

Interview with ELLEN STERN
Holocaust Oral History Project
Date: 6/21/90 Place: San Francisco
Interviewer: Barbara Harris and Burton Meyer
Transcriber: Marilyn Lewis

Begin Tape 1, Side 1

I'm Barbara Harris interviewing Ellen Stern for the Holocaust Oral History Project at Temple Beth Israel Judea in San Francisco. Assisting with the interview today is Burton Meyer.

Q: MRS. STERN, CAN YOU START BY TELLING ME THE DATE YOU WERE BORN AND IN WHAT CITY?

A: I was born in 007 '24 in Cologne, Germany.

Q: AND CAN YOU TELL ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOUR PARENTS?

A: My parents were "old Germans" and had lived there all their lives and their parents before them and my father was a prosperous businessman.

Q: WHAT KIND OF BUSINESS DID HE HAVE?

A: He was in the manufacturing of paper.

Q: WHAT WAS HIS NAME?

Sp
A: Karl Heyman.

Q: AND YOUR MOTHER?

Sp
A: My mother was (Hetra) Heyman and she came from Berlin and then into Cologne.

Q: DID YOU HAVE MUCH FAMILY IN COLOGNE?

A: Well, no, most of my family was in Berlin. I think I only had a grandmother in Cologne.

Q: CAN YOU TELL ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOUR CHILDHOOD?
YOU SAID BEFORE THE INTERVIEW THAT YOU WERE THE
ONLY CHILD?

A: Well, I was the only child. I had a very nice and
unremarkable childhood until '33 when Hitler came
into power and then gradually all our privileges
were being revoked, and I had to change schools and
had to go to a Jewish School and could not play
tennis. Couldn't go swimming. Could not go to
the opera any more, all the things we used to do.

Q: WHAT KIND OF SCHOOL HAD YOU GONE TO PRIOR TO THIS:

A: Well, I went to a Catholic School and then I changed
to a Jewish School.

Q: THAT'S INTERESTING. YOU WERE IN A CATHOLIC SCHOOL?
WHY DID YOUR PARENTS PUT YOU IN A CATHOLIC SCHOOL?

A: Well, it was in the neighborhood and it was a good
school.

Q: HOW WERE YOU TREATED AT THAT SCHOOL? DID YOU HAVE
A LOT OF FRIENDS AND WERE YOU ACCEPTED?

A: At the Catholic School, yes, yes. Had a lot of
friends and we were very integrated.

Q: SO YOU REALLY DIDN'T THINK THERE WAS ANY DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN JEWS AND NON-JEWS?

A: No, no, we were definitely Jewish oriented.

Q: DID YOU CELEBRATE ANY OF THE JEWISH HOLIDAYS IN YOUR HOME GROWING UP?

A: No, my parents ²¹ Christmas.

Q: WHICH WAS VERY COMMON IN GERMANY AT THAT TIME?

A: I believe it was. In the circle of our friends, it was common.

Q: YOU WERE ABOUT NINE YEARS OLD WHEN HITLER BECAME CHANCELLOR?

A: Yes.

Q: HOW SOON WAS IT THAT YOU NOTICED THINGS BEGINNING TO CHANGE? WHAT WERE THE FIRST SIGNS?

A: Oh, within a couple of years things changed radically.

Q: YOU SAID THAT YOU HAD TO CHANGE SCHOOLS? WERE YOU THROWN OUT OF YOUR SCHOOLS?

A: Yes, yes. The edicts came down that we had to leave the schools, that we could not have gentile employees any more or they had to be over a certain 55 or so, above a certain age.

Q: DID YOUR FATHER HAVE GENTILE EMPLOYEES?

A: Yes.

Q: AND WHAT ABOUT IN YOUR HOME?

A: Well, we had a housekeeper and she also had to leave. My mother had to do something in the house.

Q: DO YOU REMEMBER WAS YOUR HOUSEKEEPER SOMEONE WHO
HAD BEEN WITH THE FAMILY A LONG TIME?

A: Yes.

Q: WAS IT VERY DIFFICULT?

A: Yes, it was difficult situation but it had to be
done. There was no choice, but at this time, we
did not believe that Hitler would stay in power.
We thought it was a transient thing.

Q: WAS THERE MUCH DISCUSSION ABOUT WHAT WAS HAPPENING
AROUND YOU IN YOUR HOME?

A: I'm sorry?

Q: WAS THERE MUCH DISCUSSION WITH YOUR PARENTS, BETWEEN
YOUR PARENTS AND THE OTHER ADULTS AROUND YOU?

A: Since at this time, they were not discussed in
front of children. Whatever there was discussed,
I was not privy to that information.

Q: YOU HAD FRIENDS IN THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL, DID THEY
JUST STOP SEEING YOU?

A: Yes, because there was a fear. They didn't like
to stop seeing me, but it had to be done because
they, again, they had to join the Hitler party and
they could not be seen with Jews.

Q: WHAT DID YOU THINK OF THE JEWISH SCHOOL WHEN YOU
BEGAN GOING THERE?

A: I liked it. It was a way of life and to me it was, I think it was quite comfortable there.

Q: YOU SAID PRIOR TO THAT YOUR FAMILY HAD BEEN VERY SOCIABLE, HAD GONE TO THE OPERA AND THINGS. YOU COULDN'T EVEN GET OPERA TICKETS THEN?

A: Yes, but all this stopped after '33 or, '34.

Q: WHAT ABOUT YOUR FATHER'S BUSINESS? HOW WAS HE AFFECTED BY THIS?

A: He was very much affected because he gradually had to - he lost his employees and he had to stop working and in '35 or '36, he tried to re-establish his business in Belgium, and it was almost completed and the last minute something went sour. Don't recall what it was now, and it didn't work out.

Q: DID YOUR FAMILY MOVE TO BELGIM?

A: The whole family was supposed to move to Belgium. This would not have been emigration, just for that being a transfer.

Q: YOU SAID YOU HAD A PAPER MILL?

