

Interview with MAX KNIGHT  
Holocaust Oral History Project  
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Q. IT IS JULY 24TH, 1991. WE'RE AT BETH SHALOM INTERVIEWING MAX KNIGHT FOR THE HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT. MY NAME IS PEGGY COSTER AND WITH ME ARE JOHN GRANT AND TAMI NEWNHAM.

WHY DON'T YOU START BY SHOWING US THE BOOKS THAT YOU BOUGHT.

A. Well, I mentioned my books the last time, and you asked me to do some show and tell, so I brought some of them along. There are three I would like to be remembered by eventually, and they are, first, this book which is called The Pure Theory of Law. It is a book on legal philosophy by Professor Hans Kelson \*\* who I consider my mentor who was one of my teachers at law school in Indiana and he himself became a refugee eventually and came to Berkeley and I became his student for a second time.

I treasured him very highly and his principal work, the work he's primarily known for is this book The Pure Theory of Law. It has been translated in every language you can think of and I had the privilege of translating it into English.

The other one is my joy and pride, Morgenstern, the Gallows Songs. I brought the two paperbacks along, it appeared in hardback in 1963, I had the date wrong in the

earlier tape, and it was very well received. This is the American edition, and this is the German edition. It appeared twice, German and English on facing texts, poetry by this turn-of-the-century humorist writer.

And the last one is this book, Return to the Alps. It tells about my adventures in the Austrian and Swiss mountains, it's published by the Sierra club, Friends of the Earth, and has beautiful pictures which I can say because I didn't take them, but I wrote the text.

I'm used to meeting people who will tell me, "Oh, I have seen your beautiful book." Then I know they have never read it. They looked at the pictures. And this is about all you can do at first.

On the earlier tape, I did already mention this book, One and One Make Three, the -- what you might call our joint autobiography, my friend Joe Fabrey \*\* and myself, written under the name of Peter Fabreychews \*\* which is our old pseudonym, the name under which we wrote our stories in the old country and partly also in this country.

Then here my great love is my mother's cookbook, The Blue Danube Cookbook, which is a transcription of a handwritten cookbook which my mother kept from the time she was a young girl until old age, well fingered, full of grease spots, not so much from her but from me when I was a kid and played with it. I got it away from her on her 70th birthday and transcribed it, translated it, edited it, and published

it. It was quite a success, it had three printings. It was a birthday gift.

She was often asked by friends, when she served a dish, how she did this and how did she do that. And there were usually long conversations over the telephone. And now I saved her these, and the next time when somebody asks me, "How do you do this?" you can grandiosely say, "Here's my book." It was a surprise, it was on her table at the right time, on the proper date.

I only want to mention it, I don't have this book here, I did translate the correspondence between Richard Strauss and the distinguished Austrian essayist Stephen Streich \*\* which appeared -- it was published by the University of California Press.

So these are my trophies, they are more than that, also many anthologies, but I think I have boasted enough.

Q. WAS THE NAME STRAUSS, WAS HE THE MUSICIAN?

A. Yes, yes, Richard Strauss, the musician, yes.

Q. HOW DID YOU MEET THEM AND GET TO --

A. I did not meet them, I translated their correspondence which was excellent, I had the correspondence and -- and I translated it. It was not collected by me, it was collected

( by the university.

Q. OKAY. WELL, I GUESS WE'LL KIND OF START BY GOING BACK TO SHANGHAI, WHEN YOU WERE LEAVING, ACTUALLY LEAVING SHANGHAI. WELL, I GUESS THE WHOLE THING IS SHANGHAI.

MS. COSTER: Can you turn it off for a moment?

UNIDENTIFIED VOICE: (Inaudible). Ask you a question.

Q. OKAY. WHAT WAS YOUR TRIP TO SHANGHAI LIKE ON THE BOAT?

A. On the boat?

Q. YOU KNOW, JUST WHAT WAS YOUR AVERAGE DAY, THE LENGTH OF YOUR TRIP?

( A. Well, it really was a -- a routine trip for everybody else. It was only different inside us. When I say, "us," this is my friend Kurt Schwantz, \*\* with whom I took the trip, and myself. We were very apprehensive. We didn't know what was going to happen to us, we didn't know whether we would get into the Japanese hands, what they would do to us, we didn't know whether there would ever be a return trip back to the western hemisphere or whether, in the meantime, war would break out between Japan and the United States, and so we would never get back.

