HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

EVELYN RUBIN

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Meta Joy Jacoby
Date: October 15, 1999

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ER - Evelyn Rubin [interviewee]
MJ - Meta Joy Jacoby [interviewer]
Date: October 15, 1999

Tape one, side one:

MJ: …let it run a little bit before we start taping. This is October 15th, 1999. We are at the Rickshaw Reunion in Philadelphia, and we will be speaking to Evelyn Rubin. I am Meta Joy Jacoby, interviewer. This is tape one, side one. [MJ speaks to ER only: Now let me just play it back, just to make sure we're in business.] When and where were you born, Evelyn?

ER: I was born Breslau, Germany. Today it's Wroclaw, Poland, July 31st, 1930.

MJ: And what was your family's composition?

ER: My father, my mother, and I'm an only child, and at the time I was born I had three grandparents, one grandfather had died in 1911, my mother's father, and then we had my father's mother and my, and my other, I had two grandparents.

MJ: What are your memories of, before going to Shanghai?

ER: Well, my only memory from Germany, of course, because of the time frame that I was born in Nazi Germany, I don't know any other Germany. I come from an Orthodox family, and my mother's background Ultra-Orthodox, but we were what today is called Modern Orthodox, kosher home, Sabbath observers, Synagogue attendees. My parents had a business that my mother had established in the First World War. It was her own business, and my father worked with her.

MJ: What kind of business?

ER: It was a paper and twine wholesale business. They sold papers throughout Europe, mostly Germany but other parts of Europe. They had a, my mother had about a dozen salesmen going throughout Europe. We lived in a very beautiful five-room apartment, and it turned into a Jewish, what do they call it, a Jewish nursery school. We took, went to vacations in Czechoslovakia and Spindelmühl and in the summer we went to the different baths also in Czechoslovakia, to Marienbad and to Carlsbad and places like that, and, but, of course, what I remember mostly at that, at a very young age, is that there were changes; every day there was something going on that I didn't quite grasp, of course, what was going on. I remember 1934, I was told, when we were in Czechoslovakia, the following year I'd be taken for skiing lessons because my parents would go skiing. I'd go sleigh riding and of course that was never to be with the Nuremberg Laws that came to existence. A big red "J" was put onto our passport, and pleasure travel outside of Germany was not permitted any longer. And what I also remember, and that's very clear in my memory, is I had what today you'd call a nanny, an Aryan woman who took care of me because both my parents went to business.

Because my mother's business as I mentioned, she took my father into the business as her employee. It was her business and, but they both went to business, of course, so I had this, Marta was her name, take care of me. And I remember one day as she was taking me for my swimming lessons, a big sign *"Juden verboten",* no Jews allowed. I wasn't allowed to take swimming lessons any longer, and then when my parents on a Sunday took me ice skating, there was a big sign up at the ice skating rink, *"Juden verboten",* no Jews allowed. So these are very vivid memories, I must say, and then the Nazi parades going throughout Breslau, where one had to salute and stand there and say, "*Heil Hitler!*" When I was with Marta**,** with the nanny, children didn't have to salute; she saluted. When I was with my parents, it was a different story, because we were Jewish, you were not allowed to salute, but you weren't allowed to stand there and not salute, so a Catch 22 situation I'd say. My parents would drag me into the lobby of an apartment, of an apartment house or in to a department store to wait for the parades to go by, so these are mainly my memories of Germany as a very little girl.

MJ: When you were restricted with ice skating, swimming, and everything, how was this explained to you?

ER: Just the sign, that big sign which I couldn't read because I was under five at the time, and when it was read to me, I didn't even know what it meant. Why yesterday I was allowed to go and today I'm not allowed to go, but I understood that being Jewish was something that was different, and I also remember when we went to the synagogue on *Simchat Torah* with the flag, that everything had to be wrapped up. The flag couldn't be carried out in the open, our *Siddur* had to be wrapped in the brown bag so that nobody should know that that's what we were carrying, and I was particularly unhappy to have my flag wrapped up. I remember that also. Some of the stores also had the signs up, *"Juden verboten".* I had blonde hair and blue eyes that was never taunted in the streets. Fortunately, I never had a personal experience, antisemitic experience, in Breslau. I, as a Jewish child of a veteran, my father fought in the First World War, I had gotten permission, my parents had gotten permission to send me to the public schools, but they chose to send me to Jewish day school, and that's where I started my schooling, in Germany. And of course, we did sing the *Hatikvah* at the beginning of the school day. We also sang the German anthem, *"Deutschland, Deutschland, über Alles,."* kind of went together with it, and then my other memories, of course, are coming home from school, and hearing my parents speaking, trying to speak all kinds of strange languages, strange to my ear anyway. They were trying to leave Germany. So they studied Portuguese hoping to go to Brazil, English hoping to go to Palestine by the British mandate. My father spoke French fluently because he had been a prisoner of war of the French in the First World War. I had an uncle who had gone to Paris, so they tried to go to France and to no avail really, and I knew something was going on, and I was told we would be leaving Germany, where to, we don't know, when, we don't know, and that's basically my memories of that part of the Breslau when I was very young.

MJ: Do you have recollections of *Kristallnacht*?

