoon just before quitting time, the last session of the day.

GS: So that continued in or through '37?

HM: Yes. In '37, I remember that, '38 no more but '37.

GS: Right. Now '38, after *Kristallnacht*...

HM: Yes.

GS: Now, how was your family affected?

HM: Well, because of my activity with the Jewish Zionist organization, my dad had a tremendous reputation with the local police department, and the decision was made in the spring of 1938 to close the stores, and consider emigration at a faster pace than we did in 1937 for sure. And then when the store was closed, I believe in the

summer of 1938, just at vacation time, around July 1st, the policeman came to my dad and said that my name was on a quote, unquote, blacklist and he was just coming by to apprise my dad of that factor and act accordingly. He didn't say we should leave, he didn't say the store is closed, that you don't have to worry. He didn't say anything at all, he just talked to my dad and as friendly acquaintance seemed he had the beat in front of the store at the time it was still open, and the store was closed all during the summer. So when *Kristallnacht* happened, the store was closed, yet all the windows and anything that was in the store like the display cases and the butcher blocks, those were all damaged extensively. That was a rented store. We lived in a multi-family complex above. The store was at ground level, I think we lived on the third floor, and on the night of *Kristallnacht*, again, we were, the same policeman apprised my dad not to be home that evening, and we all went to my grandfather's on mother's side, about I would say 20 blocks away, and we spent the night there. Grandfather was 80, was the only male in the house normally. My grandmother had passed away earlier, and he had three daughters with him in that place and nobody rang any doorbells that evening to look for, they were after males mainly, and at *Kristallnacht*. And the males were my dad, myself, and my brother, younger brother, the-- were not bothered.

GS: I'm curious, you said the store was closed in the spring.

HM: In July.

GS: In July, from that period until *Kristallnacht* for several months...

HM: Yes.

GS: ...it must have been difficult for your family without the income from this business. How did you manage, how did they manage?

HM: Well, that is part of the deal why we were still there. The kosher laws were very restrictive in Germany in total, and the easiest place to get any kosher product or even what they called then, a new kosher product which was a, it's still a ritual killing but the animal is stunned before the knife is attached to the throat, and they passed that and they let, they permitted that, but even in the country itself, be it the Rhine, or be it Bavaria, or be it Thuringia or be it the east part of Germany, you couldn't get any meat so in 1937, 1936, '37 and the first part of 1938, my dad had a tremendously flourishing business trying to supply by overnight mail, express mail, a meat product that was, under the new kosher fashion available to the people. It was the only meat these people had, and my dad did, the income tax for 1936 and 1937 was astronomical. It was so high that he had contemplated-- now my dad is born 19-, in 1895 so make it five, plus 35, plus 37, 42 years old and he contemplated to retire at age 55 as a multi-millionaire. It was just...

GS: So he had enough income accumulated...

HM: Oh, it was a tremendous amount of money...

GS: To carry you over that period...

HM: All above board, all above board money, all taxed money. In fact the jealousy of a non-Jewish butcher around the corner was such that this [unclear] fellow

tried to get the party, Nazi Party to cut the allowances of the meat available to my father because of his past practices, having required so much meat to go through the store because the mailings of a finished product that eventually the Party prevailed and my dad's allotment was cut to the point that we closed the store, that he couldn't do the shipping.

GS: That's what forced his closing?

HM: That was, that was right at the closing, with a tremendous cut in allowance of available product for my dad to process.

GS: Right. So at this point your family is seriously considering...

HM: Considering...

GS: Emigration. Right.

HM: Yes, and we did. One of the first things we did, was we booked a passage on a boat to go to Cuba and we went to the harbor in Bremen and we looked for the boat, only to find out that this particular boat was sunk in 1923 but tickets were readily available to go on another passage and there were no refunds.

GS: Right.

HM: So that money for a trip to Cuba was paid but never consumed.

GS: This was in '38?

HM: That was in '38, fall of '38. So we went back to Berlin. Our living quarters were still there. We stayed there, then we took the Shanghai route.

GS: Now how did you, how did you learn of the possibility to go to Shanghai?

HM: My, all right, I said there were a number of siblings on both sides. One of my mother's sisters had a husband who had been in a concentration camp and she moved anything possible to get him out of there. He came back after about 45 days and he went in the spring of '38 to Shanghai, and then of course and when we couldn't get to Cuba, now we couldn't get to Australia and we couldn't get to Chile and I, I think Argentina was contemplated, and all those places costs money but dad had plenty of money. What he didn't have was under-handed money, black money, that he could use to bribe somebody, that he did not have because all his money was legal money and it, actually it was a detriment because if we would have had some money that was not reported to the fiscal authorities in Germany at that time, we could have had a much better deal because we could of bribed somebody to get out. With the money that he had, he didn't dare do that because the paper trail was too obvious. It was very, very hard. It was very, very hard to be honest.

GS: So when was it that you actually...