A: Yes.

Q: WHAT WAS THE NAME OF HIS BUSINESS?

A: I think it was the name of his place, his father, my grandfather, (Gotfried Heyman).

Q: SO DID YOU EVER GO TO BELGIUM?

A: Many times.

Q: WHILE THE ARRANGEMENTS WERE BEING MADE FOR THIS TRANSFER?

A: We also had family in Belgium and we used to vacation there and we spent quite a number of times in Belgium.

Q: WHAT HAPPENED IN 1935 WHEN THE BUSINESS TRANSFER WAS APPARENTLY NOT GOING TO HAPPEN?

A: Nothing. My father had to live on his income.

Q: WHERE DID HE HAVE INCOME FROM?

A: He was quite well-to-do.

Q: HOW DID YOUR DAILY LIFE CHANGE? DID YOU HAVE TO MOVE OUT OF YOUR HOME?

A: We moved out of our - we had a home and we moved out of that into an apartment, into a nice apartment, I must say.

Q: AND YOUR BELONGINGS?

A: Well, we kept all our belongings at this time.

Q: WHAT WAS LIFE LIKE IN THE APARTMENT, WHEN YOUR FATHER WAS NO LONGER WORKING?

A: My father kept busy and there wasn't really too much of a change in our daily life.

Q: WHAT ABOUT YOUR MOTHER? WHAT WAS SHE LIKE? DID SHE WORK AT ALL?

A: No, my mother never did work. My mother wasn't brought up to work and never believed in women working. All she did was play Bridge.

Q: AND HOW DID HER LIFE CHANGE AFTER 1935?

A: Her life didn't change too much. Her life only started to change radically after we emigrated and went to Shanghai.

Q: YOU SAID ORIGINALLY THAT YOUR PARENTS THOUGHT NOTHING WAS GOING TO HAPPEN THAT IT WOULD BE A PASSING?

A: It changed Kristallnacht, November '38, brought on this change. My father was hidden by a gentile, a lawyer of his, and he was not deported but we were strongly advised to leave the country as soon as possible. He helped him educate him for America, however, this would have taken many, many years so the only avenue open to us was Shanghai, because it was an open border at the time.

Q: DO YOU REMEMBER MUCH ABOUT THE PREPARATIONS THAT WERE MADE TO GET YOU ABOARD A SHIP?

A: We sold almost everything and had a hard time getting tickets which we finally did secure and we could not take very much along. We did not dare to take money along or jewelry because you heard lots and lots about people who got caught and were put to death or at a concentration camp, so my father did

not want to take a chance. At this time, I was supposed to go to England with my school, but my parents didn't want to separate the family.

Q: DO YOU REMEMBER WHICH SHIP AND WHEN YOU LEFT FOR SHANGHAI?

A: Yes. I think it was the S.S. Victoria. We left
140 , Italy, Genoa.

Q: WHAT WERE YOU ALLOWED TO TAKE WITH YOU WHEN YOU LEFT?

A: Well, as far as money, I think only a very limited amount and hardly any jewelry because you had to give all the jewelry you owned to the German government
141 so actually there were only personal possessions like clothing and things like that. We could not take any household articles with us.

Q: DID YOUR FATHER PLAN ON ANY OTHER WAY TO GET MONEY OUT OF THE COUNTRY SO THAT IT WOULD BE READY FOR YOU?

A: No, he didn't dare to.

Q: SO YOU SOLD EVERYTHING AND LEFT EVERYTHING BEHIND?

A: Exactly.

Q: IT MUST HAVE BEEN VERY DIFFICULT ON YOUR MOTHER?

A: Terribly.

Q: HOW DID SHE ADJUST TO LEAVING ALL HER POSSESSIONS BEHIND?

A: She had no choice, not very well, but there wasn't a choice.

Q: WHAT WAS THE DATE YOU LEFT FOR SHANGHAI?

A: For Shanghai, we left in, let me see, '39. I think it was May '39, no, February '39.

Q: HOW DID YOU GET TO GERMANY?

A: By train.

Q: DID YOU HAVE ANY TROUBLE AT THE BORDER?

A: No.

Q: NOT AT ALL?

A: No.

Q: DO YOU REMEMBER HOW YOU WERE FEELING? YOU WERE JUST A YOUNG GIRL?

A: Well, I was excited because I was young and didn't know what was happening. My parents were unhappy.

Q: THIS WASN'T YOUR FIRST TRIP ON THE TRAIN?

A: Oh, no, no.

Q: LET BE BACK UP A MINUTE AND ASK YOU A LITTLE BIT ABOUT KRISTALLNACHT. YOU SAID THAT'S WHAT REALLY BROUGHT IT HOME TO YOUR PARENTS?

A: Right.

Q: TO MOVE? WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER OF KRISTALLNACHT?

A: Well, I was not at home at this time. I was in a Jewish boarding school in Hanover and what I remember is that all the gates of the school were closed,

because the director had some ins with some high-ranking S.S. officers and they told him, close all the gates and don't let anyone out. And the next day, we heard about the burning of the synagogues and I called my parents and found out that my father was safe.

Q: WHEN DID YOU GO TO HANOVER ORIGINALLY?

A: I think that was - must have been '38.

Q: AND IT WAS A GIRLS' SCHOOL?

A: No, it was a coed school. It was a boarding school.

Q: WAS THAT A PLEASANT MEMORY FOR YOU BEING IN A BOARDING SCHOOL?

A: Yes, it was very nice.

Q: WERE MOST OF THE CHILDREN ALSO THERE BECAUSE THEY COULD NO LONGER GO TO CATHOLIC SCHOOL?

A: That's correct.

Q: SO AT WHAT POINT DID YOU COME HOME AND REJOIN YOUR PARENTS?

A: Well, after Kristallnacht, it must have been the end of '38 or the beginning of '39.

Q: DID THEY ASK YOU TO COME HOME?

A: Yes.

Q: DID YOU KNOW WHY THEY WANTED YOU TO COME HOME?

