

We can start in about five seconds. I'll give you a cue. Any time.

OK. I stopped when I worked for the committee at this kitchen, a large kitchen. I have to tell you before that before I went to this place to work for them, I worked for another place in Shanghai. That was the-- I need to put my glasses on for a minute. It was the [INAUDIBLE] painters in Shanghai.

I was a supervisor of some Chinese workmen to bring in over the garden bridge, because there were the Japanese standing on this particular garden bridge to patrol it, because the Japanese took over Shanghai during the Second World War. I worked there and I watched Chinese workmen during a period of six weeks.

It was the general repair of a hospital. It was done by the masons, carpenters, painters, plumbing, and electric installers. Then I brought the workmen, Chinese workmen, back over the garden bridge in the evening, and that was it. That was my job for several weeks. And here is one of the scripts I have here. And this was one of the things I did in the beginning before I worked for the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee medical department, 138 Ward Road, and this was done in 1947.

When I left it, I received this letter from the director, executive director, Mr. Bergman. He hereby certified that Mr. Hans Arons has been employed with the SR hospital of our institution in the capacity of the room attendants and laborer from June 1946 to November 1947. That was my last job.

And this is another thing. You can read this here too, and I have another one here, which I-- also 1947. This is the same thing, and it's also the same things which I did.

This is to certify that Mr. Hans Arons was employed in our hospital kitchen in the capacity of a cook from July 10th, 1944 to April 1946. During this time, he has shown himself an able, willing, and intelligent employee, who did his work to our entire satisfaction. Mr. Arons left the position on his own accord with our best wishes for the future. I went down to the American, which I stated before.

I worked-- this is what else I did in Shanghai is working there until the war was over, as I said before, to work for the American forces. Then trained in driving Jeeps, trucks, and staff cars. That's what I did until the end of the-- I left in November 1947.

I also belonged in Shanghai to some Jewish organizations, which we believed in Zionism, which was this particular group was a Labor Zionist Jews, the Habonim in Shanghai, which we had a group which we called the Ben-Gurion group. We were inclined for the Jewish state of Israel at that time.

I was in the position of the [INAUDIBLE]. I mean, to work with them as a education and things. At some point we had very many young people, and this is what it was. We had very interesting meetings with younger people, and it was under the auspice of the Jewish Labor Party for Zion in Shanghai with the chairmen, Mr. Stein and Mr. Fred Goldberg, which he had the store here in San Francisco.

I think he had a bookstore or gallery, a painting gallery. He died here in San Francisco, and he was the top man for this particular organization in Shanghai with this particular other issue there. This is Habonim. This is Habonim, this one.

We can look at these later.

This is all I can tell you about what we've done, and this is about Shanghai. Now, the other bad part, when in 19-- I don't know which year it was, but it was at the time-- it was a time when the Japanese came with the guns and bayonets and surrounded the camps where the Jewish refugees lived, because nobody could go out without having a pass into the city of Shanghai. It was like a ghetto, more or less.

Was this after 1941, after Pearl Harbor? When--

Yes.

OK.

Correct. It was after 1941. We had also no things to cook in the kitchens, because everybody got the raw material. Beans, whatever. So everybody had to cook at home or buy a little stove with coal and make their own meals for seven years. In that time, I was also on the staff, because we had a man of the Japanese order. They had an refugee office for the refugees, the Japanese, and this name was Mr. Ghoya. He also was called the king of the Jews in Shanghai.

And I get to this here. I have to show you several things.

We can look at the end, maybe.

Pardon me?

Can we wait and look at these at the end of the interview?

At the end of the interview.

I just want to show you one thing. This particular thing was put in our arm, our arm here, and we were also called the state police, to help the Japanese. If anybody had a pass, then we had to do this here so they could see this here, so we had to work with the Japanese on this particular issue, as the Kapo of this particular-- it says--

I have to put my glasses on to read this here to you. The Foreign Pao Chia Vigilance Corps PAO.

And how did the Japanese, Mr. Arons, treat you personally?

Well, they treated us not too bad, but sometimes they were very strict. In particular, this particular man in the office of the refugees, which they called the Shanghai refugee office in this particular area of Hongkou, which he called in several people that-- no, they came in to ask for a pass, and he asked this question. What is your profession?