ER: Yes, very much so. Preceding *Kristallnacht,* it will be 61 years very shortly--preceding *Kristallnacht*, what had happened was, as my parents were looking for a place to emigrate to, and I'd like to stress that till approximately 1940 there was no problem Jews leaving Germany. The problem was finding a place that would let us in. And once anybody found a place that they could emigrate to, they got the permission to leave without a problem till approximately then. And I had a great aunt in the United States, my paternal grandmother's sister. My paternal grandmother now lived with us because my maternal grandmother, paternal grandfather died in the meantime in 1932, and this grandmother came to live with us. She had been corresponding with her sister, lived in Brooklyn, and asked her to send us an affidavit, and unfortunately, the reply came back, "Don't you know America is in a Depression. I cannot sponsor you." So there went another hope. However, my parents were still hoping that somewhere along the line we'd find a place that would take us in. So in the middle of 1938, and I remember the date exactly because my birthday was July 31st and which was the last day in that apartment on Charlottenstrasse 24; I don't remember the address; I do remember the telephone number, and it was my birthday party, and the next day we were moving into furnished rooms. We had to sell all the appurtenances in the apartment at Nazi-mandated prices, and literally with the bags packed for my grandmother and my parents and I moved into three furnished rooms, because if we should get permission to leave Germany to, in other words emigrate someplace, you couldn't leave anything behind, and that's why the bags were packed and we could be ready to go. So just about that time, we did get an affidavit from that recalcitrant, recalcitrant great aunt of mine, the HIAS people in the [unclear] society in New York had told relatives in the United States who had relatives in Germany that they would be the guarantors, that they would sign the papers, they would take care of the relatives coming over, and under those conditions that great aunt sent us an affidavit. However to our chagrin, we found out that we were not on German quota, where we thought we would be, because when the quota system was established approximately in 1921 or 1922, it said in part that you belong to that quota where the city of your birth was situated in 1922, not what your nationality is now, not what it was when you were born, but what it were at the place of your birth was in 1922. My father was born in Jarotschin, which was Germany. Under the Versailles treaty after the First World War the province of Posnan, Jarotschin was situated, became Poland, and we became Polish quota.

MJ: Yeah, that's a bad quota.

ER: It was a very bad quota and a very unfair quota, because we had never been Polish. We'd always been German on both sides of the family for a few generations back. My father was a German soldier. I'm not saying it with pride; it's just a fact. He was a German soldier. He served Germany. He, when the *Kaiser* abdicated, he got a bunch of medals. He was a prisoner of war with the French. As a German soldier, we

had a German passport, and yet we were on German quota. Not on German quota, we were on Polish quota, and the American consulate told us it will be quite a number of years, you have a high number, probably still wouldn't have come up by today. [chuckle] You have a high number, be patient, eventually you'll get your affidavit. So we waited, you know, who knew what, at that time, what the future was going to be. Then came *Kristallnacht.* You asked me about *Kristallnacht,* so I wanted to mention what just preceded it. So *Kristallnacht,* the beginning of November, my mother had gone to Berlin to the American consulate to see what the status of our possible visa was, and *Kristallnacht* in Breslau, I believe, started possibly the, a later day then, some the ninth, some the tenth, I'm not exactly sure, because it started in other parts of Germany first, and Breslau started possibly a day later, maybe. Anyhow what I do remember is that--by the way, we had to let our Aryan nanny go, because Aryans were not allowed to work for Jews where there was a male in the household, if they were younger than 45. She was only 37. So now we had a young Jewish girl who walked me to school every morning. School was about 10 or 15 minutes walking distance from where we had moved to, and the, that young girl came in and said, that I do remember, "I don't think you'll be going to school today. There's something going on. I'm not sure what. I see the smoke in the sky. I hear that they're arresting people in the streets." My father went out to see what was happening. He didn't like what he saw, and he left this young woman with my grandmother. My mother was in Berlin, and he took me over to a friend's house, and then he went into hiding at the Christian landlord's, the landlord of our place of business, the Christian landlord very kindly put him up in his attic. On November 11th Goebbels made an announcement on the radio that this *"Aktion"* as they called it, this raid was over. My father came out of hiding; he went to pick me up. It so happened the Gestapo were in the same building, and they picked him up and sent him to Buchenwald. In the meantime my mother came home from her very fruitless mission to Berlin, fruitless for the moment that the first synagogue was put to the torch, the American consulate closed their doors, and no visas were ever given out again, and then she decided to take matters into her own hands. She found out that my father was in a concentration camp, Buchenwald. Nobody knew exactly what, what it was at that time. They knew he was concentration camp but what's gonna happen, is he gonna stay? Is he gonna come out? She took a ship, a train to Hamburg and bought tickets on the Hakozaki Maru Japanese steamer to leave for Shanghai the following February. She had enough money for three tickets. She didn't know whether it would be she and my father and I go, or my grandmother, or we'd have my grandmother follow. We didn't know at the time, because my father was still in Buchenwald. When I say she only had enough money for three tickets, we had money, but it had been frozen, and my mother was allowed to draw for household monies, and she inflated her needs as much as she could and was very frugal in spending, so she had enough money left over to buy three tickets, not four at the time. My father was released from Buchenwald because he had a particular medal that the