HM: We left on the...

GS: ...went?

HM: ...second Christmas Day, December 26th with our full passage paid on a German luxury liner...

GS: Excuse me, you said 26, I think you mean 30?

HM: I'm sorry, December 26.

GS: December 26?

HM: Second day Christmas, December 26, 1938.

GS: '38, right. Did your family hope that they could move on from Shanghai, that this was just a temporary...

HM: Well, we never got to Shanghai...

GS: Oh.

HM: ...on that trip. When we arrived in Singapore, this was now I think near the 20th, the trip took a month. It took 30 days to get from Bremen, from Bremen Harbor through, to go through Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Southampton, it went around Gibraltar, it went up to Genoa, we went down to Naples, we went through Port Said, we went through Colombo, went through Bombay, we came to Singapore and someone came on board and was looking for a butcher. It was an Australian farmer who had a butchery and we were pulled off the boat. We left the boat, we were not pulled off the boat, we left the boat and we were in Singapore 90 days to the day. By that time, whatever my dad knew as a butcher the local help had copied, and there suddenly was no more need for my dad to be employed, so the Australian farmer said if your boat comes by here, you just continue your trip and then you will arrive in Shanghai a week later. It was unfortunate, if this would have been another 90 days, it would have been June 1939 and I would never sit here talking to you, because all white people in Singapore the day that Germany marched into Poland were evacuated to Australia. I would probably be now an Australian citizen, perfectly fluent in reading and writing, 18 years old, army material and probably counter-intelligence in the war when the British declared war against Germany. So again...

GS: It was just chance that this farmer came aboard asking...

HM: Yes, it was very chance that he came aboard. It was also the same chance that he let him go 30 days later, 90 days later, and we continue the trip to Shanghai.

GS: So then you arrived in Shanghai...

HM: We arrived in Shanghai...

GS: In '39.

HM: ...on April 19, 1939 if I remember that correctly, pretty close, April 19, 1939.

GS: What was your first impression?

HM: Horrible. One impression that remains very, very strongly is I lived in Shanghai for nine years, from '39 to '47. In nine years, I never had a bath; bathtubs are not known in Shanghai. I had a sponge rubdown with a pail of water. That was the size of the hygienic efforts; but there was no bathtub, there was no showers, there was no butter, eggs were a rarity, food, we went, we never lived in a camp because dad had enough money we could afford the rent of a very small apartment. We lived with a two pots, kitchen pots that had a hanger handle on it, which we marched to the soup kitchen twice a day to pick up food.

GS: Who ran that soup kitchen?

HM: The soup kitchen was run by the Jewish community. From what I understand is the Jewish community was financed by American philanthropy. At that time dollars were still an accepted mode of payment. Later on, when the size of the Jewish settlement got a bit larger, the Japanese did not want any American currency after '41 going among the Jewish population. So the money was then sent to Switzerland. The philanthropic money was sent to Switzerland, which in turn was returned as Chinese money to China. In other words, a money-laundering scheme that somebody had cooked up.

GS: Can we go back to '39? You were living then in Hongkew?

HM: I was living in Hongkew, we had a...

GS: From the time you first arrived?

HM: Yes.

GS: ...that's where you...

HM: And they, in a three room apartment.

GS: Do you have any recollection about that arrival? Did anyone meet you from the Jewish community?

HM: Yes, the Jewish community had people there to greet you and help you out. I'd like to regress a little bit more...

GS: Of course.

HM: On the trip from Bremerhaven to Amsterdam, Rotterdam, a Jewish committee came onboard, Dutch people, who were giving every Jewish person, I believe, the equivalent or the actual amount of about 100 Dutch guilders. When we got to Southampton, there was a Jewish committee that came onboard and I think we, each of us got five pounds or something like that, in British money. There was no money after that anymore either in Italy or in when we had hit Port Said. Those were the only assistance of money that we received. When you are well aboard of a luxury liner of Ger-, under the German flag, your board money was not available to you. So the only way that the maximum board money that my dad had to be spent during that trip was actually frozen but they did let us buy two expensive cameras in the gift shop, and when we arrived in China after the stay over in Singapore, those two cameras, I believe, had us for nearly two years. They were very expensive. They were a Nikon...

GS: So your father left Germany, he couldn't take any of his money with him?

HM: None of the funds were available to us. Because they were all frozen. As I say it was unfortunate that we didn't have any money stashed under the table. We did take along, on a separate shipment-- the knowledge of, shall I say leisure travel or emigration travel was very unknown to us. We were not informed for instance that there was "X" number of space available on the boat that we traveled on, so we could have taken some household belongings along. They were shipped on a freighter for which my dad also paid because that money was available for the purpose of emigration, and there

were 21 boxes who had been in Shanghai way before we got there because, first of all, the 90 day delay and then the apartment was cleaned out or at least liquidated and everything packed and shipped away and we stayed a few, a week or so in a hotel before the departure in Bremerhaven so when, one of the reasons why...

