Interview with MAX KNIGHT
Holocaust Oral History Project
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PEGGY KOSTER: The date is February 28th, 1991. We are interviewing Max Knight. My name is Peggy Koster and with me are Jack Clark and Peggy Pool. We are interviewing for the Holocaust Oral History Project here in Northern California.

Q WHY DON'T YOU JUST START BASICALLY TELLING THE STORY WHERE YOU LEFT OFF LAST TIME.

A Since this is my second session here, and there has been some time since the first one, I'm not quite sure whether I might not duplicate, at least at the beginning, what I said before.

So taking that risk, I believe I ended last time with the arrival of my parents in England. I may have said that they came to England on that historic day when the synagogues burned and the Jewish shops were looted in Germany and in Austria, the Night of the Broken Glass, a historic date. And on that very date they left.

I may have mentioned that when they left the home in Vienna and were on their way to the airport, the Gestapo came to rearrest my father, and the caretaker of

the house - who had been particularly well treated by my parents all those years - was grateful enough to tell them that the parents had already left for England.

He did not tell them they were still within the boundaries of the town and they could still be caught, so they got away. And they were flying over Germany. They actually, through the window, could see the burning buildings down below.

So they arrived on that historic date at the London airport. My mother wore something like a beret on which she had pinned what looked like costume jewelry, a pin in the form of a butterfly.

The Nazis did not allow any jewelry to go out of the country, and she used this pin on her hat in such a way that nobody would think that this is real jewelry. She was actually flaunting it, taking great risk, and got away with it.

She brought, actually, a second pin; also a very valuable piece of jewelry, diamonds. I forget how she managed that one. The first one had emeralds or sapphires; it was a very beautiful pin. Today these two pins are worn by the wives of my two sons.

So I took my parents to the little place where I stayed. Again I'm afraid I do not remember whether I mentioned in the first session that I actually had found a job in England and had a minimum income. At

the risk of repeating myself, I will tell now how I got that job.

It was a great problem, because the British were jealously guarding the workers' rights and did not want any unemployment, and they did not allow refugees to take any jobs, except if the refugee could prove to the satisfaction of the Home Office, which was the same as the Interior Department here, that he had the skills which were scarce or not available in England.

Well, I didn't see any particular skills in having studied law, Austrian law, now being in England. What should I do with that? And there were many days wondering what I could do and what I could offer. In Austria, you might call it a skill to be able to speak English, but in England I couldn't even speak their language properly. I had a vague idea. I could buy groceries, but that was all.

So then I thought in England it was perhaps a skill to be able to speak German, and I had seen over the previous days and weeks copies of the foremost Jewish Journal in England, an old established periodical, and it occurred to me -- or, before I say that, that was not a paper that I usually saw. I couldn't afford buying newspapers, but I occasionally saw it when friends had it. And now it occurred to me that this Jewish weekly might be able to use somebody who reads the German newspapers, the

Nazi newspapers, because I saw them occasionally quoted.

So I went to Moore Lane, which was the address of this paper, and told them that I was a writer, journalist, you might say, and, well, they could use somebody who would read the Nazi papers and make a rough draft, a summary in my kind of English at the time, which then could be put into proper English and used for the weekly.

And not only did they buy the story, but they applied to the Home Office for this kind of special skill permit, labor permit. They embellished it. They said I was a great expert in knowing the Jewish refugee situation on the Continent. I didn't know it any better than the next guy, but it sounded good.

And so, the day happened when actually I got a job at the Jewish Chronicle of London and read there the Nazi papers which were imported through Switzerland. The Nazis would not be expected -- be able to send it to England, but to neutral country, and from the neutral country it was then forwarded to London, the Schwarze Korps, the Volkische Beobachter, and the Sturmer, the notorious paper. So I read these papers and made notations which were then expanded and used for the Jewish Chronicle.

So that was all nice, and I was much envied for having a job there. But still, I had my two parents, and my job did not pay well enough to support three

people; it was barely enough for one. And here I was now in the very fortunate situation of having been able to rescue my parents, but I didn't have money for groceries. It was a great problem. And when it became acute enough, I took a bold step, which is something that you couldn't use in a fiction story because it is so unbelievable. But here is what happened:

Ever since I was a teenager I was very interested in family history and genealogy, and I pumped my relatives of my parents for background, "Who was your grandfather? Your great-grandfather?" and all of that. And in the course of these investigations as a young fellow I came across various rumors.

It seems that people who write genealogies always like to have illustrious forebears and ancestors which slip in, documented or not, and one of those rumors in my family had long been the fact that -- I shouldn't use the words "the fact." The rumor was that way back somewhere there was some connection with the Rothschild family.

Well, I decided to go to the richest man in England and ask him to support my parents, Mr. Lionel de Rothschild, the head of the Rothschild family in England.

I looked up my family tree, which I had, and in there it was claimed that the current head of the House Rothschild, Lionel de Rothschild, and his brother Anthony

were married to two sisters by the name of Beer, who supposedly had the same great-grandmother as my mother.

I took my parents and without an appointment went to the fortress of the Rothschilds, their bank in the street called St. Swithins Lane. St. Swithins Lane, I remember that. And there was this palatial bank. And I walked in there with my parents. Of course there was a receptionist. What did I want? Did I have an appointment? they said.

"No," I said. "I'm a relative."

They looked at me; I didn't look very much like a relative. My clothes had the Austrian cut. My English, you can hear it now after 50 years how I speak, and you hear my accent, but this is nothing -- that is nothing compared with what I had then.

But they couldn't immediately brush me off, if I claimed to be a relative. So this receptionist went to the next room and asked the receptionist no. 2, and there was no. 3 and 4 and 5. And here I was waiting while they were consulting with each other. And I remember the walls were covered with life-sized oil paintings of the Rothschild ancestors.

Well, eventually, the first miracle happened. I was asked to -- I was led to a room and asked to wait there. And after a while a very ebullient, big man with a

lion's mane came in, and I showed him my family tree diagram. He seemed to know a little bit about all this, because I had told it so many times to the various receptionists, so they had coached him in some way.

He was in the room I don't think three minutes, but three minutes with the head of the Rothschild family. I told him about my parents. And I said, "Would you like to meet them?"

He said, "Meet them? Where are they?"

And I said, "They are waiting downstairs underneath the oil paintings."

So they came in, too. He said hello to them, shook hands, and that handshake was worth what he called a "pension" for a year, supporting them for a full year. He had an aide there whom he instructed to take care of things. Apparently they have or had a fund for all kinds of people who came to see Rothschild and ask for help, if they could substantiate their request somehow. The Rothschilds are generous enough, or were. I couldn't believe what I heard, but on the other hand I was determined that something would have to happen.

They were so considerate that, on leaving, that aide gave me an envelope with cash in it, so that there was an immediate tying us over the next few days because the so-called pension wasn't due until whenever it was, the first of the month or so. They did it in a very

discreet way. We didn't have the feeling of just being beggars there.

Well, that was how we managed. It was a moderate sum, but it was entirely adequate for what we needed.

I then went to my daily job. My parents had subsistence, and everything seemed, quote, "fine," unquote. But the war on the Continent was imminent. The Germans swallowed one country after another. Czechoslovakia first; after the disaster at the Sudetenland, Munich; then came Belgium, Holland, and finally France. In June 1940 -- am I right? Must have been '39, in June '39 --

Q ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT THE INVASION OF POLAND?

A No, not yet. Am I mixing things up? Let me see for a minute. Poland was invaded on the 1st of September 1939, so everything must have happened in 1940, of course. It was in 1940 in May. May 10, 1940, was Belgium and Holland, and soon thereafter France fell in June.