Germans were so interested in. It was the Iron Cross, Second Class, and three weeks later, and in later years my mother told me that it was with much trepidation that she said to him, "We're not waiting for an American visa. We're leaving for Shanghai in February," and using today's vernacular it was as if we left yesterday, it wouldn't be soon enough. And mind you at that time, Buchenwald was not what it was going to be in later years. It had been a political camp for dissidents, established in the thirties when Hitler came in power, but my father said, "After what I saw there, it's not good." He had to sign in with the Gestapo every morning that he and his family would leave Germany within two months. So we left my grandmother with our Aryan cleaning woman who had looked in on her, terrific lady, absolutely terrific lady, and then my grandmother followed us to Shanghai at a later date, left her with her because we didn't know what was gonna be, can we take an old lady, and we figured it would be temporary for her, which it was, and we took a train to Naples and we boarded Hakozaki Maru**.** We left February 13th. We left Naples and arrived in Shanghai, March 14th 1939.

MJ: What was the journey like?

ER: Terrific. It was about the best journey I have ever had. [chuckle] Of course, I'm sure my parents weren't too happy, going into the unknown. For me, it was terrific. I was eight-and-a-half years old, first time on a ship, it was a luxury ship, it was a cruise ship. We were in first class, and everything was there. Any, it's like today's modern cruise ship, maybe not, you know, maybe lacking some of the things, but for us at the time, it was wonderful. I couldn't understand why everybody was moaning and groaning, but they were on the ship going to Shanghai. I thought it was great. We got off on…

MJ: Who were the other passengers?

ER: Other Germans…

MJ: Jews?

ER: German Jews, yeah, and first class. We picked up people while we stopped at Port Said, Egypt, even allowed us off the ship, and then we stopped in what's now Sri Lanka, and what's Ceylon, and Colombo, we stopped in Bombay, and we stopped in Singapore, and we stopped in Hong Kong. When I say we stopped, we were allowed off the ship each time, and what was very, what is still in my memory, I mean I have a very sharp memory of, is between Hong Kong and Shanghai we ran into a typhoon, a terrible typhoon, and the boat was rocking back and forth and everybody was seasick. About the only people on the ship not seasick were my father and I, and everybody was really deathly sick, and all I heard everybody praying that the ship would sink, and I asked my father, "Why do they want the ship to sink, just because the weather's so bad?" He said, "No, because they're going to somewhere, they don't know what it is going to be," he says. My father was always an optimist, my mother was a realist, my father was the optimist. He says, "No, things are going to be fine. We're

going to be there in a short while, and then we'll go to the United States. Don't worry about it," and basically that's what…

MJ: They considered Shanghai temporary so…

ER: Oh, very temporary, and some people did leave. Before Pearl Harbor, people's visas said there was an American consulate in Shanghai and people did leave. Oh, I'm sure if people had known at the time, not knowing what was going to be in later years in Germany, if they had thought they were going to spend eight lousy years in Shanghai, believe me, they were pretty dreadful. Of course, the alternative was worse, we know that after, but at the time when they knew they were going to spend eight years there, I don't think people would have gone.

MJ: What were your impressions, or your original impressions of Shanghai?

ER: Well, my first impression was, as the boat docked by the Whangpoo River[1], and you know, you look down upon the wharf and you see the rickshaw coolies, and the British were still in charge and the French were in charge, that it was still under the colonial system even though the Japanese were really the masters, it didn't show up as such. One of the British people, somebody in a uniform, beating up a rickshaw coolie, and I couldn't understand that. Why they beating that man? My mother said, "Well, he probably didn't run fast enough, or whatever it is," but she was very perturbed, too, so that was the original impression. [a noise on the tape, voices lowered] Shanghai and then we were welcomed by refugees had arrived there before us. My father…

MJ: How did you, where did you go?

ER: Well, we were, we got scattered, my mother, father, and I. We had a distant relative who had come to Shanghai, that was somebody who managed to get a visa to the United States before Pearl Harbor. They were living there; it was three people, a little boy and a mommy and daddy, and they took my mother and me into their furnished room. I was eight and I slept in the crib with the little boy. My mother slept on the couch, and they didn't have room for my father, and he went in what is called the Embankment building, it was a dormitory set up for people who had no place to go, but we didn't stay there very long because my mother had the fortitude to feel that we couldn't bring money with us, but we were allowed personal possessions. She took her personal saleable stuff. She took crystals, linens, lace, furs, silk things, and knew she was going to be able to sell them there. My father had gotten certification as a typewriter mechanic before leaving Germany, and almost immediately, within a few days that we got there, my mother gave this to the Iraqi Thrift Shop, and with those monies, my parents established a typewriter business in the British foreign settlement and hired a Chinese mechanic, and at first we were in a furnished room in the French Concession, but within about a month we purchased a four-room apartment in a very nice section of Avenue Joffre in the French Concession, and we made provisions for my grandmother to come over. She came over the following year together with one of my mother's salesmen

[1] Alternate spelling: Huang-p'u.