[Tape one, side one ended.]

Tape one, side two:

GS: This is tape one, side two of an interest, interview with Mr. Harry Methner, and we are continuing with his experiences in Shanghai as a teenage boy about his employment. Okay.

HM: I started to work as an assistant to a photographer who was taking pictures for identification purposes of the Japanese ghetto inhabitants. And I worked the darkroom, developing and making prints of these pictures and one of the things that the boss who came from Upper Silesia and Breslau had told me was that if he was absent and I was the only one there that I should take pictures of anyone who would come in and wanted some but not put a film in so that I wouldn't spoil that, and then when they would come back to pick up the pictures we would tell them that I had spoiled the film therefore they would take them over again even though there was never a picture taken of those individuals.

GS: [chuckle]

HM: So that was one of my first jobs, and I stayed with him for nearly two years. And by that time after that the *yeshivas* were domineering to the point that they wanted kosher food fresh, locally available and my father then started a stall on the public market, a repeat of his parents, I guess in 1902 or 5, somewhere around there. And we would get a shepherd and he would kill the animals, we would pluck the animals and take them to the stall the following morning and sell them to the *yeshiva* who had standing orders and any other one who wanted kosher, got kosher meat. We would then render fat and sell chicken fat rendered. We would take them apart, sell parts, portions and on and on, and that went on till, to '45. When in '45 the war was over and the atomic bomb asked for the surrender. I'd like to skip on that a moment but on July 23, two days after my 23rd birthday we had an attack by American P-51s and P-38s who were bombing, who were dropping single bombs through the entire ghetto because among our borders where our 15-18,000 people lived were ammunition factories and the American forces knew that, and they were trying to pinpoint the bombing to the point that only those places were being hit. It was not very successful, there were a number of casualties and I was in [unclear] young man was part of the first elite group, the sanitary people dressing wounds, getting them to the hospitals that were in the neighborhood all on a by-foot basis because we didn't have any vehicles to transport any, they had to be carried. So we, when my grandfather was buried on there, we carried his body for about two miles for eight, nine people to get him to the cemetery and then we lowered him into the grave. The grave was very shallow, only a foot and a half because of the ground water and there was cement slabs, one on the bottom, two on the side, put the coffin, put the body in, no coffin, dressed in a shroud, put another cement slab on top, put a little bit of dirt on top and that was a grave site.

GS: Your grandfather died of natural causes?

HM: Yes. My grandfather took three daughters and two sons, four daughters, including my mother from Berlin to Shanghai in the spring of '39 and as soon as he got there, within maybe six weeks, he caught the Chinese dysentery that he could not survive at age 80. The rabbi at the funeral mentioned that it was a perfect example of, of father saving his children rather than the children saving the father.

[Other voice in the room]: [unclear]

GS: Can you tell me anything about your health and the health of the other members of your immediate family? Were any of you seriously ill, were you ever treated by doctors, or did you have to go a hospital?

HM: We had a *Juden* and before I get to that I'd like to get to the youth organization.

GS: Yes.

HM: The Zionist youth organization called *Brith Noar Zioni* very prominently led by one of the youngest ordained rabbis of liberal cong- denomination, a name of Teichner, first name was If [phonetic] we had to [unclear]. He fired the troops up to the point, we were about 150 to 200 in that group and we had long meetings, big discussions, singing, *hora* dancing, ah-ha, with some dating there, too.

GS: An important part of the activities.

HM: Very much so, yes.

GS: Can I just ask you to repeat the name of the organization?

HM: [unclear] Brit- *Brith Noar Zioni*.

GS: Right.

HM: Noir...

GS: You.

HM: Zioni, Z-I-O-N-I.

GS: Yes.

HM: And the Rabbi's name was Teichner, T-E-I-C-H-N-E-R [Rabbi Willy Teichner]. And that is now I believe [unclear] 1940, '42, maybe early '43 memory.

GS: Right.

HM: When this was at the height and we had a cholera and dysentery epidemic again and this time he passed away, and we had a three-day vigil, people in my group who would guard the departed under candlelight. That's one of my, again more war experiences that I, something that I'll never forget. And then after that when the war was over, jumping forward and after the attack of the American P-38 and P-51 fighters, and the capitulation of the Japanese forces, the American occupying forces which were suddenly coming out of nowhere in Shanghai wanted to give, they gave jobs to anyone who was not Chinese. And anyone in our group of 18,000 whatever we had was suddenly employed in any form, shape or manner with only one goal in mind, to get the American troops home, and I picked work in the mess hall. At first I waited on tables and then I became a short order cook. We-- the first few days they still had dehydrated

eggs, they didn't want any more dehydrated eggs, they wanted fresh eggs, then toasted [unclear] so we gave them fresh, fresh eggs and I was doing sunnyside up, over lightly, the whole bit-- potatoes, fried potatoes for breakfast. We were serving three meals there. It was, it was really, I had food. I suddenly had butter. I suddenly put on some weight, I was very skinny and it was, it was a different world. From then on in I ...