Here we, the refugees, were sitting in England, those who managed to get to England. Most of them managed only to get to France or to the Lowlands, if they could get away at all. In France, when the Nazis took over, the refugees, whom the French had put into camps, into work camps, into internment camps, did not let

them run away when the Germans came, but simply changed guards, and the internment camps became concentration camps under the Gestapo.

This is, or was, an idea that terrorized me, that the same would happen with England. It is easy to sit here in 1991, 50 years later, knowing full well that England was never occupied by the Germans, but at that time that hung on a hair.

London was under siege. They expected the Germans to invade. The Germans had every plan to invade. The plans were found later in Brussels. Churchill tells about the invasion plans in detail.

The British were scared. They took down the street signs in London so if the Germans came, they would be confused and not find their way around. With these naive and primitive means, the British thought they could maintain themselves. They were practicing with broomsticks instead of rifles. They didn't have enough rifles for the general public, population.

We, the refugees, had to give up our cameras, and even the London city maps; they didn't trust us. After all, we spoke German. So I was -- I just felt I got away once, I don't want to be caught like those in France here in England a second time. I wanted to get away a second time. So --

Q YOU MEAN CAUGHT IN INTERNMENT CAMP?

A Caught, not in an internment camp, but caught by the Germans when they invaded -- and if they invaded England. I know it seems farfetched now, but it was imminent then, or seemed imminent. It was imminent.

What happened was that Hitler was so - I always say - gorged, like a cobra after having eaten an animal, that he couldn't devour immediately something else. He hesitated a few weeks.

Those few weeks were the salvation of England and perhaps the world, because the RAF, the Royal Air Force, managed to get their act together, and a few brave men fought the Germans over the Channel coast and England was -- the invasion was delayed, and the delay was final. And then later on the United States came in, but that is a different story.

Now, I wanted to find some way of solving the situation just for my own family, and although I had considered England as a -- originally considered England as the country of refuge, I went to the American Consul and applied for immigration to the United States.

As most of those who, when they hear or see this, might know, the immigration policy of the United States at the time was that each European country, each country in the world, had assigned a certain quota, so many people from this country may immigrate to the United States if all other requirements were met.

Austria and Germany had a certain number, like all the other countries, but each number was different; for each country the quota was different. And if that quota was filled for that year, you had to wait for next year or for the year thereafter.

In a country where there was a great demand for an immigration visa, people had to wait sometimes for years. I had applied relatively late. Most of my friends had applied while they were still in Vienna, at the American Consul in Vienna. I applied at the American Consulate in London. I applied late; therefore, my number was high. I would have to wait about a year. But to wait a year at the time when the Nazis invaded countries by the month and by the week and finally by the day was something that practically -- practically meant -- giving up the idea of getting away at all.

You had the choice of either waiting for that number to come up, no matter how long it might take, or trying to find a third country of refuge where you could wait out the time that you had to wait. My friends and myself were in panic during that time. We had a number.

There were other requirements which I don't want to go into now; an affidavit and exit permit and a ship ticket and all kinds of things, which are all dated, and the one date would run out before you had the next paper and then you had to start all over again. We

investigated the various countries in the world. We actually on one occasion turned a globe looking for where is another, where is a country. But no country would give an entry visa, or would set conditions which were so impossible to fulfill that it was equivalent to a denial.

And then, suddenly, a rumor came up in the refugee community. The rumor was that there is a place where you can go and do not need a visa, an entry visa. You could just go there. I mean, it was just fantastic and totally incredible in view of the fact that every other country, every little ministate in South America, would deny entry.

As a footnote, I tried, for example, to get permission to go to the Dominican Republic, which at that time had a small Jewish community. And I tried to convince the consul that I was a journalist who wanted to report about that community and for that reason would need a visa, but he saw through this and threw me out.

And so it was with every other country in one way or another. And now at this time comes this crazy rumor that you can go to China without a visa. That is to say, you cannot go to China itself, but you can go to Shanghai. There is a background to this, which I really don't think I should include here, why this was so. Let it suffice to say that this rumor turned out to be true, that Shanghai alone, this one tiny spot on the globe, was the

only place that did not check on immigration. If anybody got off the boat there, he was in China, he was in Shanghai, and that was it, and they didn't care one way or another.

It turned out that it wasn't quite that simple, that the shipping companies, after they also heard about that and after they were suddenly overrun by people who wanted to go to Shanghai, not only immediately raised the price for the tickets and would sell only first class tickets to the most wretched refugees who didn't have money for fifth class tickets, but they also required, the shipping companies required, that each passenger, would-be passenger, deposit $2,000 at a bank in Shanghai just in case there should be a change in the immigration policy there, just in case they, the shipping company, would be forced to take the people back again and they were not allowed to land. Now, $2,000 at that time was an enormous amount of money. We didn't have the money, of course.

I think I mentioned in my earlier session here that when I first came to London, I got a meal ticket and was fed one meal a day; that was all I had. I didn't have money for food. And here you were supposed to deposit $2,000 American dollars in a bank in Shanghai.

If I may make a jump now for a moment. In 1988, 50 years after Austria's annexation to Germany, my friend, Joseph Fabry, and myself wrote a book called "One

and One Make Three." It was published by a Jewish publisher in Berkeley, Ben-Mir Books; Benjamin Miriam, Ben-Mir Books. The book looks like this [displaying book]. It is written under a joint pen name that we used, Peter Fabrizius.

And in this book I'm explaining the background, the preparations in trying to leave for Shanghai, my inability to prevent my parents from getting interned by the British in internment camps. Now, these were not concentration camps; these were humane internment camps. But nevertheless, there were great hardships in those internment camps.

The British, not only were they unprepared for war, they were even more unprepared suddenly to feed and house thousands of refugees within their borders. The camps were on the Isle of Man. They were very poorly furnished. There was no light in the camp. My father, a man in his seventies, broke his leg there in the darkness. Only the minimum food. Well, I cannot -- I could not save them from internment. I managed to hold off the British police from interning me because I could prove that I had made arrangements for traveling to Shanghai.

I mentioned this book because in this book I tried to figure out how much $2,000 in today's terms would be. At that time, at the writing of that book, it was $16,000. It is still more today, a sum totally out of

reach for us.

Now, I did find a distant relative in New York who was willing to put up this money and did send it to the Chase Bank in Shanghai. I know I have here permission to tell the story at large, and yet it would be an endless story if I went into these details, how it was possible to reach this relative and why he did this and why my parents were not included, but it would -- it would not be practical to do this. Perhaps at the end, if you still think so, I can go into this. It is told in the book.

So, we -- I say "we," because I was with a friend, Kurt Schwarz, with whom I shared my little room in London. So the two of us had decided to indeed take this weird trip to an unknown land, to China of all places.

Today you can reach every point in the world from every other point in the world within 24 hours. At that time the airlines were not yet common, public transportation. To tell the end at the beginning, it took us 54 days to reach Shanghai. We had to cross the Atlantic and we had to cross the Pacific, and there was something in between.

When we finally did get a ship ticket, when we got a travel paper, we didn't have any passports anymore. We had lost our citizenship in Austria; never received citizenship in Germany. We of course were not British, but the British did furnish an identity paper to

us which allowed us to leave England, but not to return to England. Our paper was stamped, "Not valid for return to the United Kingdom."