And in various ways, he was very strict. He stood up and slapped them and whatever. But this was not very good. So this man, he didn't meant it too bad. After the war, he was all for that the Jews could go their way, but many others they were arrested and they were brought into the British House, which was a the so-called jail. And they were treated very badly because if they did something wrong. I do not know and I cannot explain what happened.

Now, the other thing what happened, that was that one of the big Nazis came to Japan and they came to Shanghai. His name was Biedermeier, and he talked to these Japanese officers. Not to this particular one, to others, and he wanted to have-- and what he did, outside of the River Huangxiapu, there was an island to build some concentration camps. They did. To bring the Jews over there from Shanghai, to exterminate them.

But it didn't happen because one man of the Jewish people was married to a Japanese woman, and she went to these officers and told them, and nothing came about it. It was put under the table. There were higher officers of the Jewish people in Shanghai, of the Arabs from formerly Kadoorie, Sassoon, Victor Sassoon, Joseph Abrams, you name it, and some also Russians. So they worked together on this particular issue, and of this particular concentration camp came nothing about, so we were safe.

So everything happened that in the time that came in 1947, in November, I got my papers and they opened up the consulate in Shanghai again. There was a lady there. I got a piece of paper but not a passport at that time. And I had to state that I have never been connected with the Nazis in Germany and otherwise also not the communists.

So this was put on paper, and I got the piece of paper with a stamp, with a stamp and my picture on it, to go on the ship, on the General Meigs in November. I didn't know the date anymore of my head to come to San Francisco. And this was the end of that, of Shanghai. You want to know about here, certain things?

This might be a good time to go back and ask some questions. Did you want to ask?

I wanted to ask you about 1936, when you were arrested. What was the German excuse for arresting you? They didn't arrest all the Jews. They only arrested some.

Just because we were Jews. Just because we are Jews. There's nothing you can say about why and why not. They wanted to eliminate, under the "Mein Kampf," what Hitler wrote, the Jews completely.

And how did they decide which Jews to arrest and which not to arrest? Because it was several years before they began to round everyone up.

They didn't know. They didn't know. They went from town to town or to different things in Germany and other places where they overran, Poland and Czechoslovakia and Holland and Belgium and France, they took them all. And Austria, whatever. They took them all. Whatever they could get, they took them. And some of these people, they were lucky. They had a lot of money, like me. We left Germany, my parents, before Hitler started the war in 1938, in 1939, I have to repeat.

In 1939, Adolf Hitler started the war, and before that time, before he started the war, any Jew they had a little bit money and could pay the finances to the Third Reich, like my father, could get out. That was the end of it. So we did.

So anyway, and that's also why I got out of the concentration camp. So this I can tell you, nothing else. What happened then I told you before already.

I had a question. You were in the concentration camp before Kristallnacht and after Kristallnacht. How did life change?

Of what?

After Kristallnacht, in the camp. How did life change?

How they changed?

After Kristallnacht.

I cannot tell you exactly anymore after Kristallnacht. It was very bad, I must tell you this. The situation got worse, because after the Kristallnacht, when they took in all the people, old to young people, young children, you name it, and they got so bad, it was unbearable to see all these people that came into the concentration camp. I cannot tell you, I was only a few more days there from the 9th of November to the 14th of December. I was only one month more there. I didn't see too many.

And after you went to Shanghai, you spent a number of years there. you in in contact with your parents? And did you know--

Yes.

You did have--

In Cuba, in Cuba.

You wrote letters back and forth?

Yes. Yes.

And also, did you know what was going on in Germany?

Also, I had some contact till 1942 with my aunt in Germany, in Berlin, which I have in this book some envelopes which she wrote and a letter in there which she wrote that my grandmother or my grandfather, they both passed away 1942, in 1943, and being buried in Berlin, in Weissensee, which this cemetery was in the eastern part of Germany, East Berlin. My father has set a tombstone there, and he went to Berlin in 1953.

But his parents and his sister and my uncle and his children and his wife and children were vanished in concentration or whatever. I have it here in the book. This is what I can tell you. I lost many of my friends and a lot of relatives. Now, when I came to the United States, you want to know about that?

Yes, we do.