GS: Were you able to share some of this with your family?

HM: Share yes, share that with the family, took some of the stuff home, yes. Was there-- oh then the trading started. A U.S. Army blanket, 100% wool, with a U.S. insignia on it in a green color went for the big sum of 25 U.S. cents and was cut and dyed and made into a wool coat for my mom...

GS: Amazing ingenuity I hear about, on the part of people who found ways to cope.

HM: A T-shirt, a nickel, a pair of shorts, army shorts, a dime, I mean it was unbelievable, they had to lighten their load, they couldn't have that, this or that take it on an airplane. They were only allowed 25 to 30 pounds, not 40, and they, they just gave the stuff away. We bought it and there was trade. And it was really quite [unclear]. But that coat, my mom still had till she died.

GS: Can we just go back and in the period before the war ended, from the time that, well from December 7, 1941, can you describe any changes in the way of life that you experienced?

HM: The changes in the way of life were we couldn't go out. We could definitely see that the Allied forces were making progress. And I remember that in the room that was given to us by one of the camps where we had our Zionistic meetings, we had a huge map and we would take pins as to the progress of the march between '44 yet, before Hitler got capitulated, beginning of '45 through Stalingrad and then the way back when the counterattack formed, from the landing came in France and the push down through Belgium and Holland. This was all documented with pins that we did on short-wave radio, which we had plenty of. We had good communication.

GS: So you were aware of what was happening...

HM: Yes.

GS: ...in Europe also?

HM: We were aware what was on militarily. We were not aware of the suffering and the pain of the concentration camps. We did not...

GS: When did you first learn of this?

HM: When the war was over. We thought we had hell on earth with our poor living standards, with our poor house situation, with our doctors not knowing how to combat tropic diseases, that we, that was our hell. When the war was over, the hell suddenly disappeared because it was a heaven.

GS: Did you have any relationships with the Jewish community in Shanghai, the older community?

HM: Definitely, definitely.

GS: Russian and...

HM: Def-, no, not the Russian.

GS: None, no...

HM: No, no, the...

GS: But just with the Sephardic community?

HM: The Sephardic, no. The, the, in fact the Sephardic community was, I would blame the guilt on them that the immigration to Shanghai stopped because they went into the English settlement and the French settlement and they told them you got to stop that because we'll be overrun and around 20,000 I think it stopped, or else we probably could of saved some more. It was that sudden fear of competition to the Russian, and I use these words gently because there wasn't any. They couldn't cut the mustard to work, to the quality of the people that were coming over, and they thought, so they felt a tremendous fear of being succumbed by suddenly a well-educated group of people that was coming over with all trades you can't imagine.

GS: In the course of your working with your family, did you leave the ghetto, were you able to get passes easily?

HM: Nobody in my family. I'll back up, only my dad got a pass. I was not available, I was not able to get a pass; in fact I tried to impress on Mr. Ghoya that I wanted to help my father and I got slapped in the face.

GS: I understand that for some people he had to stand on a chair in order to do this.

HM: Yeah, it was my height [unclear].

GS: Didn't have a problem.

HM: He was my eye level. I was short, about five foot two, maybe five foot three.

GS: So you were never able to go in and out.

HM: No, but my dad had a pass and my dad went to the market every morning at four o'clock to buy the chickens live and bring them home, drawn on a rickshaw type situation and then we had to merchandise besides the killing, it was an ongoing deal. And that was sanctioned by the way by the city because the Chinese trader who had the chicken had the connections to get my father the pass. It was all...

GS: It was a good connection.

HM: Of course it was, money yes, we...

GS: Did you have any social relationships with either this Chinese man or any other Chinese people who were living in Hongkew?

HM: No, well, yes and no. The, from the apartment that we lived in in the beginning [unclear] then bought a house, and in the house there was a balcony. The balcony became a fattening room, was not covered, was open air. We put up some pallets and put the geese on the pallets and the droppings would go through the pallets

under the animal and then we would have to clean it up and there are no sewer systems in the city of Shanghai, and your waste is picked up every day by a human being who pulls a cart and everybody brings their bucket outside, the honey bucket, and the honeys being dumped into that bucket. The honey bucket that we had was two or three of them because the geese also produced honey that had to be put in the bucket and had to be picked up, so there was some agitation by agitated Chinese neighbors who thought that was not the way that it was supposed to be done. Well then we had a meeting of this lane that we lived in and asked them what would you recommend how we do it? They said, you have your storm sewer, you certainly don't want to put it in there, so the only choice in order to have the waste removed is exactly what we had been doing and nothing was resolved. Another nice little experience that I cherished more on the lighter side was that it was a ritual at least once a month for the Chinese living in the lane that we lived in to bring their bed, their bed and their mattresses out into the lane and would stomp them onto the ground and you could see the bedbugs crawling...