and his family, so that was really our beginning in Shanghai. The school that my parents chose for me at the time was in the British foreign settlement, the Shanghai Jewish School. It was a British school, a Jewish school. It was run under the British school system, where the curriculum was made up in Cambridge, England and sent to Shanghai and meticulously followed, returned to Cambridge for marking, and Cambridge would send it back again for--to get promoted or not as the case might be. Of course, the administration, who were the, the school was established by the Iraqi Sassoon family, very philanthropic Mondavi Jewish families, and if you could pay for the private school, you paid. If you couldn't pay, they did not throw you out. You could still go to school there, you got a kosher lunch, but they had a problem. Here are all these children from the various parts of Europe, and nobody spoke English. We all spoke either German, or Czech, or Polish, or Hungarian, etc., etc., and we were all put into kindergarten, no matter what our age was. And as I told you, I was eight-and-a-half. I wasn't overly thrilled being in kindergarten. I had been in school in Germany for three years, but within approximately four months, I knew English well enough to be placed in the grade proper for my age level. Unfortunately, the climate in Shanghai was very alien to the Western European, and the elderly, the very young, and those not in the best of health did not fair too well. My father had suffered a stomach wound during the First World War. It had acted up while he was in Buchenwald. It had not been treated properly, and the climate didn't agree with him, and, in a nutshell, he got sick and they couldn't save him. He died in March, March 1st, 1941, leaving his mother and my mother and me. He was 43 years old. So my mother continued the typewriter business with a Chinese mechanic, put my grandmother into a Russian Jewish nursing home, and she had been helping my father in the business anyway. He did the work, and she went knocking on doors to get the customers. And she did the bookkeeping, the correspondence, the appointments. So now she did that and worked with the Chinese mechanic, and she rented room, she rented three of the rooms in the apartment, and we did not live too badly. It was at that time, there was enough food and there, of course, I don't want to say we lived in luxury, but it was sufficient, it was satisfactory, it was tolerable and satisfactory. And then after Pearl Harbor, things got bad.

MJ: Can I ask you first, did you belong to the synagogue?

ER: Well, it was interesting. The synagogue that I attended when I was in school, was what's called the Ohel Rachel Synagogue, the one that Clinton visited when he was in Shanghai. It's on the school grounds, a magnificent, magnificent structure, Sephardic synagogue. But when we were at home, I'll have to explain where we lived, to explain about that synagogue. That's a synagogue that nobody ever heard of because it was a private synagogue, and that's a strange thing to say. We lived, what was called a compound, they call it compounds where there were a lot of buildings together, and they were owned by somebody, and it was like, not a city, little community. A man by the name of Mr. Lifschitz had come after the '17 Revolution through Vladivostok, like many

of the Russian Jews and White Russians that had come, came to Shanghai with just a, I think a coat and his shoes. Somehow he got, managed to accumulate some money, and he bought these buildings on 1817 Avenue Joffre. He had about five or six buildings, and he was doing so well, many refugees moved in there at that time, but he had others that were Americans living there, too, and there were White Russians. He was so thankful that he made out so well in Shanghai, that to thank G-d, he decided to build a little synagogue. He built it right in the compound. There was room, I mean maybe there were five or six rows, for maybe 20 to 30 people, so that was the synagogue. It was right there for us, and, as a matter fact, when my father died, when we needed, I needed a *minyan*, I was not being, not having a, my father didn't have a son, he had a, I had an uncle who went to Paraguay, we couldn't contact him, we tried to contact him through the Red Cross to say *Kaddish,* but we weren't sure if we got it. I got permission from the rabbi, the Ashkenazi rabbi, to say *Kaddish* for my father because I was below the age of 12. I was 10-and-a-half. So I said *Kaddish* for my father every morning before going to school, and then every evening for the 11 months, and it was in that synagogue, and it because the synagogue was right there, I was able to do that with. I'd go to *minyan* before going to school, and then in the evening my friends would knock on doors with me to get a *minyan* every evening, and it was very fortunate.

MJ: So you continued an Orthodox way of life?

ER: Yes, yes. What I'd still call modern Orthodox. We kept kosher. As a matter of fact, Mr. Lifschitz had a *Shochet*, Jewish slaughterer, come every Friday and slaughter some chickens for us to buy right on the premises there. That was the first time I'd ever seen that. It was an interesting experience, too, and I'd come home from school and I'd find a big fish, a carp, floating, still alive, not floating, actually swimming in the bathtub, and my grandmother would take care of that for *Shabbot* dinner. We had an *amah***,** female maid, to clean up. That was, you know, even after my father died, my mother still had her because she was gone all day, and we had what they call a male servant, a boy, number one boy. It was very funny. He only spoke Chinese and some pidgin English, and my grandmother, of course, remember, she was 72 years old at the time, never picked up a word of English and or Chinese, of course, and they had a love, a love-hate relationship between them. She'd yell at him in German. He'd yell back at her in Chinese, and when my mother and I would come home, he say pidgin English to tell how much, what a hard time my grandmother gave him, and it would come out, "Oh Missy make lots of balla, balla." It was, it was silly, when I think back to it now, it was funny, poignant but funny in the same way, but they got along, because you know, old people are very respected in China, so he respected her, even though it was a strange relationship.

MJ: Who did you play with?

ER: There were refugee friends. As a matter of fact, one of them is right here today at the reunion. Her father was a doctor, and he had his practice right in the

compound. He had rented space from Mr. Lifschitz, and he was the one who pronounced my father dead when he died at the time, so that was one of my friends. There was, till Pearl Harbor there was an American family there, and I still remember the little girl. I don't remember her last name. Her name was Louise, and there were other refugees, and there were some White Russians, these were my friends and my school friends.