A: Yes.

Q: WERE THERE OTHER CHILDREN AT THE SCHOOL LEAVING?

A: Yes, yes, there were lots of other children at this point leaving, too.

Q: DO YOU REMEMBER MUCH DISCUSSION AMONG THE CHILDREN? CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT IT?

A: Yes, there was much discussion and fear. Some parents of some children were put into concentration camps at Kristallnacht.

Q: CONCENTRATION CAMP MUST HAVE BEEN A STRANGE, NEW WORD AT THAT TIME. DID YOU KNOW MUCH ABOUT THE CONCENTRATION CAMPS?

A: No, I didn't. I just learned in a hurry.

Q: WHAT WAS YOUR INFORMATION ABOUT WHAT CONCENTRATION CAMPS WERE?

A: Prison - prison. We did not know of any kind of atrocities. That came out later. But at this time, we only knew that people were sent to prison into those concentration camps.

Q: DID YOU KNOW ANYONE WHO WAS TAKEN AWAY ON KRISTALL-NACHT?

A: Yes, friends of ours.

Q: WERE THERE ATTEMPTS TO RESCUE THEM OR GET WORD TO THEM?

A: Yes, of course there was. At this time, there were Jewish ²¹² who paid certain amount of

money and promised to be out at a certain date.

They often were not released.

Q: TELL ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THE TRIP TO SHANGHAI?
YOU WERE YOUNG AND ON A SHIP, WAS THAT YOUR FIRST
TRIP?

A: It was my first trip on this ship. It was beautiful
because we went first-class, was very luxurious
and had a very good time; however, when we got to
Shanghai, I recall there were big trucks waiting
for us and we were put into a camp which was not
quite pleasant. There were huge rooms with bunk-beds
and thirty, forty people to one room.

Q: DO YOU KNOW THE NAME OF THE CAMP?

A: Well, they were called - they were in a designated
area in the Chinese part of the city, because Shanghai
was divided into several quarters and this was a
Chinese part of it and this was 234, this
was the name of the camp.

Q: CAN YOU DESCRIBE LIFE HERE TOO, A LITTLE BIT, AND
HOW LONG YOU WERE THERE?

A: We were there, I think a few months, maybe three or
four months until my father found work and was able
to move out into - I think we had a two-room place
then. At the camp, they had a huge kitchen, it was
like a little 243 like an army kitchen. It

was very difficult, the transition, not as much for me than for my parents.

Q: SOME PEOPLE HAVE TOLD ME THAT IT WAS A LITTLE LIKE AN ADVENTURE, THEY WERE CHILDREN AT THE TIME?

A: Yes, definitely, but as I said, it depended upon the age.

Q: WHAT WAS YOUR DAILY LIFE LIKE? WERE THERE SCHOOLS?

A: Yes, there were schools and they did not fit into a routine. There was schooling and there were lots of young people. We had a lot of fun.

Q: WHAT KIND OF THINGS DID YOU DO TO ENTERTAIN YOURSELVES?

A: Entertain? Talking, playing ball. Anything that didn't cost money.

Q: YOU WERE ALL IN THE SAME SITUATION?

A: Exactly.

Q: DID YOU MAKE ANY FRIENDS IN THE CAMP SITE?

A: Yes, yes, I made friends. Everybody was in the same situation.

Q: WAS THERE ANYONE IN PARTICULAR THAT BECAME A SPECIAL FRIEND DURING THOSE DIFFICULT TIMES?

A: Not at this particular time, no.

Q: AND WHAT KIND OF WORK DID YOUR FATHER FIND WHEN HE DID FIND WORK?

A: My father did manual work with a Welch man. His

English was rather poor so he had to do some manual work. He tried to get in to some exporting business but it didn't work out.

Q: AND YOUR MOTHER, WHAT DID SHE DO DURING THIS TIME?

A: Not much really. She had no spirits. She just tried to keep house as well as possible which was very difficult under those circumstances.

Q: YOU SAID IT WAS A TWO-ROOM APARTMENT?

A: Well, I wouldn't call it an apartment. There were two rooms, two small rooms, and a community kitchen and later on when the war progressed, when it got even more scarce, we only had one room for the family.

Q: SO IT WAS MORE LIKE A BOARDING HOUSE?

A: More or less, a primitive boarding house.

Q: HOW LONG WERE YOU IN SHANGHAI?

A: We were in Shanghai - we left Shanghai in '47.

Q: SO YOU WERE THERE DURING THE WAR. WERE YOU GETTING NEWS OF THE WAR?

A: Well, we heard that, yes, we were there during the Pacific war and we got some news via the Red Cross of the World War.

Q: HOW DID THE WAR AFFECT YOU LIVING SO CLOSE TO THE PACIFIC WAR? WHAT WAS THE EFFECT?

A: Very much so. It was the Japanese that interned us and they were very cold, and the other, to work outside, we were in this, what you call, designated ghetto - designated area, and the other, to go downtown to work, you had to have a pass. In order to get this pass, you had to apply at the police station and stand in line for hours and hours in the boiling sun until you were seen by a Japanese official who either granted that pass or did not grant it, however the mood struck him.

Q: VERY ARBITRARY?

A: Absolutely.

Q: AT WHAT POINT DID THE JAPANESE TAKE OVER AND INTERN?

A: Well, I think the Pacific war started in '41, if I remember correctly, and that's when they took over.

Q: SO 1940 WAS THE MOST NORMAL YEAR YOU SPENT?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: AT THAT POINT, WAS YOUR FATHER MAKING ENOUGH MONEY FOR FOOD?

A: Well, he wasn't making - yes, he made enough to scrape by.

Q: WHAT KIND OF THINGS WERE YOU EATING?

A: Well, '40 we still ate normally. After the war started, we did not eat normally because then

there was hardly any food available or else the food that was available was very, very expensive so the ³²² was an organization, took all the nice, the quality kitchen front, so they organized community kitchens and we ate somehow.