GS: ...to clean, get rid of them...

HM: ...away from them and then they would...

UP: No kerosene, they were just killing?

HM: And then they would bring the children out, four or five year olds, put them on their knees and say, when you see something crawling, take your finger squash it. This was the way of controlling so that you wouldn't be eaten up while you were sleeping.

GS: Did you have problems with bedbugs in your place?

HM: Yes, we had bedbugs too but we didn't take them out to stomp them on the ground. We had different ways. One way that we learned in Singapore was that you put everything and anything that you have into a cup with kerosene if it has a leg. Like your table legs, your chair legs, they all would sit in an empty can with some kerosene in there and that piece of furniture would be free of any inhabitants other than the person sitting on it.

GS: So you could do this with a bed, the legs of the bed?

HM: ...bed legs, you take the bed legs and put them under and you don't touch the wall anywhere and then the bedbugs can't come to you unless you have one on your body that you bring in but it was, it was not easy. It was not easy, no.

GS: I just want to [tape interrupted]. I'm anxious to know about the end of the war when you were aware of the Japanese surrender and how your life changed during that period...

HM: Let's come to that when...

GS: ...when the war ended?

HM: After the war, as I mentioned I worked in a...

GS: For the air...

HM: At the airport...

GS: Right.

HM: ...Kiangwan and in the mess hall and from there I was graduated as a dispatcher because I knew something about airplanes from way, way back. It was one of my hobbies and I also drove a follow-me-jeep, follow-me-jeep is a vehicle that when the airplane lands, will drive in front of the airplane to a parking space that was designated by the dispatcher. And I would flag them in and put the chucks under the wheels and then take the pilot normally right to the office all in one operation. There were a number follow-me-jeep drivers, I was not the only one. And we moved from Congwan to Kiangwan and I became a dispatcher. There were thousands of refugees worked on Kiangwan mechanics.

GS: Was your father, was your father able to work at this...

HM: My father was working, by then working alone with the help of my brother. They were still doing the same thing. Now it was a lot easier because he could get help, he could get better merchandise, the Japanese were gone, the hassle with the occupation forces were, were gone, the...

GS: Did you have...

HM: ...the money came in so it was a lot easier.

GS: Did you have any other contacts now with either the Shanghai Jewish Community or the Chinese Community then you were able to have previously?

HM: Not with the Russian portion, not with the Russian portion, not with the French or the English people, which was enough because victorious, we stayed just the way, we were...

GS: Your social life did not change?

HM: Not of my parents, mine changed.

GS: In what way?

HM: Well, I got myself a Chinese girlfriend and then a Japanese girlfriend in that order, and I moved out of the house. I was making good money and the first pay was in dollars and educated the way I was and raised, 10% of any take home pay was sacrosanct and cannot be spent for any purpose other than savings.

GS: At this time was your family planning to emigrate?

HM: Yes, but again you had the Polish quota.

GS: And you had to wait.

HM: That's it. I also, there was already rumblings that the German citizenship would come back that they took away in 1942 or '43 and I declined that. We applied for emigration to the United States, Australia, Israel and go back home, those were the four options, and options to stay in China I declined from day one, I had no part of it, even though I had suddenly, quote, unquote, a love life and then all the attention that a woman can give a guy, that was all there. Did not sway me to stay there.

GS: When did you leave?

HM: I left in October 17, 1947 with my brother in already poor health having had a bout with TB, and one of the first things-- and because I paid my own fare from China to the United States, I was not subject to be placed into a city in the United States that was prescribed by the Jewish authorities, American Jewish authorities when they resettled you when the resettlement thing was going on, so I picked Rochester, New York because it's the only person I knew was a fellow that I worked with at the airport who had relatives in upstate New York with a grocery store and they took him-- they gave him an affidavit, I never had an affidavit and I, and he settled in upstate New York and got a job at Eastman Kodak. In April of 1947-- do you have to change it again? [this refers to the tape that is recording this interview]...

GS: Are there any change in your life because of the Chinese political situation after the war ended?

HM: The only, the only change was that the, after the war ended, payment was in dollars and then payment became in Chinese dollars, and because Chinese dollars have inflation, had inflation, we switched right back into American currency in order to remain the buying, retain the buying quality, that was the only thing. The only other thing there was of note was that I worked to the last day before I left at the airport and as a dispatcher. I never was unemployed or anything like that. The minute the war was over and I had a steady income.

GS: And then once you got to Rochester, you suggested that you didn't get any help from resettlement.

HM: I got, I got from the Jewish Family Services in Rochester I had a job within five minutes. She, the lady just made one phone call and said, "I have a guy here who just got here; he says he is a photographer, can you use him?" Yes. I had, I started on October 31, 1947 and was never unemployed until the day I retired.