So, you have to put yourself in the position of a person who was let go into the universe, into nowhere. If for one reason or another something went wrong on the trip, if in Shanghai they said, "No, we have enough. We don't want you," or in between something, there was nowhere to go. You were just a bird in the sky.

In addition to that, our ship ticket was also stamped, and it said on it, "No refund in case of war." Meaning that if we were caught in between, wherever we were, there we were.

We went to Liverpool, waited for the ship -- I'm sorry. I have to be back in my chronology. We are not in Liverpool yet. I will come to that later.

We finally managed to get all these complicated papers with the various deadlines together. We had a ship ticket that would take us to our destination, but when the booking agent made out those papers, he said, "Do you have a visa?" The shipping agency would not issue a ticket unless you had a destination, a visa to go somewhere, because they didn't want to take us back at their own expense.

And when we said, "Shanghai, we don't need a visa for that," he said, "Do you have a bank deposit

there?" "Yes," we said, "we have this."

"All right. Where is your transit visa through Panama?"

"What? A transit visa? Panama? What is that?"

"Well, if you go from here to China, you have to go somewhere. You go through Panama; you have to have a transit visa."

This came at the very last minute when everything was already prepared. Well, still, we thought it was no great difficulty; we would get a transit visa. So, we went to the Panamanian Consul in London and asked for a transit visa, and the man said, "No."

Here again it is a lengthy story how we fought that, how we tried desperately to convince this man to let us have a visa. The Panamanians were afraid that these refugees would not have a place to go and would use the transit visa in order to stay in Panama.

He said, "Transit visa only if you have a final destination visa."

"But," we said, "we don't need one. Shanghai doesn't require one." He wouldn't hear it.

And that was where it was left. At the very moment when we were ready with everything else came this final hitch. And we didn't get that transit visa, and we went home, and were in despair.

We told the booking agent our story. But this man didn't seem to be disturbed particularly, and he said, "Well, I will book you on the Oronsay," a 20,000-ton ship, originally military transport.

"Well," I said, "you book us on the ship, but what about Panama?"

"Well," he says, "I will route you --"

I said, "What about Panama?"

He said, "I will route you through Canada."

I said, "Canada? How about that? You cannot go through Panama, but you can go through Canada?"

He says, "Yes. They don't require a visa," just like that. These are the unforeseeable things that happen in such critical situations.

So all of a sudden we were permitted to cross all the way through Canada, but that was only a transit situation. We had to meet a certain ship at the other end of the continent in Vancouver to go to China. The first part was the Atlantic, the middle part was across Canada; only that many days. You were not -- we were allowed to pass through Canada, but not longer than the deadline which was September 8th, I remember, 1940.

From there we had to cross the Pacific to Japan, cross Japan, cross the Yellow Sea, and finally to Shanghai. This was what took the 54 days.

So, now we are back in Liverpool. We boarded

the ship there. The Oronsay. It was full of evacuated British children. They were all taken to Canada for safekeeping during the war. It was total darkness, of course. England was under blackout. We didn't have any lights. We hadn't had any lights for many days. And two destroyers and one cruiser accompanied our ship and seven other ships. It was a convoy of eight ships going to Canada.

We left on August 20th, 20th of August. The crossing took nine days. On the 29th we arrived in Halifax and for the first time saw lights. A city lit up. I'm sure I'm unable to convey what that meant.

So, we were in Halifax. And now, of course, we had, I forget how much it was, I think about two weeks or thereabouts -- oh, yes, I do know when, because the ship at the other side of the world on the Pacific side would leave on September the 8th. So since we arrived on August 29th, we had ten days for that.

And during this time, you can imagine, we tried to move heaven and earth to get permission from the Canadians to allow us to wait until our quota number would come up. We did not ask for immigration to Canada; all we asked for was, let us wait here and not go all the way to the other end of the world, especially at the time when the war between Japan and the United States was imminent.

Now we talk about the surprise attack of the

Japanese in Honolulu -- Pearl Harbor, not Honolulu. Pearl Harbor. Of course we didn't know that they were going to attack Pearl Harbor at that date and this place, but that war was imminent. But war with Japan was imminent for weeks before that; the papers were always talking about the outbreak of the war.

And I mentioned my ship ticket was already stamped in case we wanted a refund in case of war, so the British were certainly expecting it. And we were now destined to go into Shanghai, which I should have mentioned earlier was under Japanese control. The Japanese, since 1932, had conquered all of North China, including Shanghai, and were in control there, but they allowed that one enclave to be open to whoever wanted to go there; they didn't care.

So here we had 10 days to try to convince somebody in Halifax, in Canada, to go to Ottowa and get permission for us. Well, it was in vain. We couldn't get this permission. So we decided at least to make the best out of these 10 days and go sight-seeing and be tourists and make the best of it.

Although we had been traveling first class on the Oronsay, we didn't even have money for the most elementary necessities beyond that, but we had traveled first class because the company didn't sell anything else to us.

So in the course of this sight-seeing expedition, we went to Montreal. There is this, what is this mountain called? I think it's called Mount Royal. We went up there, looked down and over there was the promised land; there was the United States. We saw it. But we, in fact, would come closer even.

And what happened, that was the most traumatic moment during that trip, and in fact in my life.

What happened was this: We went after Montreal to Toronto. In Toronto we decided to go on a side trip and see the Niagara Falls. We were playing tourists. We went to the Niagara Falls. It was on Labor Day, September the 1st, I think.

The situation at Niagara Falls is this: You have the Niagara River. There are the Falls. At the bottom of the Falls, the water is calm after a few yards, meters, and there is a little boat that goes from the Canadian side to the American side and back from the American side to the Canadian side. The Maid of the Mist. The name comes because the Niagara Falls has this dust-like mist.

And American tourists can get on that boat, cross over to watch the Falls, are not allowed to disembark on the a Canadian side, but they come back again. They go for the ride, to Canada and back. Canadian tourists going aboard on the Canadian side cannot

get off on the American side. The boat will take them back to Canada.

Now, you can see what is coming, or what went through our heads. You don't need any visa, passport, immigration, anything, to get on that little boat. You get on that boat in Canada, cross over to the United States, and off you go. Perhaps. Perhaps. You don't know what is on the other side.

We went on that boat. We bought a ticket. Canadian tourists get one kind of ticket; let's call it a red ticket. You take your red ticket, go to the American side, come back to Canada, surrender your red ticket, and that's it. In the meantime, American tourists have gotten on on the American side and they have, let's say, a blue ticket, take it to Canada, go back to the United States, throw away their blue ticket. And their blue ticket is the passport to the United States. Our red ticket indicates the permission to come back to Canada. But an American with a blue ticket cannot get off in Canada, so I made this clear.

So, we bought our tickets. Now, that ship on that day was just crammed with tourists. It was Labor Day. There was standing- room only. They were packed there. And they were indistinguishable one from another because so as not to get wet from the mist of the Falls, tourists were handed rubber coats and even rubberized

plastic hoods. So we were just like little dwarfs, or like in disguise.

So here we were, all these people, this humanity packed on that little boat with this costume-type thing, and with either red or blue tickets, depending on where they got onto the boat.

Here we were standing. I was standing right behind another fellow. I looked exactly like this guy. And he stood there watching the Falls. He had his hands behind him in a casual way, and between the two fingers was the blue ticket: Immigration to the United States of America.

Could I jostle him a little bit? Could I even slip it out of his fingers and then play innocent? He couldn't possibly know which of these many people standing around there had done this. Maybe he didn't even notice it was -- it was just like when you get on a bus you have a bus ticket, so what? There is no particular -- it didn't cost much. It was of no consequence to the one who has got residence in the United States.