Q: WHAT KIND OF THINGS DID YOU EAT?

A: I didn't think ³²⁸ a lot of grains, white bread with big pieces of sand in it.

Q: SAND?

A: Yeah, it was gritty between the teeth, very little meat. I remember after the war, a big treat was having an ounce of butter we got for dinner or have an ounce of coffee was for the special treat, so we didn't eat very well.

Q: NO BUTTER AND COFFEE DURING THE WAR, NOT EVEN RATIONED?

A: Well, no, it wasn't rationed, it was available, but was very, very expensive, and only a few people could have bought that.

Q: WAS THERE A BLACK MARKET?

A: Yes.

Q: DID YOU HAVE ANY DEALINGS WITH IT OR DID YOU KNOW OF IT?

A: I didn't.

Q: YOUR FATHER WANTED TO STAY AWAY FROM THAT KIND OF THING?

A: I don't think he was really smart enough for the black market. You had to have a certain know-how and I don't think - he was a typical German who only knew that straight-laced way and I don't think that worked, black market in Shanghai.

Q: NO. SO WHATEVER WAS BY THE BOOK IS THE WAY HE ³⁵² ?

A: Exactly.

Q: AT THIS POINT, 1941, YOU WERE MOVED TO A DIFFERENT PLACE?

A: No, we did not move. We had some choice to move to a different place then. No, I'm sorry, in 1941, you're right, you had to move in the designated area.

Q: HOW WERE YOU NOTIFIED THAT YOU HAD TO MOVE?

A: Well, the Japanese let you know in uncertain terms.

Q: AND YOU PACKED UP EVERYTHING YOU HAD?

A: Well, we lived in that Chinese area ever since we arrived in Shanghai, but people who lived outside the area, had to pick up and moved into that designated area.

Q: WAS IT ONLY JEWS IN THE DESIGNATED AREA OR WAS IT ALL FOREIGNERS?

A: No, No, they had Chinese and lots of Europeans, of

course, and they made out of a Chinese quarters, they made a little European city. They established coffee houses, bakeries, goldsmith stores. So it was a mini-European city.

Q: AND YOU WERE CONFINED TO THAT GHETTO?

A: We were confined to that ghetto unless you had a pass, as I mentioned before, to work outside of the ghetto.

Q: DID YOUR FATHER OBTAIN ONE OF THOSE PASSES?

A: My father didn't, but I did, because I did clerical work and I worked outside the ghetto.

Q: HOW DID YOU COME TO - DID YOU FINISH SCHOOL IN 1940?

A: I finished school in Shanghai. I went to a business college.

Q: AND HOW LONG WERE YOU IN SCHOOL AT THE BUSINESS COLLEGE?

A: Well, I don't think I finished it, until I got a job which was 1941 or so.

Q: CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT THE DAY, PARTICULARLY WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU WHEN YOU WENT DOWN TO GET YOUR PASS?

A: When I went down to get the pass, yes. As I said, you had to wait in the boiling sun and there was a little, ugly, Japanese sitting behind a huge desk. He looked at you and he said you are a spy - a spy.

I know you are a spy. I hate you and then he said, well, this time you can - it was an interrogation tactic - at this time, you can get the pass. Sometimes you were lucky that the pass was three months. Sometimes you got to six months and sometimes only for one month, completely arbitrary.

Q: HOW LONG WAS YOUR PASS FOR?

A: Well, it all depended, however the mood struck the Japanese.

Q: SO YOU GOT A FIRST PASS FOR?

A: Well, I had it for six months and also had for three months and only for a couple of weeks, too.

Q: WHO DID YOU GO TO WORK FOR?

A: I worked for an export firm.

Q: HOW DID YOU FIND THE JOB AND WHAT KIND OF WORK WERE YOU DOING?

A: Secretarial work. I think I got it through a joint committee.

Q: WHAT IS THE JOINT COMMITTEE?

A: The joint committee was a group of old, Shanghai landers, mostly Jews who had connections with the Chinese community, with the foreign community.

Q: AND WAS THEIR ONLY FUNCTION TO HELP PEOPLE FIND JOBS?

A: To help people period, yes.

Q: HOW DID YOU COME IN CONTACT WITH THEM?

A: They were a well-known establishment, so I applied.

Q: WHO DID YOU WORK FOR DURING THOSE YEARS?

A: Well, one was (H. D. Diestra) who was a farmer. I think he was British and then I also worked for a Chinese because at this time, it gave a Chinese important status to have a foreigner, White girl, sitting in the office.

Q: AND HOW MUCH MONEY DID YOU MAKE AND HOW WERE YOU TREATED THERE?

A: I was treated very well and I made enough to make a living.

Q: AND YOU STILL LIVED WITH YOUR PARENTS AT THIS TIME?

A: Yes, I lived with my parents until I got married in 1945.

Q: HOW DID YOU MEET YOUR HUSBAND?

A: I met my husband in Germany in that particular school, the boarding school. He was a student there, too.

Q: WHAT IS HIS NAME?

A: I'm sorry?

Q: WHAT IS YOUR HUSBAND'S NAME?

A: 451

Q: AND HOW DID YOU FIND EACH OTHER IN SHANGHAI?

A: He knew I was living there so he looked me up.

Q: DID YOU TWO KNOW BEFORE YOU LEFT GERMANY THAT
YOU WERE GOING TO THE SAME PLACE?

A: No.

Q: HAD YOU WRITTEN TO HIM?

A: No, no, I just knew him.

Q: AND HE LOOKED YOU UP? YOU STARTED DATING?

A: Yes, we started dating that night.

Q: DID YOU MOVE INTO YOUR HOUSE AT THAT POINT, APARTMENT?

A: Well, it was a room about the size of that table.
It was the own house or apartment.

Q: THIS AFFORDED YOU ROOM AND PRIVACY?

A: Yes.

Q: WITH KITCHEN FACILITIES, JOINT KITCHEN FACILITIES
THEN?

