

## Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

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

**Name of interviewee:** Glaser, Ernie

**Date of interview:** 10/16, 11/6, 12/11 & 12/20/1990, 2/21 & 3/26/1991

**Summary:** Ernest Glaser was born in 1924 in Berlin, Germany. Most of his family had survived the war by immigrating to various countries. He and his parents immigrated first to Shanghai, China in 1939, where they lived for almost 8 years, before immigrating to San Francisco, California. Ernest had a normal, happy childhood in Berlin. He recalled the first signs of change occurred with the passage of the Nuremberg Laws (1935), which "affected the relationships between Jews and non-Jews." Later, his family had been warned by his father's gentile business partner to go into hiding the morning of "*Kristallnacht*" (1938). His family stayed with his grandmother until it was safe, temporarily, to return to Berlin. Around this time, one of his uncles was arrested by the Gestapo and released, provided he exited the country. Another uncle was taken to a concentration camp, which he survived, and he too emigrated shortly after being released. Forewarned and aware of imminent worsening conditions, his family decided to leave the country. In 1939, unable to emigrate to the U.S., due to quotas, his parents chose the least restrictive, Shanghai, China. His parents sold most of their household possessions. That June, Ernest and his parents departed Berlin by train, with seven trunks of possessions and only a few *Deutsche Marks* (limited by the Reich), for the Italian border via the Brenner Pass. In Trieste, Italy, they boarded a luxury liner, traveling first class but with very little money, to Shanghai, China, where an uncle, who had immigrated months earlier, awaited them. For Ernest, age 15, travel to Shanghai was an adventure. His parents on the other hand were more "apprehensive."

The bulk of Ernest's interviews involved his life in Shanghai, from July 1939 to June 1947. He described in great detail his experiences, the "bedlam" upon their arrival and life among the refugees in the diverse, multinational (colonial), multi-class and highly charged and populated Chinese port city. They lived under typically difficult conditions first in Hong Kew, within the International Settlement district, and later in the French Concession district. The Japanese occupation, originally benevolent, became more authoritative and restrictive after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. In 1942, enemy aliens were forced into detention centers. In 1943, he and his family were forced back to Hong Kew, where most of the Jews were concentrated and confined in a ghetto for the remainder of the war. With a pass, Ernest was able to leave the ghetto, daily, to work for income in downtown Shanghai.

After experiencing allied aerial bombings, the war came to an end in Shanghai, long after the conflict ceased elsewhere. Liberation came by the Americans via the air and possibly sea. Ernest and his parents originally contemplated staying in Shanghai. But, the Nationalist Chinese regime was too corrupt, and their civil war with the Communists was imminent. Ernest and his parents emigrated via a

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former U.S. troop transport ship, and arrived in San Francisco, CA, on July 4, 1947. The remainder of Ernest's interviews regards his life as an immigrant in the U.S.