To the other one it means -- it is not an exaggeration to say, it could have meant life or death, because what we desperately didn't want was to have to continue this trip, go to Japan, go to Shanghai under the control of the Japanese, the Japanese being the Axis friends of the Nazis. The Shanghai Nazi consul riding

high there, and maybe we would be taken into an Oriental-type concentration camp under the whip of the Japanese. The most horrible thing. And here, if you get this little blue ticket, you get off on the other side, you disappear in the populace, and you save your life.

Well, it depends on your background. If you grow up in what I would call the normal way, as a law-abiding ordinary citizen, such experiments are -- you do them if you -- if you are directly under the whip of death. But if you have a legal alternative, perhaps it would work out with this trip, and perhaps you could wait for your quota number in Shanghai under the American Consulate there and come back to the U. S. in time. Maybe, maybe, maybe.

But what you want to do now is not a maybe, it is an absolutely vital decision, because if, on the other side, on the American side, there is somebody there who could catch you, or if he is not there and you try to disappear in the general population, you would be on the run all your life, because you could never be -- you are an illegal immigrant. You cannot get this paper or that paper and Social Security, nothing. You would have to be -- you have to be underground forever because an illegal immigrant is not converted into a legal immigrant, especially in times of war.

Well, the tension was just palpable between

myself and my friend. There were the two of us still. And we didn't -- we didn't do it. We didn't -- we couldn't bring ourselves to do this.

And we got back to the Canadian side, and we sat down there by the shore, emotionally, totally exhausted, and we were watching the next Maid of the Mist making the next trip and going across, more people, on and on. We didn't say a word, but our hearts were in our throats.

And while we were sitting there, suddenly a man came along and he said, "May I see your papers?" He was not in uniform.

And we said, "Who are you?"

"Naturalization Service."

This guy had been watching us all the time. They were watching people more than we thought. We didn't know there was anybody watching us, on either side. We were not Canadians, we were not Americans, we were not Austrians. We were nothing, but we were legal. We were legal. We could show him the papers.

He said, "Thank you." And off he walked.

Now, no doubt on the American side is exactly the same kind of a guy doing that. If we had done it, we would have been caught immediately. This is the moment I was talking about. The rest is an anticlimax.

We traveled through the rest of Canada. Days and days on that train. Bitter -- when we looked out the window and saw these enormous, empty territories, room for thousands, and these stonehearted Canadians would not allow us even for a very short time to wait - it would be within the year - would not allow us to stay there to wait for our visa so that we could legally immigrate. We had to get out.

We did go to Vancouver, made a last desperate attempt there. It didn't do any good. We got on the ship. It was a Japanese ship. The Heian Maru of the Nippon Yusen Kaisha, NYK, Shipping Company. And we traveled across the Pacific, and we arrived in Kobe in Japan and we stayed a few days in Japan to wait for the connecting boat that would take us from Japan to the coast of China.

We were tourists again there. We saw the temples and everything in Japan. And then we embarked on the west side of Japan, and this was now the third ship. The first was the Atlantic, the second was the Pacific, and now it was the Yellow Sea, and after a few days we arrived in Shanghai.

Undescribable the feeling, that we were now in this weird, strange, foreign place, language and all. And in Shanghai, we had friends there who had come through the Suez Canal, the other way, the other half of the world. They had come through the Mediterranean and

through Suez and India.

And so we lived there for several more months. I got a job at the University of Shanghai teaching poor, innocent Chinese English, believe it or not. And I got another job at a British owned, big newspaper, the North China Daily News. I was an editor at that paper, which was a great miracle to get any job there, let alone two jobs. Most of the other refugees were on welfare there; couldn't find anything.

And meanwhile, we were just watching the newspapers; one day after another, the newspapers. Will our quota number be transferred from the London American Consulate to the Shanghai American Consulate in time so that the quota number would come up before Japan would be at war with the United States and thereby cut us off? No more transportation after war breaks out.

This is the trouble with these oral reports, that you can only tell facts, but you cannot tell feelings. You cannot tell what it means to be -- to convey the idea, the terror, to sit on a powder keg watching the days slipping by. Will the Consulate tell you that your number is now -- it's now your turn?

You know, it's a number, just like going to a candy store here or to a bakery when you pull a number. If your number is low enough, you are still within this year that you can go. If it's too high, you have to wait

for next year. But next year, next year, for most of those who had their numbers in Europe, let's say I had applied at the American Consulate in Vienna for example, you cannot, you couldn't, wait. Waiting meant that the Hitlerites pick you up and ship you to Auschwitz, and that's the end of it. There is no waiting here.

So there we were waiting, day after day. I was with this friend, whom I mentioned earlier, this whole trip.

I might say at this point that I'm doing an injustice both to this friend, Kurt Schwarz, and to my writing friend, Joseph Fabry, the one who wrote this book jointly with me and who was my literary companion for many years and is still my friend today, and we are still in close touch. I'm doing -- I'm not telling their story, although it is so intertwined with mine.

But I'm not telling the story of my brother, either, and of my parents, except to say this much: that my parents, after about eight months internment, were finally released. They lived through the blitz in London, were bombed out twice, and eventually after the war I was able to bring them to this country, to California, where they lived their final years until they died in peace here.

For my brother I can only say -- and I may have mentioned him in the first session, I'm not sure of

that, but just say this much, that he tried to escape to Czechoslovakia, which was the closest border to Vienna. Czechoslovakia and Hungary are close borders. Switzerland is far away.

I had chosen Switzerland. He had chosen the close border, for a reason. He had chosen Czechoslovakia because he actually had a job there, was working there. He had a position in a factory. He had been in Vienna only for a visit and was trapped during the few days on his visit and then couldn't get out again back to where he originally had come from. And he had some hair-raising experiences.

The train on which he left for the Czech border was not allowed to get into Czechoslovakia, was turned back during the night. The Nazis commandeered it back to Vienna; he didn't want to be shipped back to Vienna. He jumped out of the moving train. He didn't hurt himself.

And during the night he walked back, walked back, to the border river between Austria and Czechoslovakia. He got himself a little rowing boat. He got to the Czech side. On the Czech side the check guards caught him, didn't let him land, so he had to go back with his boat.

He finally did get back to Vienna and had all kinds of experiences there. Finally was able to get

papers to emigrate out of -- to leave Austria, again, back to Czechoslovakia, where he wanted to go. And just as my parents left Vienna, just, it so happened, just on the Night of the Broken Glass, he got to Prague on the very day that the Nazis marched into Prague in September.

He and a relative hired a private plane, flew out from Czechoslovakia from Prague, tried to get into France. If you do that, you have to cross Germany, if you have your map in your head. They had to fly over Nazi Germany, from Czechoslovakia to France through Germany.

And they got near the French border; the plane had engine trouble. There was a forced landing, and the question was whether he -- whether the plane would land on the German side or the French side. It landed within yards on the French side.

The French didn't want to let them get out of the plane. They didn't want to let them in. There was a whole story as long as my own how he did finally manage to stay in France for a few days, finally for a few weeks. Then he had to leave France. He did find a ship. He did get a permit to immigrate to Australia.

Australia was the only country outside the United States that had a formalized, established immigration policy, not by bribery or by exorbitant demands like these $2,000, $16,000 in Shanghai, but regular, legal policy. So, he got a permit for Australia,

boarded the ship in Marseille. He then went to Algiers and to the French island of Martinique, then to the Panama Canal.