MJ: Did you have any Chinese friends?

ER: Well, it was really a separate society. The Chinese were the servants, and the refugees kind of kept to themselves as a group. I had Russian friends, which many of the refugees didn't. The reason I had Russian friends was, first of all, because some lived there, and in school. We had Iraqis, the Mondavi's, we had Russians, and then we had the Germans, Austrians, whoever, you know, were the refugees. So I…

MJ: Any contact with…

ER: Polish.

MJ: …the Sephardic community?

ER: Only through my school friends. We had contact. We went to the synagogue there. We had the Abrahams and Jacoby's and, through them, but not on a social basis because it was--for no…

[Tape one, side one ended.]

Tape one, side two:

MJ: …we have to start over. This is tape one, side two. We are speaking to Evelyn Rubin, interviewer Meta Joy Jacoby. Would you please continue, Evelyn?

ER: Can you stop it a second?

MJ: Sure. [tape interrupted] All right we're back on.

ER: All right, my friends were, my school chums in the Shanghai Jewish school who were Iraqis, and Polish and, and Russians, so this is what basically, and refugees, and this was basically my circle of friends.

MJ: Now what happened when the war broke out?

ER: Well, when the war broke out, the big change, of course, was that my mother's customers in the typewriter business, the Americans and the British, they were interned. So there went a lot of revenue. She still had some German and French customers, maybe a smattering of Japanese or Chinese, but they didn't really make up the bulk of her customers, mainly the Americans and British. However, interestingly enough, she had German customers that did not mind doing business with a Jew, and I remember after school helping her *schlep* the typewriters in a rickshaw, and what really stuck out in my mind going to one of her customers, a German lady, and as we walked into the entrance of the building, there was a big picture of Hitler, and as soon as this woman saw us coming, she said, "Excuse me a minute," and she turned it around facing the wall, which I thought was very nice and very sensitive…

MJ: Yes, it was.

ER: …on her part. Well, I guess if she didn't feel that way, my mother wouldn't have, she wouldn't have done business with my mother, but it kind of just got very tight and also there was not enough food in Shanghai. The American Joint Distribution Committee had their staff, who had been in Shanghai helping the refugees settle, they had been repatriated to the United States, and now we got rations from the Japanese, and there was very little food around, but my mother still managed to eke out a living after having rented the three rooms in the apartment, and doing stuff on her own. She kind of managed. The school was still intact even though our British teachers were interned. We still had some of our Iraqi teachers who were not interned, not all of them were British subjects, and we had our British trained Russian teachers, so I still continued going to the Shanghai Jewish School, and I guess life, life went on. I remember different things going on the tram. I didn't have the money for the tramway to go to school, and neither did many of us, and we used to pool the money. How did we do it? One person would buy a ticket, the conductor would come and we'd pass the ticket down the line. And that's how we'd be on the tram and managed, or, if necessary, somebody would get off and go again on the next tram and try and do the same thing. We kind of all supported each other. After my father died, my mother went to the principal of the school and told him that she couldn't afford the tuition. No problem. They kept me on at

the school. It was no different. They included the kosher lunches, and I continued going to this school. Kadoorie and Sassoon really had made provisions for Jewish children, no matter where they came from. Once they were in the school, or wanted to go to that school, and they could continue going there.

MJ: And you continued to live in the French Corridor?

ER: We continued to live in the French Concession till 1943, when the Japanese came out with their proclamation stating that all stateless refugees who came to Shanghai after 1937 had to relocate to a designated area. Designated area, of course, a euphemism for ghetto. Relocated is, well, move. We had three months in which to move, and I would like to emphasize that this proclamation--nowhere in that proclamation did it say Jews. The word Jew was never mentioned; just stateless refugees. So now, my mother had to move again, and what she did, is she sold the apartment in the French concession to a Japanese family, and with three other families, we moved them to a dreadful Chinese house in a lane in the Hongkew ghetto in May of 1943. My grandmother was still in the Russian Jewish nursing home, and she died just a month before we had to move to the ghetto. We were told because she was in that home, she didn't, she wouldn't have had to move to the ghetto, but it so happens that she died. She really never recovered from my father's death. She was 74 years old when she died. So it was just my mother and myself, and we had a tiny room on 498 Board Road in the ghetto area. We pooled the money with the three other families who were a little bigger than we were, and we put in a flush toilet, which there wasn't. We put in a sink into each little alcove or room with cold running water, so when the water worked, then we had water. We cooked, when I say we, I'm talking about my mother and myself, but the other people basically did similar things. We had a little Chinese stove with which we cook, on which we cooked up on the roof; the roof of the building was flat. We were able to put that stove on there. We'd buy the black coal dust, mix it with water, make it look like shaped balls, put it into the stove, and with some newspaper, light some newspapers, fan it, and that's how we would do our cooking. We would buy the hot water from the hot water stand, boiling water if my mother had a little more money, or just hot water if she didn't, because drinking water had to be boiled at least five minutes past its boiling point, and, of course, I did not mention at the beginning but we did have to be inoculated against cholera, typhoid, and paratyphoid, three times a year, the smallpox once a year and all…

MJ: Every year?