A: Kitchen facilities, no, because there was no gas
so most of the time, we had to eat out and we ate
at my parents. They had a little, like a hibachi,
in the front hall which you could use.

Q: PRETTY PRIMITIVE?

A: Yes, I'll say.

Q: THEY MUST HAVE BEEN VERY CREATIVE ABOUT SURVIVAL?

A: Yes, since everybody was in the same boat, we really
didn't feel so bad about it.

Q: DID HIS PARENTS MOVE TO SHANGHAI?

A: No, his parents did not. They couldn't leave Germany. They were waiting until their son, my husband, got out and his father got out. They wanted their sons to be established and didn't want to leave everything they had, so it was too late for them, so they went to Auschwitz and were gassed.

Q: WHERE WAS HIS FAMILY FROM AND WHAT WERE THEIR NAMES?

A: His family was from, a small place in west area, ⁴⁹⁹ and their name was Stern.

Q: DO YOU REMEMBER THE FIRST NAMES?

A: Leo Stern and Anna Stern.

Q: SO HE AND HIS BORTHER CAME OUT TOGETHER?

A: No, they did not come out together. I think his brother came out first and then my husband came out.

Q: AND WHAT KIND OF WORK DID YOUR HUSBAND DO?

A: He worked as a painter, house painter.

Q: AND HOW OLD WAS HE AT THE TIME WHEN YOU GOT MARRIED?

A: When we got married, he was 24.

Q: DID YOU CONTINUE WORKING ONCE YOU GOT MARRIED?

A: Yes, oh yes.

Q: TELL ME, WHAT WAS YOUR DAILY ROUTINE LIKE? WHAT WERE THE MOST DIFFICULT PARTS OF LIVING IN SHANGHAI AT THAT TIME?

A: The most difficult parts were the air-raids. It was a tremendously scary experience 52✓ .

Q: WERE THEY FREQUENT?

A: Frequent enough, yes, yes. I think those were the American ⁵²¹ bombs. I think once going to die, hit right here by mistake.

Q: WHERE WERE YOU AT THE TIME?

A: I was in our apartment and went over to see whether my parents were okay and on the way, you saw Chinese dead, half-dead, dismembered.

Q: AND WERE YOUR PARENTS OKAY?

A: My parents were okay.

Q: THAT MUST HAVE BEEN VERY NERVE-RACKING. HOW DID YOU COPE WITH THAT DAY IN AND DAY OUT?

A: You have no choice, you cope.

Q: DID YOU HAVE A NETWORK OF FRIENDS BY THEN IN SHANGHAI?

A: Yes, we had some very good friends.

Q: WERE THEY MOSTLY JEWISH?

A: Only.

Q: ONLY JEWISH?

A: Jewish, German or Austrian.

Q: THAT MUST HAVE BEEN SOMETHING OF A CHANGE SINCE WHEN YOU WERE A CHILD, YOU WERE USED TO A MIXED GROUP OF PEOPLE?

A: Yes, right, but in all my formative years, they were all people, I had more or less.

Q: WAS THERE A RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY ALSO IN SHANGHAI?

WAS THERE A SHUL?

A: Yes, yes only had synagogues.

Q: DID YOUR PARENTS HAVE A JEWISH LIFE AT ALL?

A: Not very much. My husband went to synagogue. I never did.

Q: WAS HE FROM AN ORTHODOX FAMILY?

A: Conservative.

Q: DID YOU HAVE CHILDREN?

A: Not in Shanghai.

Q: WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER ABOUT 1945 WHEN THE WAR ENDED?

A: A tremendous relief. We were very happy, very carefree, because we could see the future open up.

Q: WHAT DID YOU THINK YOU WOULD DO?

A: Well, go with my husband and family in the States. At this time, we were married and we wanted to come to the United States.

Q: WAS THAT AN EASY THING TO DO AT THAT TIME?

A: Yes, yes, because if you had to have an affidavit and within two years we were on our way. After the war, my husband worked for the American army and things were very carefree and a lot of fun.

Q: WHAT DID HE DO?

A: He worked at the PX.

Q: SUDDENLY YOU HAD THINGS AVAILABLE TO YOU?

A: That's correct. Even C-rations were good.

Q: TELL ME ABOUT COMING TO THE UNITED STATES. WHEN DID YOU?

A: We came to the United States, we were supposed to go to Philadelphia because our family was in Philadelphia, and when we arrived in San Francisco, it was one of those glorious May mornings, everything was basked in sun and so we stayed and there were lots of planned opportunities in '47.

Q: WERE YOU FLUENT IN ENGLISH WHEN YOU LEFT OR BEFORE YOU LEFT GERMANY?

A: When I left Germany, I wasn't that fluent. In Shanghai, of course, I became fluent.

Q: AND SO YOU FOUND THAT MAY MORNING IN SAN FRANCISCO WAS VERY DECEPTIVE AND I LIKE THAT?

A: It was gorgeous, and I never did look at it.

Q: IT WAS A BEATIFUL SETTING. AND HOW DID YOU ESTABLISH YOURSELVES HERE? YOU DIDN'T HAVE ANY FAMILY, RIGHT?

A: No, we didn't have any family. Well, as I said, there were lots of planned opportunities. We found an apartment right away. We both found work and that was it.

Q: WHAT KIND OF WORK DID YOU TWO FIND?

A: Well, I started working in an insurance company and my husband was a painter. He worked for Zelinsky and Company.

Q: AND DID YOU HAVE A FAMILY HERE WHEN YOU GOT HERE?
YOU RAISED YOUR FAMILY?

A: Yes, I had a family here.

Q: AND HOW MANY CHILDREN?

A: I have two daughters.

Q: HOW DID YOUR WARTIME EXPERIENCE CHANGE YOUR PERSPECTIVE
ON LIFE?

A: It changed and almost were changed out of respect as to food. I will never throw out food, and that hasn't changed.