And he got as far as New Caledonia. The ship didn't go any further than that. He had to stay there. He went to the interior of New Caledonia. That's where the man-eaters seemed to be still, and all kinds of experiences in the interior of New Caledonia. It was an exasperating trip on his part. Finally did get a connecting ship into Melbourne from New Caledonia, but he was -- he was so exhausted from the experience, from always being hunted, first this business about the Czech border, and then afterwards getting into Czechoslovakia just when the Nazis came in, and the business about the plane, and in France not being allowed, and on and on and on, his health was totally undermined. And after a relatively short stay, he died in a hospital in Melbourne, just a late victim of the Nazis, although not burned in Auschwitz. This much of a digression, I meant not to say much about this, but I got carried away. I'm sorry.

So I think I'm coming to the end part of what I have to say. My number, my quota number, did come up in time before Pearl Harbor. My friend's did not. He had to stay in Shanghai throughout the war. He had his own experiences, which again means a different tape; he survived it.

And I boarded a ship on the 1st of May 1941. Because of my two jobs in Shanghai, I had accumulated enough money to pay for that ship, to pay for the boat transportation.

The Jewish community in Shanghai did what they could in the most self-sacrificing way to help us. The day before I boarded the ship, a man came to the place where I lived. I had never seen him before. He introduced himself as a member of the Jewish community. He said, "I understand that you are one of the lucky ones who got your visa and are allowed to leave tomorrow. I hope you don't mind my asking you, do you have enough money?"

I said, yes, I had enough money. I already had bought my ticket.

He says, "Well, you may need some money, even on board ship, some spending money." And he gave me an envelope; he gave me this envelope. It had $44 in it, American dollars, in bills. And he said, "This is a loan, you know," and he smiled when he said that. A loan. He didn't expect ever to see this again. It was more money then than it is now, of course, again. Well, I took this money in the envelope, put it in my pocket. I got on the ship.

I won't talk much about the return trip, first to Japan, then to wait there, then to wait for the next connecting ship across the Pacific. I never bought a

drink or anything on that ship and never spent one dollar of that, what I had in this envelope.

I arrived in Seattle eventually, and there, to my enormous surprise, I was expected by a lady, very elegant, very nicely dressed. She had my name. Somehow they are in touch, these Jewish communities. She said, "I understand you are going to California, and I'm here to take you to the train." She had a car -- and I was very moved.

She wanted to do something for me. She wanted to buy me something. I didn't want anything. I didn't need anything. So she bought a Life Magazine, I remember. I remember even the cover on the outside. She just wanted to help.

And I said, "No, I really don't need anything, but on the way to the railroad station, I would like you to stop at a bank." We stopped at a bank, and I sent the 44 bucks as they were back to Shanghai, to this man.

Well, I got on the train, passed through Portland in the middle of the night. I had friends in San Francisco who had long before told me that I could stay with them if I could make it. I passed through Berkeley in the morning. Somebody in the same -- in that train, pointed out to me the hills. "You see," he said, "these are the hills of Berkeley. There are nice homes there,

residences. All the professors live there." Little did I know that this was where I would be living for the rest of my life, up in the Berkeley Hills.

And I came to Oakland. There was a ferry boat there. There was no bridge -- that ferry was the transportation; you went by ferry. I asked my way around. There were many people, going back and forth at the ferry station. I wanted to know just exactly where it was.

I heard a voice behind me, somebody saying, "Take it easy. Take it easy. It's okay," or something to this effect. And here was my friend Harry Lieser from San Francisco who had come to meet me. And so we went together. Here I was in good hands; went on the ferry.

I remember this unforgettable sunset that evening that was a real welcome to the new world.

At the other end in San Francisco there were other friends and they took me to the home of Harry and Trudy Lieser in San Francisco, and to other -- and at this point the second part of my life begins and my immigration story ends. I think this is a natural end of my story because my career here, how I became a member of the University of California Press, and how I wrote and got married and had children and all this is perhaps not what is meant by a tape for Yad Vashem.

Q ACTUALLY, WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR ABOUT THAT, BUT IF YOU DON'T WANT TO THAT'S OKAY.

A Well, it's not a matter of not wanting to do that, but this -- there is a long, long story. Perhaps I could summarize it by saying that I was befriended by a British writer, C. S. Forester, who lived in Berkeley, who took me in, he and his wife, in their beautiful Berkeley home, treated me as a son, although I was a stranger to them. And after a year, when the American part of the war began and the shipyards started taking laborers in Richmond, I became a laborer there at the shipyard, officially the tag was shipfitter, but that was entirely meaningless.

Actually, this was my second job, because my first job in America was polishing shoes for the Forester family. You know, I wanted to do something for them. So the wife said to me, she said, "The one thing I don't like, I can understand you want to do something for me, the one thing I don't like is to polish four pairs of shoes every morning." So I polished shoes, and then I became a laborer, and after a year or so, I married.

I married Charlotte Lowes, a Canadian whom I got to know through the Sierra Club, and she was sort of a refugee herself from her own family, a non-Jewish family, in Canada. She, ironically, came from that same Toronto from which I had taken the trip to Niagara Falls.

And I now remember that I left off one little

point in my story about Niagara Falls. And that was, when the boat, The Maid of the Mist, landed on the American side, there was a pole in the water painted red, white, and blue. I was on the deck of that little ship, and I touched that pole with my left hand - that was the United States - with my left hand. My left hand touched the United States.

The day before, at Mount Royal, from the height of the mountain, I had seen the United States, but here I had actually touched it, and then to take -- it would take the whole trip and the whole emotional experience of going into the teeth of the enemy and come back again before I could use my right hand to touch American soil.

But back to where I was with Charlotte. She worked at the California State Employment Office. Later she became administrative assistant to Clark Kerr who became president of the University of Berkeley. And we started from scratch and together built up an existence in this country.

I wanted to, all the time, to find work at the University of California Press because there was a combination between my academic inclinations and my writing experience. It was an ideal joining of two interests. And I applied there, but they had no position for me. And so I decided to go to school here in

Berkeley. I had an advanced degree from the University of Vienna; I wanted another advanced degree here.

I got various odd jobs in between, including a year when I had no jobs and when I was entirely freelancing, meaning writing stories for journals, papers; miserable year when I was afraid we wouldn't have enough to eat.

We had a child; later on we had a second child, two boys.

And then I managed to get a research assistantship at the University of Berkeley. Later I got a fellowship job at Stanford University where I had to commute from Berkeley, a five-hour commute coming and going because I had no car. I had to take the Key train; it doesn't run anymore.

The Key train went to San Francisco, and from San Francisco I had to transfer on a bus, and from the bus I had to transfer to the railroad to go to Palo Alto, and from the railroad on another bus to Stanford, and the whole thing took two and a half hours. I had to leave in the middle of the night to get there in the morning, but I didn't mind any of that. I had a job; I had a job; I had a job. And it was indeed a good thing.

I did some research work there that ended in a book I did under the auspices of the Stanford University

Press. And in between all these part-time jobs I kept going to the University of California Press hoping that they will have a place for me, and they didn't, and they didn't, and after nine years they did. And I waited nine years, and only after those nine years had I caught up, you might say, with my previous life, that I was again not hunted, and not eating from hand to mouth.

And it was not even the lowest job. Because of my previous experience, they gave me the second lowest, but nevertheless I started, of course, at the bottom of the totem pole. And that was in 1951, and I stayed there for 25 years. They gave me two extra years, so I stayed there 27 years. And I wound up at the top of the totem pole. I was finally principal editor of the editorial department, and I retired in 1976 and have been retired ever since then, and am now here to tell my oral history story.