ER: Every year, every year against smallpox.

MJ: Who did the inoculations?

ER: A doctor or hospital. That was no problem.

MJ: Chinese or European doctors?

ER: European doctors. When the Japanese totally occupied the city, they had inoculation stations set up in various parts of the city, because the Chinese didn't want to

let themselves be inoculated. They thought you were putting the devil into them, and so they, they forcibly inoculated them. So we always had to take our little certificate with us. We had a thumbprint on it to show that we had been vaccinated and inoculated in order, because there were a lot of epidemics, to stop the epidemics.

MJ: So the Japanese were providing the…?

ER: The Japanese were providing the vaccines and all that, yes, correct. They may not have physically done, well, their doctors also did inoculations on the street, or their nurses, not necessarily doctors, but were, I mean as Europeans nobody had to tell us more than once that we needed to get this. We made sure that we did get vaccinated and inoculated. The Japanese also made sure to spray the rickshaws with DDT, and they set up the health department, and did everything possible to curb the epidemics in Shanghai, and in order to leave the ghetto you had to have a pass; and this pass was administered by a man by the name of Mr. Ghoya.

MJ: Do you remember Mr. Ghoya?

ER: I remember Mr. Ghoya very well but…

MJ: Tell me about it.

ER: I have a slightly more positive impression of him than most people, and I will tell you why. I know well for a fact that he called himself the King of the Jews and that he did have the power to give somebody a pass or not. I always say that, you know, speaking of the Japanese, and that includes Ghoya, it's a negative that's really a positive. They did not kill us, and that makes a negative a positive. They may not have been too kind, they may have had rules and regulations that were uncomfortable, annoying, aggravating but not impossible, and Ghoya took advantage of that. If a tall--he was a short man--if a tall man came, he'd slap him around a little bit, but most of the time, I would say most of the people who applied for a pass and could successfully show him and Okura, the other guy, that they needed a pass to go outside the ghetto to make a living, almost everybody did receive such a pass. Now many of the refugee children were persuaded by their parents to transfer to the school in the ghetto called the Kadoorie School, and I refused to change schools. You know how it is with kids; G-d forbid you should leave your friends. I had friends who didn't have to go to the ghetto, Iraqis and Russians. I didn't want to leave the school, and quite a few of my friends, who were also refugees who had to go to the ghetto, we felt the same way, and reluctantly our parents agreed to allow us to take now a very lengthy, difficult, cumbersome trip to the school outside the ghetto. Of course, we needed a pass, and it would take us anywhere between an hour and a half and three hours to get to school and same thing on the return but we wanted…

MJ: Oh my.

ER: So we decided to apply for a pass. They had four-week passes which were pink, and three-month passes which were blue, and we applied, the kids, we immediately got a pass without question. As a matter of fact, when we stood in line to, for our three-

month renewal, and sometimes Ghoya would come out to see how many people there were in line, and he'd see the kids on line, and he'd say, "What are you here for?" and we'd say, "Well, we have to renew our pass for school." "You have to go to school; come to the front of the line." Never had a problem renewing the pass. Now as I mentioned, for adults it was a little more difficult. Of course, my mother's typewriter business was now totally down the drain. First of all, who could afford to repair a typewriter, who would be interested in the ghetto area? She had lost all her customers in the French Concession or the Settlement, but she had to make a living somehow; the food shortage was getting worse and worse, we had, you know, malnutrition and continuously hungry, so she devised a plan. She wrote to one of her French customers in the French Concession to send her a letter to tell her that she was still servicing her typewriters. Armed with that letter and an applic--she made an application for a pass--and she appeared before Ghoya, and Ghoya said, "You? Woman? Pass?" Says yes. My business was my husband's business, he died, and I just continued it, and I still have customers. "Well, won't be hard to give her a pass, a four week pass." However she had no intention of servicing typewriters. Armed with that pass and her toolbox, which I still have to this day, she would go. She was supposed to go to the French Concession, she purposely asked the French Concession, because in order to go there she had to traverse the foreign settlement. She would stop off in the foreign settlement, and she'd go to the Chinese sectors where Westerners did not go, and she'd buy up sundries like sunglasses, silk scarves, silk stockings, belts, and so forth, put them under the tools in the toolbox, bring them back into the ghetto and give them to the peddlers on consignment in the ghetto area, and that's how, not too much came in. It kept us maybe one, half a step above starvation, I would say, and she devised various ways of putting food together. When I think of it today, I say how'd she do it? One I'll just mention, I'll just mention one thing, little Chinese boys used to chase grocery trucks, and then at night they'd slit the sack, and noodles would fall to the gutter. They'd sweep them up, and they'd be sold very cheaply. My mother would buy those noodles, and we'd sit around the kerosene lamp or some times the electric when we had electricity, it depends how much we had, and we'd separate the noodles from the debris, the debris being glass and nails and so forth, and have noodles. She also knew if you bought a minute amount of peanut butter, which wasn't dreadfully expensive, but really you couldn't afford to buy too much, and a whole bunch of syrup which was cheap; she'd mix it together and we'd have a spread. We were the only people in the building who still tried to keep kosher. Of course, meat, forget it. There was no meat available, but what my mother did do, they would render pork lard, and my mother would render beef fat, and the stink, you know, it's hard to talk about it. I can still smell it, I think [chuckle] and we [unclear] our bread was rationed, and you know what? We'd put it on the bread--we'd spread it on the bread. We'd make believe it was chicken fat…

MJ: Yeah.