GS: And you remained in the field of photography?

HM: No.

GS: No.

HM: I did not remain [unclear]. That was a job, 65 cents minimum pay, 40 hours a week and then because it was close to the holiday season and all the people here had money in the United States and made family photos. The, the place that I worked was a processing plant. He had six or seven studios which were bringing in the pictures and I had to wash them. I had, my first job was 30 rotating washing machines to load pictures in tap water about 36 degrees, 37 degrees right out of the pipe, one minute a piece, so there were 30 washing machines. I had one minute to take the pictures out and one, the same minute to put new load in and turn the water back on, 30 machines. I did that for eight hours straight, eight weeks, my arms were red up to the elbows from the cold water. I didn't work 40 hours, I worked 60 hours...

GS: What did you do next?

HM: ...at time and a half because I needed penicillin or tetracycline...

GS: For your brother? Yeah.

HM: [tears, becomes quiet] Want me to go back there? I won't know. The tetracycline was required for my brother who had caught tuberculosis in China and unbeknown to me, since I had left in those three months, he had a tremendous relapse and his life was in great danger. And I used that tetracycline, or they required the tetracycline, to pull him through and fortunately that happened. The job in itself, in the photo lab lasted exactly 10 weeks and the week after Christmas, I punched out and the job was gone, and then through [unclear], through a connection with Saturday Services I was able to find a gentleman in upstate New York, in Rochester, who had a flourishing business in distributorship mainly in paperwork and ball pen, good supplies as well as paper plates, cups and butcher paper, hangers for drycleaners, chemical cleaning stuff and all that was delivered and we delivered in a 100 mile area when I became a warehouse employee, a truck driver helper, I stayed on that job for four years working up from, not knowing what a piece of paper was for butcher vs. parchment and a, to a truck driver covering the entire area from Buffalo to Watertown, New York [unclear] along the Ontario Riv--Lake Ontario.

GS: Well you certainly had a wide range of work experience. When we met previously, you told me that there was something you wanted to share with us...

HM: Yes.

GS: ...about a particular transport of people across the United States. Can you tell us about that?

HM: Yes, in that process with that work we also started a youth group in the same name that we had in Shanghai. It was called the *Brith-Noar Zioni* and I mentioned it earlier...

GS: Yes.

HM: ...in the tape. We went to the Youth Family Service and asked for all immigrants from middle Europe since 1936 and this is now 1947. We were given 200 names, we mailed 200 penny postcards, and 200 new Americans showed up at a meeting of which we formed several groups, finally including myself, there were eight marriages which was the [chuckle] outcome of that, but mainly we were interested in keeping our Jewish education alive in a new surrounding. Meanwhile we kept close eyes on our relatives in Shanghai and noticed that Mr. Mao Tse-tung was feeding Mr. Chiang Kai-shek and in 1949 it was imminent that he would be the victorious survivor in that conflict and the I.R.O., the International [Refugee Organization]...

[Tape one, side two ended.]

Tape two, side one:

HM: ...Chiang Kai-shek were in the war for survivors and Mr. Mao Tse-tung was the winner and the International Refugee Organization was eager to get the remaining, close to 1,000 people in China, into a safe haven by using a troop transport and bringing them from Shanghai to San Francisco, put them into a sealed train, transported them to Ellis Island and from then put them on another troop transport ship and take them to Italy. The thing, the reason it was done, was that the United Nations I.R.O, International Refugee Organization, an arm of the United Nations, was interested in saving funds and it was cheaper to do that itinerary compared to shipping them around Cape Horn in Africa and up the east coast of Africa to the Mediterranean which would have taken them much, much longer.

GS: Excuse me, these were people who had applied for American visas and had not obtained them, were waiting...

HM: They may have applied but there were quotas like Austrian and Polish which was not very favorable for immigration. In fact there was no Austrian quota for America at all, so the, none of the Austrians could ever come from Shanghai to the United States because there was no quota. So most of the Austrian people went back--this is just an aside.

GS: Right.

HM: That's the way it worked. And so there was a lot of Austrians that were left behind there. Some of them had gone back to Austria already earlier and then to Israel and then tried to come here from Israel after they had obtained maybe another citizenship or married a citizen which was one way that the girls used to come here.

GS: And what had your parents hoped to do?

HM: My parents had hoped, my parents had hoped to come here to the United States seeing that I was here now, but because my brother was sick and because of the Polish quota that would have been a year down the road.

GS: Right.

HM: So my concern was to become a citizen first and then sworn to an affidavit.

GS: Right.

HM: So when they arrived in Ellis Island the State Department denied that the transport even was in existence.

GS: How did you know that they were in Ellis Island?

HM: Well, the State Department could say all they wanted that these people were not traveling. We got postcards from Hawaii, we got a telephone call from San Francisco when they landed, when they were taken off the boat to the train and made a phone call.

GS: Did they know that they were going to Ellis Island?