Q WOULD YOU LIKE TO MENTION THAT FUNNY PART ABOUT THE DESK AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA?

A How do you know about this? I must have told it before.

Q NO, I READ IT IN YOUR BOOK.

A Oh, you read it in the book. Well, I have left out a lot that I did say in the book. In a way, this is a repetition of what it says in the book, except it is disorganized and it leaves out 75 percent.

Well, since you asked me about this, when I first asked for a job at the University Press, I was interviewed by the - what then was called - manager, later director, of the University Press, Mr. Harold Small was his name. And he asked me about my background, and I told him that I had -- that I have the European type high school, classical high school, gymnasium, where we studied Latin for eight years, and Greek for six years, and that my own interests were also in history, especially art history, and literature.

And every time I said something -- and then I told him that I worked for newspapers in Vienna, first as a freelancer, and finally I got a "permanent" job on the last day before the Nazis took over. And then I worked for journals in London, and then I worked also as an editor-writer in China.

And every time I said something he nodded, affirmatively, as though to say, That is good, That is what we need, and he said so eventually.

And he said, "Well, this is exactly the kind of background we need and we want." And he was so encouraging, I thought I had a job in my pocket.

And when I was all through, when I thought he would say, all right, start to work for us, he said, "I cannot give you a job."

I said, "Why not? After all this?"

And he said, "Because we do not have a desk for you."

And I said, "Now, that is a strange reason."

He said, "Yes, but, look at our accommodations here. Where would I put your desk?"

Well, it would have been no problem for me. I would have put the desk in the middle of the room if necessary, but that was not his idea. And I couldn't get past that. He said, "We don't have a desk," and I had to wait nine years until they finally found a desk for me. That's it.

Q IT MUST HAVE BEEN DIFFICULT BECOMING AN EDITOR IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE. I MEAN, YOU MUST HAVE BEEN PRETTY NEW AT THE LANGUAGE STILL.

A Well, that of course was the paramount problem. And you certainly ask the right question. But it begins in England, that story.

You may recall I just said that I had to find a job where English was not needed, or only primitively enough so it could be used by somebody else to rewrite it all. And well, yes, in England that was the first time I was confronted with the question of whether I would still be a writer or, as I put it at the time, sell insurance; in other words, something totally different.

And I wanted to be a writer. I wanted to use the language. And so I just had determined that I had to

learn the language. I had to learn it, and then to learn it in a way that was fit to be printed. I could buy my groceries, but if I would write something in that style, that couldn't be used for books, or for newspaper articles.

And I learned desperately. I listened to the radio, I read books, and conversation, and girlfriends who spoke English, and all that. And I have no magic formula, except this firm determination to learn the language well enough that it could be used for published material. As long as I was in England, myself and my friend, Joseph Fabry, whom I mentioned several times, our stories, which were in German, had to be translated by professional translators.

Now I'm a professional translator; I translate for money. I mean, aside from being a journalist and a writer, I'm a translator, and I have several books published by top publishers in America in English. But you see, when you hear me talking, I can never lose my accent. That is impossible. But what I tried to do is that the accent cannot be seen in the printed word, in the printed article. And finally I was recognized, my work was recognized. The Austrian government, the president of the republic, gave me a decoration, grandiosely called The Golden Merit of something or other, and that was for the writings.

So it came full cycle. My first book published in translation was German verses. I'm particularly interested in translating poetry because it is such a challenge, to rhyme in English something which rhymes in German. And of course, not just the rhymes, I'm talking about the technique. And that was in 1967, and that first book was published here. It has had seven printings so far, it was very well received, had had wonderful reviews in the New York Times, in the London Times Literary Supplement, in the professional journals. It was a great triumph and made me very happy to have that published.

It was also published, the same book was published also, in Germany, although it was half in English, the German text on one side and the English on the other side. So it was published in the United States, German/English, and then in Germany, English/German. The same book was republished and had many printings there also. It was also read, the whole book was read, on a recording by Ogden Nash; he was the editor of the New Yorker. And he read my translations on a recording. And I in turn took his poetry -- he wrote poems, very funny, whimsical poems, and I translated them into German; it was published in Germany. So it was such a seesaw sort of thing.

And since then, I translated mostly together

with my friend Fabry, several other authors, German authors. They were all published. I also, on one occasion, did some translations from French medieval poetry, so it was French; that was done by the University of Chicago. And various odds and ends.

And I'm busy to this day editing and writing a little bit, and enjoying it. And I regard it as the great grace of my life that I was able, all my life, to work in an occupation which I loved, that you could do something that you liked to do. I did not work from 8:00 to 5:00 in a stupor and then come home and being eventually freed from the chore and now my life begins. My life begins at 8 o'clock in the morning as in a job.

(Recess.)

Q YOU WERE TALKING WHEN WE STOPPED THE TAPE ABOUT HOW YOU ARE ABLE TO GO TO A JOB THAT IS VERY FULFILLING.

A Yes. And of course my experience with stories I had heard from others, all different, and fundamentally different. And I have now in my late years started to encourage other people to write their stories. That was before I ever heard of Oral History. I had a class - I still have it - at the Jewish Community Center in Berkeley where I invite people who have gone through the Holocaust or been witnesses of this Holocaust to write their stories. And since my job is writing, I can help

them do so.

And it is very satisfying for me to see those important stories preserved, doing the same thing that you are doing only in a less efficient way. It couldn't be better than video and you see the person actually, but the next best thing is to write the story.

And especially I have some -- these are all old people, very old, in fact. Last year, the average age of the people who wrote their stories, the average age, was eighty-five. Only recently did I finish a story -- I said "I" finished, she finished it, but I helped her along once a week to write, to rewrite, to organize and so forth, and she called her report, or account, "On Reaching Ninety." She is now ninety-three.

I have now quite a collection of those completed stories, others are still being done. They are done in this beautiful way that exists now, what is it? Desk top publishing. But some of my authors had them job printed. They really printed books, bound printed books, at their own expense. They wanted it this way, for friends, for family.

And on one memorable occasion, a book was picked up by a publisher; it is commercially published. That may interest you particularly because it was done by the founder of the Holocaust Library, Mr. Garcia. Mr. Garcia is a Dutch Jew, married to a gentile wife, who

was in one of my classes.

I forgot to mention that during those nine waiting years, I gave courses on the university campus in Berkeley, training editors how to write for publication.

At the end of one of those courses, there was a small and quite inconspicuous young lady who came, whom I hadn't noticed before. After all, there are 30 people in every class; I hadn't noticed her. And she came and she introduced herself. She said she is the gentile wife of a Jewish man who had been in concentration camps for four years, including Auschwitz, or mostly Auschwitz.

I couldn't believe that; for four years! He had the most hair-raising experiences. And she had pumped him over the years, telling a little bit today and another little bit another day. He was very reluctant; he didn't want to tell his story. And she is such a very loyal, wonderful woman, she was so enthralled by all this, she was literally sitting at his feet and urging him to tell a little more and a little more.

And she took notes, and when she had all these notes she came to my class to learn how to turn those into a narrative, into a book, into a readable account. And so she asked whether she could continue privately with me. These are public lectures or courses on the campus. And so for a year thereafter she came and

she took him along. By that time he was sufficiently softened up to play ball with us, and then he and she and I, we worked on this book. It is an incredibly -- incredible experiences of this man. This is somebody from whom either you already have his oral history or you certainly should have.

Q MAX GARCIA?

A Max Garcia. You have it don't you?