ER: …and it wasn't so terrible, so we did that then, and somehow I'm here. [chuckle] We managed.

MJ: So you continued at the school?

ER: I continued in the school. And we'd be caught by air raids. My mother would be in the city…

MJ: Tell me about the air raids.

ER: Well, the Japanese had an air raid system where they'd would sound a siren depending where the planes would be, and the outskirts of Shanghai were bombed, and we'd see American and Japanese fighter planes in the sky, and being kids we had no fear. Today I would call it dumb, we'd stand up on the roof, and we'd bet with marbles who would shoot down whom as this fresh shrapnel was falling around us, and this was basically one of our great games, and, but during an air raid the trams didn't run, and if you were on a tram, you'd sit on it. The air raid would go boom, the tram wasn't allowed to go farther, so sometimes we sat for hours on a tram. We, of course, at the school we used to sing, when we first, you know, for assembly when we first came in, *"G-d Save the King"* and the **"***Hatikvah*," and we're not allowed to say *"G-d save the King"* anymore. At that time there was not a king, of course, but we were allowed, nobody stopped us from singing the "*Hatikvah*,*"* that continued with our Hebrew lessons, with our French lessons, we had our Religion lessons, and we had Japanese lessons; we had to learn Japanese during the war. You didn't pass Japanese, you didn't get, you didn't get promoted. So we still had that. I was captain of my field hockey team, but we couldn't play that anymore, because the Japanese took away our building. That was in about 1944 approximately, I don't remember the date. They took the building, not to be malicious, but it was a beautiful building, and they thought that when Shanghai's bombed they'd need more hospital space, and it would lend itself beautifully for a hospital. So now we had our classes in the Shanghai Russian Jewish Club around the billiard and card tables, but we continued going to school.

MJ: What, do you recall any cultural life in those years?

ER: Well, you know, I was still a kid. Really, there wasn't, there was cultural life, I know, for my mother. My mother became the President of WIZO, Women's International Zionist Organization. Here it's called Hadassah, and they had lectures, and they did all kinds of stuff, but for the kids it wasn't really that much culture. We had--you can't call it culture--we had birthday parties, we'd get together, we'd go to synagogue for the holidays, High Holidays. The Japanese allowed us special passes, those that never had a pass anyway, to go just outside the ghetto limits where the movie theaters were now the synagogues, Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, we did that. We still had our, the Girl Guides, they weren't the British Girl Guides anymore, but they were in the ghetto area, and basically that's--it's more or less what kids do.

MJ: Did you have any experience with refugee or relief organizations?

ER: Not till after the war.

MJ: Not during the war?

ER: No.

MJ: And what organizations after the war?

ER: Well, after the war, we were--let me just tell you before I tell you about that, about the time that Shanghai was bombed, when the ghetto was bombed.

MJ: No, we're fine.

ER: …July 17th 1945, my mother was on one of her illegal forays into the city, and it was the summer, I had no pass to go to school, there was no school. I was on my way to visit some friends when the dreaded siren went off and the city was under attack. There were no air raid shelters, but what the Japanese did, they had built trenches in the street. I jumped into a trench, I heard the bombs falling all around me, and the next I knew there were about 30 refugees were killed, hundreds wounded, more Chinese wounded, and my mother, she heard what was going on in the city, that the ghetto was bombed. Of course, you can imagine how she feels, she didn't know where I was, I didn't know where she was, but we were both OK, and shortly thereafter we were liberated by the Americans, and then the Joint came with the UNRRA[2] packages, and what we at that time called our gourmet food, otherwise known as the Army K-rations [chuckle]. For us it was gourmet food. And that's about the little experience that I had. Of course, a gentleman by the name of Mr. Jordan…

MJ: Did it stop? No, we're all right.

ER: …was sent in by the Joint to work with the refugees, Charlie Jordan, an American, and he established a community center for the refugees' children, and to acquaint us with what we'd find in the United States when we'd go there. My mother and I came into the United States in 1947.

MJ: Was there ever a consideration of going to Israel?

ER: Well, there was no Israel in 1947 yet; that didn't come…

MJ: That's right.

ER: …of course, until 1948, and we were trying to go to Palestine with the British.

MJ: You couldn't…

ER: And we got an affidavit this time through my mother's sister-in-law. One of my uncles had gone to England in '37, and his wife remembered that she had a nephew in Lakewood, New Jersey, a man who never knew us, and he sent us an affidavit, and we came on German displaced persons quota after the war. I'd written to that aunt, by the way, first, and found out she had died, and her daughter had said, "We still can't sponsor you, I'm a school teacher and…"

MJ: Did you have much contact with the Japanese? You told me your contact with Ghoya.

ER: No, not, none really.

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[2] United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration

MJ: What about Chinese?

ER: The only Chine--I had a little friend in the ghetto. The houses were so close across that when I went up on the roof, there was a little girl who was on the other side of the roof. Her name was Meodi [phonetic]; she didn't speak English, I didn't speak Chinese. We used to wave to each other, and that was about it.