End Tape 1, Side 1

Begin Tape 1, Side 2

Q: HOW DID YOU FIND THE RECEPTION IN THE UNITED STATES?

A: Very nice, very warm. People from San Francisco worked with us. People who arrived in '33, and they were helpful. They showed us around. Showed us - gave us some pointers, where to look for apartments but you really didn't need any help because we had jobs right away and we were able to establish ourselves.

Q: DID YOU GET INVOLVED WITH THE JEWISH COMMUNITY WHEN YOU FIRST CAME HERE?

A: No, not really, no.

Q: HOW DID YOUR EXPERIENCE UNDER THE NAZIS CHANGE YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT JUDIASM?

A: Well, I became much, yes, I was very much aware that I'm a Jew. *014* I expect.

Q: WHAT IF ANYTHING DID YOU TELL YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCES, YOUR TWO DAUGHTERS ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCES?

A: Well, I told them all about those experiences. My daughter went to Germany once and did not feel very comfortable there through my talking.

Q: AT WHAT AGE DID YOU STARTED TELLING THEM ABOUT?

A: I'm sorry?

Q: AT WHAT AGE WERE THEY WHEN YOU BEGAN TALKING ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST?

A: Well, since they were maybe ten, nine, ten, something like that.

Q: DID YOU CELEBRATE HERE IN THE UNITED STATES? DID YOU CELEBRATE THE JEWISH HOLIDAYS?

A: Always.

Q: SO THAT WAS A BIG CHANGE?

A: Well, I was not in favor of celebrating Christmas ever since I was thinking because my mother had a Christmas tree and I made a big fuss about it. Didn't want it in the house.

Q: HOW DID YOUR PARENTS REACT TO THAT?

A: Well, they were - I think they complied with my wishes next year.

Q: WHY WAS IT THAT YOU DIDN'T WANT THE CHRISTMAS TREE IN YOUR HOUSE?

A: At this time, I was active in the Zionist organization.

Q: CAN YOU TELL ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THAT?

A: Not really too much. It was a and it was a shed.

Q: HOW DID YOU FIRST HEAR ABOUT IT, GOING TO A CATHOLIC SCHOOL?

A: Well, this was after the Catholic school. This was in a Jewish school. This was the thing to do.

• Q: BUT YOU NEVER WANTED TO GO TO ISRAEL?

A: Not really. It was more a social thing than anything else.

Q: DO YOU REMEMBER, I KNOW YOU WERE YOUNG, BUT WHEN HITLER WAS RUNNING FOR OFFICE, DO YOU REMEMBER LIKE POLITICAL RALLIES?

A: Certainly.

Q: WHAT WERE THOSE LIKE?

A: Scary, scary, very nosy, very scary. You did not dare to go out on the streets. I remember those rallies.

Q: AT THAT TIME, DID YOUR PARENTS THINK THAT HE WAS GOING TO BE ELECTED?

A: Well, they were already against - that I wouldn't know.

Q: WAS YOUR FATHER IN THE GERMAN ARMY IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR?

A: Oh, yes. Iron Cross.

Q: IRON CORSS. DO YOU KNOW WHERE HE SERVED?

A: No. Yes, I do. I think it's a French - near France somewhere. And that's why he did not understand that anything could happen to him because he was an officer, decorated with the Iron Cross.

Q: WAS HE IN LIKE THE RESERVES AT THE TIME?

A: No, no, no. He was active.

Q: HE WAS AN ACTIVE ARMY?

A: He was an active army.

Q: WAS HE ASKED TO LEAVE THE ARMY AFTER THE NAZIS TOOK OVER?

A: Well, no, after the war was over, he was through.

Q: WHEN YOU SAID YOUR PRIVILEGES WERE CURTAILED, DID THE GESTAPO OR THE POLICE ACTUALLY COME TO YOUR HOUSE AND TELL YOU NOT TO DO THESE?

A: No, those were said over the radio that Jews cannot have, for instance, employees, younger than this and this age. Police did not come to the house. Those were all orders, mostly we heard over the radio, or the newspaper.

Q: AND YOU ACCEPTED IT?

A: Yes.

Q: ON KRISTALLNACHT, WHEN YOUR FATHER WAS ADVISED?

A: To disappear.

Q: HE WAS TOLD BEFORE KRISTALLNACHT?

A: Yes. The afternoon of Kristallnacht he was advised to go into hiding.

Q: AND WAS THIS BY A NON-JEWISH?

A: That was by a non-Jewish lawyer.

Q: WHEN YOU FIRST HEARD OF CONCENTRATION CAMPS, AND PEOPLE BEING KILLED, HOW DID YOU HEAR ABOUT IT INITIALLY?

A: Word of mouth. People were whispering.

Q: BEFORE THE NAZIS TOOK OVER, DID YOU GENERALLY FEEL THAT THE LEGAL SYSTEM IN GERMANY WAS FAIR?

A: Well, I mean I had no opinion, but my parents felt very comfortable. They felt very German.

Q: WHEN YOU WERE ON THE TRAIN GOING FROM GERMANY TO ITALY, WERE THERE GERMAN SOLDIERS ON THE TRAIN?

A: Yes, yes. There were German soldiers on the train.

Q: WERE YOU BOTHERED AT ALL BY THEM?

A: Well, no, they scrutinized our papers and we were scared, but nothing happened.

Q: WHEN YOU FIRST ARRIVED IN SHANGHAI, WHEN THE BOAT LANDED, WHO MET YOU? WERE THERE CHINESE ARMY TROOPS?

A: No, no, no. Those were people from the Jewish community in Shanghai met us, old Shanghai landers as they called themselves, and they transported us to our quarters because we came there without any money and without any means of support.

Q: THE CAMP OR QUARTER THAT YOU WERE ORIGINALLY AT, WHO WAS RUNNING THAT CAMP?

A: Those people, the Shanghai landers and that was mostly American money.

Q: WHEN YOU WERE IN SHANGHAI, WHAT WAS THE LANGUAGE USED? WHEN YOU WERE WORKING, DID YOU SPEAK GERMAN AT THE JOB?