I came to San Francisco by 19-- I was first in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where I worked for peanuts. I was sent there by the Jewish community, Jewish Services of San Francisco to Albuquerque, to get a gardener shop, but I didn't. I worked for a farm, a broiler chicken farm. I have it in my papers here too.

I worked there only not too long. I made a little bit money, I saved a little bit money, and I went downtown, and I stayed in the YMCA in Albuquerque, where I met next door a recruiting sergeant from the Army. So he became my friend. We went out, I'm not a drinker, to the bars and to the movies, and he asked me, Hans, why don't you want to join the Army of the United States to see the country, to see everything? You get your clothes, get your teeth fixed, you got everything that you want.

I didn't have very much money. My parents couldn't help me because they had no jobs in Cuba, because in Cuba you couldn't work. So anyway, I decided later on, when he asked me again, that I was going to make my IQ test in Albuquerque for the Army. I did with the Natives of this land, the Indians.

So I went to Fort Ord for my basic training, and when I finished my basic training, I was asked by the officers I had to go-- I was told by the officer I had to go overseas. And he said, where do you want to go? I said to Germany. He said, no Jewish boy has been sent to Germany, because you go to your hometown and you see somebody in the United States uniform, hey, you. You did something to my ancestors. I give it to you. They didn't want any trouble.

So where I landed up, in the Korean War. I was 16 months on the line, and then I went back to Hawaii. I stayed a month-- oh, no, I stayed a year in Hawaii in the [INAUDIBLE] barracks, and then I went to San Francisco to the Presidio, where I asked for discharge.

So I discharged in 1951 or '52, whenever, and I was staff sergeant, and I got into-- some people here, my friends in San Francisco from Shanghai and some others, and I met a lady sometimes. Oh, yeah, I got a job at Levi Strauss in Battery Street. I worked as a denim clerk hiring some denims. That is what I did.

Then I asked Mr. Haas, I think it was Walter Haas, the Junior, I wanted to quit, and I needed also a piece of paper, probably come during the Army time. I was not directly connected with the United States. I got some papers for the citizenship.

So anyway, I met then my wife to a lady. She was also in Shanghai. She had a store for men. She was from Austria. Ties, other things for men, and she opened up here on Market Street a Continental Chocolate store.

But the ladies, my wife worked for the San Francisco Southern Pacific for about seven years or so, and I was told from this lady, if I meet some-- we met at a dinner place in San Francisco, also from Shanghai people. They opened up a dinner place in the evening. We went there, and this lady told me, you want to meet some nice ladies? You're a young nice man. I said yes. OK, she gave me a couple of names.

And then I did not [INAUDIBLE] she said to me, well, we make arrangements to go to the movie or something. I said OK, and I did not showed up. That was very bad. And then I apologized and I asked her to give me the phone number and the address of the ladies, so I called this particular lady up, which I married, and we got together.

She lived on Lombard Street in an apartment. I met her. We had dinner together, and then we married. We married in Beth Israel on Geary Street, which is not existing anymore, under Rabbi Bernstein, and we had no children, sorry to say that. So anyway, my wife worked for the SP, and I worked, became a gardener. I made my credentials at the city hall and became a gardener in Golden Gate Park.

I worked first in the field, and then I was asked by the supervisor if I have studied horticulture. I said, yes, in Germany. Would you like to work in the hothouse? I said, yes. Would you like to go into the conservatory? And I said, yes. I went to the conservatory for eight years. I worked eight years in the conservatory as an horticulturist or something like that.

So anyway, I worked there eight years and then I worked out in the field, and I retired from the city after 14 years, because I had some pains in my back and I had to quit the city. After that, I went to the wholesale flower business with a company, which I knew the man, and I became a partner for 12 years in the wholesale flower business. After that I retired, and then I didn't do anything anymore.

We had a place in the country. I had to attend this. Near Guerneville, in [PLACE NAME], and I worked up on that place. We had two acres and a summer home there. And after 20 years, I had to give that up because it was too much for us. Now, this is all I can tell you of my life, and any questions you have, please ask me.

Thank you very much.

Thank you. Do you have any other questions?

You've given us a wonderful overview of your life, and I was hoping that now we might go back and you could give us a few details about the highlights of the various periods in your life. For example, for me I'm very interested in when you first--