Q YES. WELL, I HAVE ONLY INTERVIEWED HIM, SO I'M SURE I WILL READ HIS BOOK.

A Well, his book was published. And there was this incredible episode of a man who in Auschwitz had appendicitis, a broken appendicitis, if you know what that means. It could not be operated in the normal, containing way, but it had already putrified and broken into the -- whatever. And with an SS doctor operating on this man, he wanted to, not out of compassion, he wanted to see whether such a challenging job -- whether he could fix that.

So he operated on this poor man, and it was successful, the operation, but the moment the SS man saw it was, this doctor, saw it was successful, he was no longer interested in this fellow, and he sent him right back to the barracks on these flea-bitten straw mattresses -- it's not a bed; what do you call these things?

Q A PALLET?

A Pallets or cots or something. And this man survived, and Max Garcia tells that story.

Well, so, this is only one of the various accounts which I have now.

Q ARE YOU STILL HELPING PEOPLE WRITE THEM?

A Yes, I'm still doing it. The last one about a lady who fled from Krakow in Poland and wound up in a refugee camp in East Africa, Tanganyika. Have you ever heard of that? In all your accounts, you will not have anybody who spent time in a camp in East Africa. And what is in between is a long, long story. And I have it.

And I sent it, this story, it is not for my personal amusement, of course. I sent this account to the various depositories. There are quite a few now, and in fact they are competing with each other. They want these stories. In Germany there are some. I sent one to London, I sent one to the Beck Institute, and I think you have one. I'm not sure. I think so.

Q DO YOU SEND EACH ONE ONLY TO ONE DEPOSITORY?

A Oh, no, no. I send the same story to three or four of these depositories. Her name is Dora Moskowski. I think you have that here.

Q I WAS WONDERING BECAUSE I WOULD PROBABLY LIKE TO BE ABLE TO GET A COPY OF THIS IF IT IS POSSIBLE, OF ALL OF THEM.

A It is possible. I can tell you who has them,

I'm sure, but I believe you have at least some of them.

You certainly have the one by Max Garcia.

(Proceedings concluded.)

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A Well, it's not a matter of not wanting to do that, but this -- there is a long, long story. Perhaps I could summarize it by saying that I was befriended by a British writer, C. S. Forester, who lived in Berkeley, who took me in, he and his wife, in their beautiful Berkeley home, treated me as a son, although I was a stranger to them. And after a year, when the American part of the war began and the shipyards started taking laborers in Richmond, I became a laborer there at the shipyard, officially the tag was shipfitter, but that was entirely meaningless.

Actually, this was my second job, because my first job in America was polishing shoes for the Forester family. You know, I wanted to do something for them. So the wife said to me, she said, "The one thing I don't like, I can understand you want to do something for me, the one thing I don't like is to polish four pairs of shoes every morning." So I polished shoes, and then I became a laborer, and after a year or so, I married.

I married Charlotte Lowes, a Canadian whom I got to know through the Sierra Club, and she was sort of a refugee herself from her own family, a non-Jewish family, in Canada. She, ironically, came from that same Toronto from which I had taken the trip to Niagara Falls.

And I now remember that I left off one little

point in my story about Niagara Falls. And that was, when the boat, The Maid of the Mist, landed on the American side, there was a pole in the water painted red, white, and blue. I was on the deck of that little ship, and I touched that pole with my left hand - that was the United States - with my left hand. My left hand touched the United States.

The day before, at Mount Royal, from the height of the mountain, I had seen the United States, but here I had actually touched it, and then to take -- it would take the whole trip and the whole emotional experience of going into the teeth of the enemy and come back again before I could use my right hand to touch American soil.

But back to where I was with Charlotte. She worked at the California State Employment Office. Later she became administrative assistant to Clark Kerr who became president of the University of Berkeley. And we started from scratch and together built up an existence in this country.

I wanted to, all the time, to find work at the University of California Press because there was a combination between my academic inclinations and my writing experience. It was an ideal joining of two interests. And I applied there, but they had no position for me. And so I decided to go to school here in

Berkeley. I had an advanced degree from the University of Vienna; I wanted another advanced degree here.

I got various odd jobs in between, including a year when I had no jobs and when I was entirely freelancing, meaning writing stories for journals, papers; miserable year when I was afraid we wouldn't have enough to eat.

We had a child; later on we had a second child, two boys.

And then I managed to get a research assistantship at the University of Berkeley. Later I got a fellowship job at Stanford University where I had to commute from Berkeley, a five-hour commute coming and going because I had no car. I had to take the Key train; it doesn't run anymore.

The Key train went to San Francisco, and from San Francisco I had to transfer on a bus, and from the bus I had to transfer to the railroad to go to Palo Alto, and from the railroad on another bus to Stanford, and the whole thing took two and a half hours. I had to leave in the middle of the night to get there in the morning, but I didn't mind any of that. I had a job; I had a job; I had a job. And it was indeed a good thing.

I did some research work there that ended in a book I did under the auspices of the Stanford University

Press. And in between all these part-time jobs I kept going to the University of California Press hoping that they will have a place for me, and they didn't, and they didn't, and after nine years they did. And I waited nine years, and only after those nine years had I caught up, you might say, with my previous life, that I was again not hunted, and not eating from hand to mouth.

And it was not even the lowest job. Because of my previous experience, they gave me the second lowest, but nevertheless I started, of course, at the bottom of the totem pole. And that was in 1951, and I stayed there for 25 years. They gave me two extra years, so I stayed there 27 years. And I wound up at the top of the totem pole. I was finally principal editor of the editorial department, and I retired in 1976 and have been retired ever since then, and am now here to tell my oral history story.

Q WOULD YOU LIKE TO MENTION THAT FUNNY PART ABOUT THE DESK AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA?

A How do you know about this? I must have told it before.

Q NO, I READ IT IN YOUR BOOK.

A Oh, you read it in the book. Well, I have left out a lot that I did say in the book. In a way, this is a repetition of what it says in the book, except it is disorganized and it leaves out 75 percent.

Well, since you asked me about this, when I first asked for a job at the University Press, I was interviewed by the - what then was called - manager, later director, of the University Press, Mr. Harold Small was his name. And he asked me about my background, and I told him that I had -- that I have the European type high school, classical high school, gymnasium, where we studied Latin for eight years, and Greek for six years, and that my own interests were also in history, especially art history, and literature.

And every time I said something -- and then I told him that I worked for newspapers in Vienna, first as a freelancer, and finally I got a "permanent" job on the last day before the Nazis took over. And then I worked for journals in London, and then I worked also as an editor-writer in China.

And every time I said something he nodded, affirmatively, as though to say, That is good, That is what we need, and he said so eventually.

And he said, "Well, this is exactly the kind of background we need and we want." And he was so encouraging, I thought I had a job in my pocket.

And when I was all through, when I thought he would say, all right, start to work for us, he said, "I cannot give you a job."

I said, "Why not? After all this?"

And he said, "Because we do not have a desk for you."

And I said, "Now, that is a strange reason."

He said, "Yes, but, look at our accommodations here. Where would I put your desk?"

Well, it would have been no problem for me. I would have put the desk in the middle of the room if necessary, but that was not his idea. And I couldn't get past that. He said, "We don't have a desk," and I had to wait nine years until they finally found a desk for me. That's it.

Q IT MUST HAVE BEEN DIFFICULT BECOMING AN EDITOR IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE. I MEAN, YOU MUST HAVE BEEN PRETTY NEW AT THE LANGUAGE STILL.

A Well, that of course was the paramount problem. And you certainly ask the right question. But it begins in England, that story.