A: No, when I was working, I spoke English. At the house, mostly German.

Q: AND DID YOU HAVE CONTACT WITH THE CHINESE THERE?

A: Yes.

Q: AND WHAT LANGUAGE DID THEY SPEAK?

A: English.

Q: DID YOU SPEAK CHINESE AT ALL?

A: A little bit.

Q: WERE YOU IN SHANGHAI WHEN THE JAPANESE ARMY ACTUALLY ENTERED AND TOOK OVER?

A: Oh yeah, yeah, during the attack on Pearl Harbor, yes.

Q: NOW WHAT WAS THAT LIKE?

A: Very, very scary because all of a sudden you saw Japanese, with open bayonets, hurrying on the streets and shouting orders in Japanese which you don't understand, very scary.

Q: WHAT TIME OF DAY WAS IT? WERE YOU HOME OR AT WORK?

A: That was in the early morning hours when they attacked Pearl Harbor, when we heard about it, over in the 109 because they sank several ships in Shanghai Harbor. It was in the very early morning hours.

Q: SO YOU WERE HOME WITH YOUR PARENTS?

A: I was home with my parents.

Q: AND WHAT DID YOU DO? DID YOU STAY INDOORS?

A: Nothing. I mean, waited until we heard something.

Q: WHAT KIND OF ACTIVITY WAS THERE ON THE STREETS AS THE JAPANESE WERE COMING IN?

A: People were milling around and then the Japanese shooed them into their homes because the Japanese

didn't know what was going on, so it was a couple of days of utter confusion.

Q: WAS THERE A CURFEW INITIALLY?

A: Yes, there was a curfew, and the curfew was enforced by our own people. The Japanese recruited young Jewish men and they had to enforce the curfew.

Q: WHAT DID THEY DO TO ENFORCE IT? WERE THEY GIVEN GUNS? DID THEY PATROL?

A: I believe no, they didn't have guns. I think they had clubs, but they had to enforce it because they, again, would have been subject to severe punishment by the Japanese.

Q: WHEN THE JAPANESE WERE IN CHARGE, DID NAZI OFFICIALS EVER COME AND VISIT WHERE YOU WERE?

A: Not to my knowledge.

Q: WERE THERE RUMORS THAT THE JAPANESE WERE GOING TO BRING OVER THE GERMANS?

A: But of course. They were friendly with the Germans.

Q: THE COMPANY THAT YOU WORKED FOR, THE EXPORT-IMPORT COMPANY, WAS THAT A SPECIAL TARGET FOR AMERICAN BOMBERS?

A: No, no.

Q: WHAT TYPE OF EXPORT-IMPORT DID THEY DO?

A: I don't recall that. I really don't.

Q: YOU WERE ALSO IN SHANGHAI DID THE AMERICAN ARMY THEN ENTER TO TAKE IT OVER FROM THE JAPANESE?

A: Yes.

Q: WAS THAT MORE PEACEFUL?

A: Yes, that was wonderful.

Q: FROM WORD, DID YOU HEAR ABOUT THE ATOMIC BOMB BEING DROPPED?

A: That was much later. We heard much later about that.

Q: WHAT ABOUT THE EMPEROR OF JAPAN SURRENDER? WERE YOU NOTIFIED OF THAT?

A: Also, not immediately, also a few days later.

Q: DID THE JAPANESE PEACEFULLY TRANSFER AUTHORITY TO THE AMERICAN WHEN THEY CAME IN?

A: Yes, to the best of - well, no, peaceful, no. Not peaceful. They had pockets of resistance.

Q: SO THERE WAS ACTUALLY STREET FIGHTING?

A: Yes, there was some unrest going on. Also, what happened, for instance, the Jewish people, the Germans got hold of those Japanese officials who were in charge of giving the passes and they wanted to stone them. I think one got killed. The other one escaped.

Q: DO YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO THE OTHER JAPANESE OFFICIALS?

A: Yes, they were imprisoned by the Americans.

Q: WERE THERE ANY TRIALS OF THEM IN SHANGHAI THAT YOU KNOW?

A: Not that I recall.

Q: YOU NEVER TESTIFIED?

A: No.

Q: WHEN YOU GOT TO SAN FRANCISCO, DID YOU HAVE ANY CONTACT WITH THE ORGANIZED JEWISH COMMUNITY IN SAN FRANCISCO?

A: Not really. We joined the Temple.

Q: AS RECENT ARRIVALS, DID YOU NEED ANY HELP? DID THEY OFFER ANY?

A: Yes, recent arrivals, they called it, people from '33, Germans who came to the States in '33. They were very helpful.

Q: HOW DID YOU GET IN TOUCH WITH THEM?

A: They were right there when we arrived. They were right there.

Q: DID YOU HAVE ANY TROUBLE WITH THE AMERICAN AUTHORITIES BECAUSE YOU DECIDED NOT TO GO ON TO PHILADELPHIA?

A: Oh, no, no. All I had to sign is that no one is responsible for me, that's all.

Q: THEN WAS YOUR HUSBAND, FROM BEING A PAINTER, WAS HE INVOLVED WITH A LOT OF THE BUILDING UP OF SAN FRANCISCO?

A: Well, yes. At this time, he was very busy and he worked for a large outfit and he was always working.

Q: DID ZELINSKY BUILD HOUSES WHERE THERE HAD BEEN JUST SAND DUNES?

A: Yeah 177 .

Q: YOU MENTIONED THAT, I THINK YOUR WORDS WERE, AFTER THE AMERICANS CAME AND LIBERATED SHANGHAI THAT YOU WERE "LIVING IT UP". IN WHAT WAY WERE YOU ABLE TO LIVE IT UP?

A: Well, buying things which we were not able to buy, getting nylons. It was a big thing. Little luxuries which we never had, and freedom.

Q: YOU COULD MOVE ALL OVER?

A: You could go wherever you wanted to go.