MJ: Were you still living in China when Communism--yes, you were.

ER: No, that came in '49. We left in '47. We left on the General Gordon, on March '47.

MJ: What did your mother do to support both of you when she came here, to America?

ER: Well, the Joint paid our fare, and when we came East, they paid our fare, they paid our rent and in a furnished room, and then my mother went to night school, and during the day she worked in a camera factory, and I had taught myself shorthand and typing while I was in Shanghai, and I got a job working for Mark Cross, Fifth Avenue, in the Credit Department, so, and we moved into a furnished room in Queens, in Jackson Heights, Queens.

MJ: Have you ever been back to Shanghai?

ER: Yes, I went back in '95…

MJ: What was that like…?

ER: …with my American born husband [chuckle] who didn't want to go; we went. It was very interesting. I gave a lecture at a University to some Chinese professors, and then we took a cab, and I had a map, an old map and a new map of Shanghai, and an interpreter with us, and we went to the ghetto area, the apartment that we were in in the ghetto was still there, Chinese people living in there now, and the interpreter explained to them who I was. Well, they welcome you with open arms, and there was one woman standing there, and she was chattering away, and the interpreter told me that she remembered my mother and me, and I said, "Oh she's just saying that," and she looked, pointed to me, and then she described my mother perfectly.

MJ: Isn't that wonderful?

ER: Yes, and the only difference in the building was that now they had televisions and cell phones [chuckle] and…

MJ: Just as crowded, I bet.

ER: Yes, just as crowded, and we went looking for the cemeteries which I knew weren't there, but I went looking anyway. My grandmother and father were separate, buried in separate cemeteries because one was full already, and where my grandmother's cemetery was, the Point Road Cemetery, there is a concrete factory; an apartment house where the Columbia Road Cemetery was where my father was buried, but now some little Chinese huts, I guess you might call them, and I walked through there, and I did find some paving stones that were grave stones, that were used as paving stones, but I must say I don't think it was done purposely. Just they were given these

stones, they just put them down and some had been turned over, the right way and some the wrong way, and I remember particularly I was thinking, oh gee, wouldn't it be something if I would see my father's stone, because I have a picture of it. My mother took photographs before we left Shanghai, and there was one stone with the *Mogen Dovid* and the date, refugee I did not know, had died, but I figured I'll take a picture of it, and as I'm standing there ready to take the picture, a woman comes out of the house, and she just nudges me and motions me to wait a minute, and she came with a pail of water and a rag to wash it off, so I could…

MJ: Oh.

ER: …take a better picture.

MJ: How nice.

ER: And it was just was very, very, very touching, I must say, but you know, so what I did, I stood there, I said *Kaddish* for my father, and what else can you do? They built over all the cemeteries.

MJ: How do you feel…?

ER: It was interesting going back, though. The school building, they're making into a museum now, and where we lived on the Avenue Joffre is now a military establishment. It's just a couple of houses down from where the American consulate is situated, so the interpreter spoke to the guard there, hoping he'd let us in, but they wouldn't let us in.

MJ: How do you think your Shanghai experience impacted the rest of your life?

ER: Well, it really impacted me a lot in my personal life. I guess I don't take anything for granted, for one thing, and I had a very acrimonious divorce, and I think from what I had gone through, it had strengthened me to make a new life for myself. I'm remarried 15 years now, and that, I think, you know, perhaps the way I raised my children, and just to be able to cope, and another thing, see, a lot of people, my mother, who came from an Ultra-Orthodox home, lost her belief in G-d totally since 80 members of our family were killed. She just continued observing for tradition's sake, memory of her father, I must say. She'd done it all her life, so she observed. I'm just the other way, I'm not Orthodox, I'm in a Conservative synagogue, but I'm observant to a degree, you know how it is. I have a kosher home. I don't eat *treif* meat out. I'll eat dairy or fish out. I go to synagogue, and I got myself very involved in synagogue life and UJA, because I felt I survived for a reason. So that reason must be to carry on a tradition, and I am a past President of the Jericho Jewish Center Sisterhood. I am, I sit on the board of directors of my synagogue. I just came back from a conference in Washington, and I think it has affected me a lot to carry on the tradition and try and instill it in my children. Two of my daughters also belong to Conservative synagogues and keep kosher, one does not; husband was giving her a hard time. My son's Orthodox, and my granddaughter

goes to the Ramah Day School, which is a wonderful Orthodox day school. We just came back from a Bat Mitzvah in Israel.

MJ: Oh *Mazel tov.*

ER: Thank you, and he raises his daughter and observes his in Manhattan, just the way I grew up. It's like the circle, you know, which came around, and this is really, I guess one--would I have continued the same way in Germany? Possibly, because it was my background, but I just, I just feel very, very strongly that we have to support the State of Israel, because if we don't, then this tragedy that befell us not so long ago, can happen again. It's really incumbent upon every Jew, and that's why I'm involved in the UJA Women's Campaign. I am involved with everything Jewish and culturally Jewish.

MJ: This has been a wonderful interview, and we thank you.

ER: It's my pleasure. If you'd like me to come speak at the College, I'd be happy to do that, if you ever have anything like that.

MJ: Yes, well--that's a different division, but I certainly…

ER: I'd be very happy to do that.

MJ: Let me see how I can turn this…

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