

Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

P.O. Box 25506, San Mateo, CA 94402

Name of interviewee: Bellak, Lori

Date of interview: 7/8/1998

Summary: Lorie Bellak was born Lorie Salinger March 17, 1929 in the town of Ratibor, Germany. Lorie was the only child of Hans and Margot Salinger. Her father owned a brewery and the family lived a relatively affluent and happy life.

In 1938, as a result of growing anti-Semitism, Lorie and the other Jewish children were no longer allowed to attend the local school. Lorie's non-Jewish friends turned against her, and she was schooled at home by her mother and a non-Jewish servant who continued to work for Lorie's family. Pro-Nazi parades became a regular part of life and the increasing anti-Semitic persecution in Germany made Lorie's parents afraid to let Lorie leave the house.

On Kristallnacht the local synagogue was burned. The next day local police came to the Salinger's home and arrested Lorie's father. He was taken to the Buchenwald concentration camp. Surprisingly, he was returned to his home six weeks later, looking thin and sickly. Her parents soon began making plans to try to leave Germany. They were able to gain passage on a ship to Shanghai, China, but they were forced to leave very quickly.

Lorie's journey out of Germany began in March 1939 on a train to Vienna, Austria. There the family saw posters reading: "Jews not allowed" in stores and restaurants. They quickly continued to Naples, Italy, from where they boarded a Japanese passenger ship for the thirty-day passage to Shanghai. Lorie remembers being treated wonderfully by the Japanese crew.

Upon arrival in Shanghai, all Jews on the ship were picked up by Japanese army trucks and taken to Jewish camps. After some time in the camp the family was allowed to work and rent a room in the Jewish ghetto. Lorie's father joined another man and opened a pudding factory, but Mr. Salinger's partner disappeared with all the company's money and the business was forced to close.

In the ghetto all the children attended school and spoke only English while in class. At times Lorie would venture out into the town of Shanghai and would encounter the terrible poverty and starvation of the Chinese people. Lorie's family was also enduring poverty, with little food or clothing available, but they managed to get by on very little, with Lorie's father taking a job as a policeman protecting the welfare of the ghetto Jews.

The Shanghai ghetto developed into a self-contained culture, with concerts, schools, theater, dances, and a fairly normal social life. Because Shanghai was occupied by Japanese military, the area was attacked by U.S. planes, and some Jews were accidentally killed in the attacks. American troops arrived soon after the war ended, and Lorie worked as a cashier at the army PX. Around this time Lorie met her future husband, Peter Bellak.

Lorie and her family left Shanghai in 1948 when they were able to secure passage on a ship to the United States. At first they lived in San Francisco, but soon they moved to Cleveland where Lorie's uncle was living. Peter Bellak

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joined Lorie in Cleveland where they were married. After three years Lorie convinced the family to move back to San Francisco.

Lorie had two children, Peter and Katie. She opened a home kindergarten school, with eight children in her school. Her husband got a job selling linens and drapes. Lorie's mother died and her father remarried a woman who discouraged Mr. Salinger from staying close to his family. Three years later her father died. As Lorie got older, she worked as a home nurse with stroke patients. At the time of this interview, Lorie had a nine-year-old grandson, Alex.

Since the end of the war, Lorie has returned to see both Germany and Shanghai.