You may recall I just said that I had to find a job where English was not needed, or only primitively enough so it could be used by somebody else to rewrite it all. And well, yes, in England that was the first time I was confronted with the question of whether I would still be a writer or, as I put it at the time, sell insurance; in other words, something totally different.

And I wanted to be a writer. I wanted to use the language. And so I just had determined that I had to

learn the language. I had to learn it, and then to learn it in a way that was fit to be printed. I could buy my groceries, but if I would write something in that style, that couldn't be used for books, or for newspaper articles.

And I learned desperately. I listened to the radio, I read books, and conversation, and girlfriends who spoke English, and all that. And I have no magic formula, except this firm determination to learn the language well enough that it could be used for published material. As long as I was in England, myself and my friend, Joseph Fabry, whom I mentioned several times, our stories, which were in German, had to be translated by professional translators.

Now I'm a professional translator; I translate for money. I mean, aside from being a journalist and a writer, I'm a translator, and I have several books published by top publishers in America in English. But you see, when you hear me talking, I can never lose my accent. That is impossible. But what I tried to do is that the accent cannot be seen in the printed word, in the printed article. And finally I was recognized, my work was recognized. The Austrian government, the president of the republic, gave me a decoration, grandiosely called The Golden Merit of something or other, and that was for the writings.

So it came full cycle. My first book published in translation was German verses. I'm particularly interested in translating poetry because it is such a challenge, to rhyme in English something which rhymes in German. And of course, not just the rhymes, I'm talking about the technique. And that was in 1967, and that first book was published here. It has had seven printings so far, it was very well received, had had wonderful reviews in the New York Times, in the London Times Literary Supplement, in the professional journals. It was a great triumph and made me very happy to have that published.

It was also published, the same book was published also, in Germany, although it was half in English, the German text on one side and the English on the other side. So it was published in the United States, German/English, and then in Germany, English/German. The same book was republished and had many printings there also. It was also read, the whole book was read, on a recording by Ogden Nash; he was the editor of the New Yorker. And he read my translations on a recording. And I in turn took his poetry -- he wrote poems, very funny, whimsical poems, and I translated them into German; it was published in Germany. So it was such a seesaw sort of thing.

And since then, I translated mostly together

with my friend Fabry, several other authors, German authors. They were all published. I also, on one occasion, did some translations from French medieval poetry, so it was French; that was done by the University of Chicago. And various odds and ends.

And I'm busy to this day editing and writing a little bit, and enjoying it. And I regard it as the great grace of my life that I was able, all my life, to work in an occupation which I loved, that you could do something that you liked to do. I did not work from 8:00 to 5:00 in a stupor and then come home and being eventually freed from the chore and now my life begins. My life begins at 8 o'clock in the morning as in a job.

(Recess.)

Q YOU WERE TALKING WHEN WE STOPPED THE TAPE ABOUT HOW YOU ARE ABLE TO GO TO A JOB THAT IS VERY FULFILLING.

A Yes. And of course my experience with stories I had heard from others, all different, and fundamentally different. And I have now in my late years started to encourage other people to write their stories. That was before I ever heard of Oral History. I had a class - I still have it - at the Jewish Community Center in Berkeley where I invite people who have gone through the Holocaust or been witnesses of this Holocaust to write their stories. And since my job is writing, I can help

them do so.

And it is very satisfying for me to see those important stories preserved, doing the same thing that you are doing only in a less efficient way. It couldn't be better than video and you see the person actually, but the next best thing is to write the story.

And especially I have some -- these are all old people, very old, in fact. Last year, the average age of the people who wrote their stories, the average age, was eighty-five. Only recently did I finish a story -- I said "I" finished, she finished it, but I helped her along once a week to write, to rewrite, to organize and so forth, and she called her report, or account, "On Reaching Ninety." She is now ninety-three.

I have now quite a collection of those completed stories, others are still being done. They are done in this beautiful way that exists now, what is it? Desk top publishing. But some of my authors had them job printed. They really printed books, bound printed books, at their own expense. They wanted it this way, for friends, for family.

And on one memorable occasion, a book was picked up by a publisher; it is commercially published. That may interest you particularly because it was done by the founder of the Holocaust Library, Mr. Garcia. Mr. Garcia is a Dutch Jew, married to a gentile wife, who

was in one of my classes.

I forgot to mention that during those nine waiting years, I gave courses on the university campus in Berkeley, training editors how to write for publication.

At the end of one of those courses, there was a small and quite inconspicuous young lady who came, whom I hadn't noticed before. After all, there are 30 people in every class; I hadn't noticed her. And she came and she introduced herself. She said she is the gentile wife of a Jewish man who had been in concentration camps for four years, including Auschwitz, or mostly Auschwitz.

I couldn't believe that; for four years! He had the most hair-raising experiences. And she had pumped him over the years, telling a little bit today and another little bit another day. He was very reluctant; he didn't want to tell his story. And she is such a very loyal, wonderful woman, she was so enthralled by all this, she was literally sitting at his feet and urging him to tell a little more and a little more.

And she took notes, and when she had all these notes she came to my class to learn how to turn those into a narrative, into a book, into a readable account. And so she asked whether she could continue privately with me. These are public lectures or courses on the campus. And so for a year thereafter she came and

she took him along. By that time he was sufficiently softened up to play ball with us, and then he and she and I, we worked on this book. It is an incredibly -- incredible experiences of this man. This is somebody from whom either you already have his oral history or you certainly should have.

Q MAX GARCIA?

A Max Garcia. You have it don't you?

Q YES. WELL, I HAVE ONLY INTERVIEWED HIM, SO I'M SURE I WILL READ HIS BOOK.

A Well, his book was published. And there was this incredible episode of a man who in Auschwitz had appendicitis, a broken appendicitis, if you know what that means. It could not be operated in the normal, containing way, but it had already putrified and broken into the -- whatever. And with an SS doctor operating on this man, he wanted to, not out of compassion, he wanted to see whether such a challenging job -- whether he could fix that.

So he operated on this poor man, and it was successful, the operation, but the moment the SS man saw it was, this doctor, saw it was successful, he was no longer interested in this fellow, and he sent him right back to the barracks on these flea-bitten straw mattresses -- it's not a bed; what do you call these things?

Q A PALLET?

A Pallets or cots or something. And this man survived, and Max Garcia tells that story.

Well, so, this is only one of the various accounts which I have now.

Q ARE YOU STILL HELPING PEOPLE WRITE THEM?

A Yes, I'm still doing it. The last one about a lady who fled from Krakow in Poland and wound up in a refugee camp in East Africa, Tanganyika. Have you ever heard of that? In all your accounts, you will not have anybody who spent time in a camp in East Africa. And what is in between is a long, long story. And I have it.

And I sent it, this story, it is not for my personal amusement, of course. I sent this account to the various depositories. There are quite a few now, and in fact they are competing with each other. They want these stories. In Germany there are some. I sent one to London, I sent one to the Beck Institute, and I think you have one. I'm not sure. I think so.

Q DO YOU SEND EACH ONE ONLY TO ONE DEPOSITORY?

A Oh, no, no. I send the same story to three or four of these depositories. Her name is Dora Moskowski. I think you have that here.

Q I WAS WONDERING BECAUSE I WOULD PROBABLY LIKE TO BE ABLE TO GET A COPY OF THIS IF IT IS POSSIBLE, OF ALL OF THEM.

A It is possible. I can tell you who has them,

I'm sure, but I believe you have at least some of them.

You certainly have the one by Max Garcia.

(Proceedings concluded.)

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