

Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

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

Name of interviewee: Garrick, Leah

Date of interview: 9/12/2001

Summary: Leah was born on July 9, 1928, in Shanghai, China. Her grandparents had fled Iraq because of the severe persecution of Jews in the late 1800s and traveled to and decided to reside in Shanghai. There had been family conflicts in the early 1900s and that all changed when Leah was born, she was a catalyst for the Jacob family to resolve all of their problems.

Leah's parents were both British citizens when they met in China and she remembers her early home life and schooling very well. Because her family's original roots were in Iraq, they were Sephardic Jews. She went to a British school, but had no problems integrating, coming from a Sephardic orthodox home. Her family always lived in a house with a garden or an apartment that had a roof garden. This was very important to her father, who built a succah, to remind people of the fragility of life, for every house they lived in. This was important to the family to invite family and friends over to have meals in the structure. Leah remembers celebrating Jewish holidays very vividly and it has caused her to realize just how much her heritage means to her. Her family was always together on holidays and most of her fondest memories were from this time.

When Leah was only nine years old, the Japanese began to bomb Shanghai, and she immediately fled to Hong Kong with her mother, grandmother and two siblings. They soon returned to stay with their father, who had remained in Shanghai to keep his silk stocking factory in business. Shanghai had been growing rapidly and had a population of about six million people during the war. During this time, Leah says she remembers watching bombs hit the water at the docks of Shanghai and also recalled a time that her father took her downtown at the beginning of the war, and she witnessed Chinese refugees running from the city with all of their belongings. She also remembers the terrible famine that had struck the Chinese during the war, and how her family tried to help as many refugees as they possibly could. Leah's family was extremely lucky because her father was still permitted to work during the war, and they were not forced to wear armbands. This was because they were still seen as British citizens, not Iraqi. She remembers the day of Pearl Harbor being extremely momentous and chaotic. When she was only 13 years old, she helped her parents care for her siblings. The factory that her father owned was bombed three different times during the war, yet he still managed to build it back up to success every time. Leah remembers being constantly afraid of the air raids and that there were many times where she had to sleep at friend's house because it was unsafe to be outside or go home. They really had no contact with the Chinese, even though there were many that lived in British settlements throughout Shanghai. She expressed that she had very mixed feelings when the Americans began bombing Shanghai. Leah and her sister graduated from a Jewish school in 1944, which they had attended for three years, and began to learn valuable lessons in both

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writing and typing that would prove to be very important later in life.

Just as the war was ending, people began to return to their homes from internment camps and found that the Japanese soldiers had been occupying their homes and ransacking their belongings. For the most part, she had never been bothered by the Japanese and knew that most of the people from Shanghai that were forced into the internment camps were not harmed unless they broke the law or tried to escape. During liberation, Leah says her family was completely relieved and immediately thought of the people in the camps. No one was aware that liberation was near, so they were not used to such freedom when it did occur. They noticed that the attitude of the Japanese was changing as soon as the bomb was dropped on Japan, but everyone had forgotten what freedom felt like.

In 1947, Leah and her sister were sent to the USA and attended an orthodox school in Crown Heights, New York, where they were taught classes in Yiddish. Leah's sister soon got married and left for San Francisco, while Leah had no real means of making a living, until she was offered a job at a Jewish organization making a small salary. In 1949, the Communists entered Shanghai, forcing Leah's parents and brother to flee to Hong Kong. The British declared them stateless at this point, so her mother and brother moved to America where he continued his schooling, and her father built another factory in Macau, China and remained there for 20 years. In 1948, the state of Israel was established, so Leah's relatives traveled to Israel, when the Communists were invading Shanghai.

In 1955 Leah came to California to see her mother and brother and began to reside there and work for San Francisco Jewish organizations. In 1969, after the requests of his family, Leah's father finally came to California, even though he didn't want to leave his factory in Macau. This was the first time the family had been together in 20 years. In 1987, Leah visited her childhood homes in Shanghai, and was delighted to see all the same servants and cooks working at her old apartment building. She still keeps in touch with them today, by having someone help her write and translate Chinese. She also went to a 1998 reunion in Israel, which all her Sephardic Jewish schoolmates attended as well. Leah finally retired from working at various organizations in 2001. She had been a director at the Leisure League for 15 years when she retired quite happily.

Leah believes that God had a hand in sending Jews to Shanghai, as they were very lucky throughout the war. She is extremely proud to be Jewish and that it brings richness and fond memories to her every day. She still celebrates Jewish holidays with her sister's family and is very grateful for that. She doesn't believe that there could be another Holocaust like the one she lived through because the effects are well known today. She did express that the events of September 11, 2001 scare her greatly, and she parallels it to the Pearl Harbor events.