HM: They knew that they were going to Italy and Israel.

GS: But how did you know that they were on Ellis Island?

HM: We did not know they were in Ellis Island. We knowed they were on a train.

GS: Right.

HM: We know that the only way to get them in, we knew they were going to be somewhere in New York or at least on the East Coast and be embarking again but then when we asked the HIAS [Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society] ...

GS: Right.

HM: ...and the United Service for New Americans for assistance, they knew that they were coming.

GS: So they informed you...

HM: Well, they informed us, but they didn't help trying to get my parents into a synagogue to have me, to have us in the ceremony with a, in the traditional form and that was denied us, and when the New York press got wind of that, they threatened Washington with a scandal as far as Washington was concerned for having two individuals denied the presence of their parents or in-laws at a ceremony in church or temple because of some political...

GS: For their marriage?

HM: ...for some political obstacles and so the chief of Ellis Island, the manager was ordered to provide means and assistance to get this marriage going. The visiting rights are normally on Ellis Island from ten to three, that's only five hours a day and the United Service for New Americans got a rabbi, Rabbi Kamenetsky who picked up a bottle of wine and a glass and a *chupah*, a portable *chupah* and brought it out not knowing what he was experiencing and he performed the ceremony with 250 people in that transport as witnesses. I was issued a certificate of marriage, we had our license, we were now man and wife, and we tried to see the parents the next day and by that, by that time the transport had already left. They embarked very early by the time we get there, nine o'clock, we could see the boat pull out. The visiting time, which was normally only an hour in those five hours day was given to us for three hours. We were three hours with them together and that was it.

GS: I guess you weren't able to have any reception after your marriage?

HM: Nothing like that, no, no, no. The bottle of wine was passed around and little cups, there was no food what so ever, despite the big hall but it was monstrous hall, tremendous place but ...

GS: But then when your parents embarked, disembarked in Italy...

HM: They disembarked in Italy, my father went to a hospital, stayed there a short time, was declared to be fit outside the hospital and my parents...

GS: Excuse me, you said father, I think you meant your brother.

HM: Yes, my brother...

GS: Your brother.

HM: And my brother...

GS: Right.

HM: And he didn't, my brother didn't need any more treatment for or against TB from the day he got to Italy. The change of climate from Shanghai to Italy was more than enough to cure him or at least arrest the tuberculosis.

GS: Right.

HM: ...function. My parents were in a camp, the camp of Bari, B-A-R-I for maybe three or four months and then moved into an apartment at the foot of the hill where the Pope has his summer resort which is Castel Gondolfo and they stayed there for nearly two years before I was able to obtain citizenship and two years is a short time because my wife who had arrived in 1940 from a *Kindertransport* and orphanage in Holland made her citizenship in 1947. We married in '49. I was then already two years in the country, that's one requirement, then in 1950, I was married one year, that's the second requirement and I became a citizen in 1950. I sponsored an affidavit of the court with a request for expediency to the International, the Immigration, the Naturalization Service to grant a visa and in 1951 my parents arrived, settled with me in Rochester, New York and my brother went to a consulate, consulate in Rome, American consulate in Rome, they took an x-ray, they waited 12 months and took a second x-ray and the two x-rays proved to be completely identical. They declared him quote, unquote, cured and they issued a visa for him to come to the United States, and one thing when you were under the auspices of the displaced person or Jewish community, if you could pay for your own trip, you could choose your city that you lived in. If you were a, had assistance from the organizations, they would place you in a city that they desired you to stay at and I had paid my trip over from Shanghai to the United States with my own funds and as the parents were coming back from Italy and my brother on our own funds, they could choose their place of residence or domicile on their own. So when my brother-- when my parents, when my parents were here and I had by that time had a boy, a baby boy and my wife and I, my salary was not large enough to support a second affidavit and also not knowing whether a replacement of my brother from Italy to the United States might have flared up the tuberculosis again, I could not chance that with the limited funds that I had available at the time. The Family Services in Rochester said they would not take my brother but Denver would take him, Denver, Colorado, and Denver was requested to accept him and they did. My brother came to us in Rochester, stayed for one week and proceeded in 1953 to Denver, Colorado, entered the Colorado University and became an electrical engineer, after four years paid tuition, paid by the German government as a restitution for refusing furthering education at the time earlier; and my brother graduated an electrical engineer taking a position with Lockheed Martin, Martin Marietta at the time as a rocket science engineer.

GS: So your family story ends on a positive high note.

HM: Well...

GS: In terms of your survival and...

HM: Yes, yes.

GS: ...and your unification of family but now this leads us to our final question that we want you to reflect about. What impact did the Shanghai experience have for you on the rest of your life?