Q: WHAT ABOUT YOUR PARENTS? DID THEY COME TO THE UNITED STATES WITH YOU?

A: They came to the United States after. I think they came in '48.

Q: WERE THEY LIVING PRETTY COMFORTABLY IN SHANGHAI ONCE THE WAR WAS OVER?

A: Comfortably, I wouldn't call it. My father sold everything during the war he had, so they scraped by.

Q: WHAT DID HE DO WITH THE MONEY FROM SELLING THE FAMILY'S POSSESSIONS?

A: Eat.

Q: SO IT WAS MOSTLY USED UP BEFORE YOU GOT TO SHANGHAI?

A: Exactly.

Q: WAS HE STILL WORKING WHEN HE CAME TO THIS COUNTRY?

A: When he came to this country, yes, he started to work. He worked in the Dutch Royal outfit but then he got some restitution from Germany and he was able to live quite comfortably with that. They went in the stockmarket and he did all right.

Q: SO HIS LAST YEARS WERE MORE COMFORTABLE THAN THOSE MIDDLE YEARS?

A: Yes, yes, definitely, very comfortable then.

Q: HOW DID YOUR PARENTS - WHAT KIND OF WAYS DID YOU SEE THEM CHANGE AFTER HAVING GONE THROUGH THE HARDSHIPS THAT THEY HADN'T BEEN USED TO IN GERMANY?

A: Well, I didn't notice too much change, but then again, I was very involved with myself, I was young so already to me it was gradually getting older.

Q: AND YOUR MOTHER, HOW DID SHE ADJUST TO THE UNITED STATES?

A: Well, the United States was much happier because she had a decent style of living again even though she did work here because I think they bought a cleaning store and she worked at this cleaning store.

Q: SHE WOULD BECOME ACCUSTOMED TO WORKING BY THEN?

A: Not really. No.

Q: IT JUST HAPPENED?

A: Yeah.

Q: DID IT CHANGE HOW THEY FELT ABOUT JUDIASM HAVING
GONE THROUGH THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING FORCED OUT
OF GERMANY?

A: Yes. Well, they also became much more, not religious,
but Jewish-oriented, yes.

Q: WERE YOU CLOSE TO YOUR PARENTS WHEN YOU WERE A CHILD?

A: I was always close to my father.

Q: DID YOU DO THINGS TOGETHER IN GERMANY?

A: Yes, with my father.

Q: YOU MENTIONED YOU PLAYED TENNIS AND WENT TO OPERA,
WAS THAT MOSTLY WITH HIM?

A: Yes, that was mostly with my father.

Q: DID YOU HAVE OTHER COUSINS OR ANY OTHER FAMILY?

A: In Germany, yes. I had cousins but I didn't see
too much of them. This was not a very close-knit
family.

Q: DID ANY OF YOUR OTHER RELATIVES SURVIVE DO YOU KNOW?

A: I happened to meet one cousin, there in San
Francisco, by chance. I think the rest did not
survive.

Q: YOU HAD RELATIVES IN THE UNITED STATES BEFORE THE WAR?

A: My husband's relatives.

Q: YOU MENTIONED THAT YOUR FAMILY MIGHT HAVE BEEN ABLE TO GET AN AFFIDAVIT TO GO TO THE UNITED STATES?

A: That's correct, yes, my father had a sister which she had passed away meanwhile.

Q: YOU NEVER SAW HER?

A: No.

Q: DID YOU EVER ASK FOR ANY KIND OF RESTITUTION FROM GERMANY OR ACCEPT ANY KIND?

A: I was not entitled to it because I did not work in Germany.

Q: HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE UNIFICATION OF GERMANY?

A: Fearful.

Q: DO YOU THINK THERE ARE SOME PEOPLE THAT WERE

?

A: Yes.

Q: WHAT MAKES YOU SAY THAT?

A: Experience.

Q: EXPERIENCE KNOWING GERMANS?

A: Knowing Germans, reading about Germans, yes, I'm very fearful about unification. I'm fearful that Germany is going to be too strong a power.

Q: HAVE YOU SEEN THINGS IN THE NEWS REPORTS OF EAST-GERMAN REACTION, WEST-GERMAN REACTION TO THE REUNIFICATION?

A: Yes, that's correct.

Q: AND WHAT WERE SOME OF THOSE THINGS THAT BROUGHT BACK YOUR FEARS?

A: Well, anti-semitism, and I think there's been too much change.

Q: HAVING LIVED IN SHANGHAI, ARE YOU INTERESTED STILL IN FOLLOWING THINGS IN CHINA?

A: No, Shanghai to me was never home. Shanghai to me was a way-station. I was never very comfortable due to the fact that I didn't speak the language.

Q: HAVE YOU EVER GONE BACK THERE SINCE THE WAR?

A: No, I haven't. Most of our friends went back to Shanghai, but I really was not interested.

A: YOU ALSO MENTIONED BEFORE THE INTERVIEW THAT YOU HAVEN'T GONE BACK TO GERMANY BUT YOU HAVE TRAVELED WIDELY IN EUROPE?

A: Yes.

Q: CAN YOU TELL ME WHY IT IS YOU DON'T WANT TO GO BACK TO GERMANY?

A: Well, because my memories are not very pleasant, and there's still a little hatred in me.

Q: HAS YOUR EXPERIENCE AFFECTED YOUR HEALTH IN ANY WAY?

A: No.

Q: HOW ABOUT YOUR HUSBAND? HOW DOES HE FEEL ABOUT GERMANY?

A: He feels the same way I do.

Q: HAVE YOU BEEN TO AUSTRIA?

A: Yes, unfortunately.

Q: YOUR FEELINGS WERE REKINDLED?

A: Exactly, yes. That was against my better judgment.

Q: IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADD ABOUT
YOUR EXPERIENCE THAT YOU MIGHT RECALL?

A: No, I don't think. I think that pretty much covers
it.

Q: THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

A: Okay.

End Tape 1, Side 2