HM: Well I'm not too-- for actually your question I will finish off with a request that my mother had, that the family should always be together and when my brother was living in Colorado and we were still living in Rochester, New York, it was her biggest wish that we would all be together. So I had in the meantime taken a correspondence course in electronics, got a job as an electronic technician in an airline back East. I went to the wedding in 1957 that my brother had in Denver, marrying the nurse of the confidential doctor who had to check him every three months for farther TB progress and then that young lady became my sister-in-law and we moved the parents, and I went to the wedding, they went on a honeymoon, I went to Stapleton International Airfield and I got myself a job in Colorado. We moved the family, my immediate family, now two boys and my wife with a U-Haul trailer from Ithaca, New York, Cornell University City, to Denver, Colorado. They flew, I drove. And the minute we had established a residency in Denver, Colorado we brought the parents over in their retirement, and we were blessed with a good five years of my dad and 25 years with my mom. What has Shanghai done to this? Well, the good things, all the good things that Shanghai did for me happened after I got to the United States. Shanghai itself for me was a period of my life as a budding teenager and a developing man a disaster, till such a time that the war was over. When in August, I'm not sure, on my birthday, July 21, 1945, American fighter planes were dropping 50 pound bombs onto the ghetto because among the Jews living in the ghetto there were ammunition plants manned by Chinese and Japanese who were forming bombs and shells, grenades, and the American troops know that, or knew that, and they tried to be as gentle as possible-- how you can be gentle in a bombing raid, I don't know-- but we had some casualties, minor casualties which was another one of my quote, unquote, involvement in the Second World War. We took these people to Jewish hospitals, we were dressing wounds, tearing up some shirts and making tourniquets on the bleeding limb, arm or leg and this to me again was a sign-- I was then 24 years old, 23 years old, '45-- and I felt that I, I put that on Hitler's roster also because he is the ultimate culprit in that type of suffering and with this reunion here that we are doing at this recording, I met a couple of people that I had not known in Shanghai, after all 18,000 people, minimum is a whole bunch who had a different impact. I asked a gentleman how old he was when he got to Shanghai and he said he was 18 and he went immediately to school, to an English school in 1939 and studied the Chinese language, became proficient in the language and worked on making China his future home. In all

the nine years that I was there I was not able to muster that kind of feeling that I would ever stay there, as a future to my quote, unquote career, whatever it would be. And my only desire was at the earliest possible time to leave the place. It had, it had no, I had good feelings for it and I do not remember any decisions that would have me stay, for maybe just one short time after the war was over and we all, all the immigrants suddenly got jobs, we suddenly had money to buy enough hot water to take a bathtub full and take a bath because hot water is not available in China in individual homes, at least not the ones we were in and you had to buy the hot water with a bucket at a hot water store and then do with it as you pleased. When the American troops hired us and my first paycheck was 180 U.S. dollars of which by my offering 10 percent was immediately sacrosanct to be saved and never touched. I moved out of my parents' house. I was able to get myself an Oriental girlfriend, after the first Oriental girlfriend, I took a second Oriental girlfriend, the whole episode lasted maybe six or seven months with the both ladies and that I would say was maybe I became a man, I mean that would be the highlight of a young man. I mean I knew that the army was not a career either. When they, one, one of the things when they sent these troops home, the G.I.'s had to unload their baggage that they carried in order to make the weight of no more than 25 or 30 pounds to carry along in the air transports and they were selling wool blankets, U.S. wool blankets at 25 cents apiece, when I bought one of those, we had it dyed, we had it tailored into a coat for my mother that she wore till the day she died some 30 odd years.

GS: So Shanghai for you was a place for survival during the Holocaust...

HM: It was...

GS: ...and it was your coming of age home, location.

HM: It sure was.

GS: ...and you learned skills that you could apply...

HM: Yes.

GS: ...would you say in your work today?

HM: You are perfectly right but I did all those with a, I would say tainted opinion of the part of the, because of the poverty, because of the degregation, because of the persecution, because of the loss of citizenship regardless whether you liked the country you came from or not. Being a citizen without a country is like losing your passport, falling overboard on a ship and nobody knows who you are anymore because you can't prove it. What we thought was hell on earth changed very, very rapidly when we suddenly found out after the atomic bomb was bombed what, how many concentration camps there had been in the, in Germany, how suddenly we couldn't find out anything anymore of, at least two dozen relatives of mine that I could never see again because the last time I saw them was probably at my bar mitzvah in 1935 in Berlin and then maybe the outcome of Shanghai as a haven took on a larger meaning, but only because we suddenly found out that there was a place much, much worse than we had and we had our own big problems, and especially with tropical diseases that our doctors

were not able to handle and we lost minimal 4-5,000 people to dysentery, typhoid fever, para-typhoid which were the main killers, cholera, very, very prevalent at that time.

GS: Well, Mr. Methner I think we've come to the end of a good interview.

HM: I hope so.

GS: I thank you very much for the time and for sharing your story.

HM: You're most welcome. I'm happy to do it even if I was a little emotional.

[Tape two, side one ended; interview ended.]