( We did prepare ourselves for Shanghai, as it were,

( by reading a very good book called My Country and My People by Lin Yu Tang, an Americanized Chinese. We learned a great deal in that book. It was a preparation, and when we actually got to Shanghai, we tried to continue that -- we wanted to inform ourselves. We would study the various dynasties for two thousand years and, well, we were wide awake, we realized that we were having a very unusual experience, and we wanted to make the best of it. That's all I can say about that.

Q. WAS THE FOOD GOOD? WAS THE FOOD GOOD?

( A. Yes, the food was very good. On these lands the food is always very good, you get a fancy menu and you pick something. So, yeah.

Q. WHEN YOU GOT TO SHANGHAI, YOU TAUGHT ENGLISH. HOW DID THAT GO?

( A. Well, it's a strange experience for somebody who doesn't know English to teach English, but that doesn't -- but I just knew that much more than my poor Chinese students at the university there. They were very motivated, devoted, eager students.

( They were all Chinese, I was the only non-Chinese there, very conspicuous. They have great regard for teachers. They were very appreciative, and as I say, most eager to

learn. They would -- they seemed to hang on every word that was said. They would follow me, after the lessons, down the hallway, down the stairs. There were some that even went on the bus with me on my way home, which means something to those Chinese students, that was an expense, the fare, yet they wanted to have still more information, asked questions.

I had one funny experience and that was I did notice some -- some unease among them. And when it continued for two or three sessions, and I tried to find out what it was all about. They reluctantly came out eventually and one of them told me, you know, "You give us such sentences as 'Dog bites the man,' 'The garden has nice flowers,' such simple stuff. We would like to read Shakespeare." So I tried to explain to them the facts of life. But you can see the ambitiousness, you can see the seriousness. They thought learning English means to read Shakespeare, but they had a long way to go they didn't immediately realize, but they were a very, very nice bunch, and I was very fond of them, very -- and I enjoyed the experience.

Q. DID YOU READ THEM ANY SHAKESPEARE?

A. We never got to Shakespeare, no, I don't think they would have been able to read Shakespeare for another 10 years. I can't read Shakespeare today.

Q. WHAT OTHER FUNNY THINGS HAPPENED WHEN YOU WERE TEACHING?

A. Well, that's the one I remember, that's the one incident.

Q. WHERE DID YOU LIVE?

A. My friend and I lived in the part of Shanghai which was known as the French Concession part of Shanghai, is the international settlement, or was, this is all past tense, and one part was the French Concession where the municipal authority were the French. It was a residential area. There were quite a few German newcomers who had enough means to run a pension, and we stayed in one of them. Quite western. It was just like a bed and breakfast place here. There was nothing Chinese about it. You wouldn't know it was Shanghai when you were -- if you were inside.

We had meals in the style that we were used to. The only difference was that we did drink the water there which you couldn't drink anywhere else or we did not drink anywhere else in Shanghai. We had been warned that it was dangerous, and we knew in that place that the water was boiled and then refrigerated and got that way on the table so we could drink the water, which was a great relief.

We felt very much at home there and we lived in a Western style.

Q. WAS IT HARD TO GET FOOD?

A. No, we could go shopping, could buy anything. There were many white Russian stores, you could buy caviar which we couldn't afford. The white Russians came from an earlier wave of refugees after the Russian Revolution, and we did not buy food in the way a housekeeping person would buy food because we ate in that place where we were. That was all meals.

There was a lot of selling of food in the streets. The Chinese had little shacks in which they sold strange kinds of food, steamed often, but we did not try that. We were scared. We were told right from the beginning to be very careful with food and so we were -- many people got sick, we never got sick, because we absolutely observed the rules.

For example, no vegetables, no fresh, green vegetables or food -- or I mean fruit, no fruit and no vegetables uncooked. Only those that we got cooked in the place where we lived. So that was about the story.

Q. WELL, WHEN YOU WERE AWAY FROM HOME, THEN, ALL DAY, DID YOU TAKE YOUR FOOD AND WATER WITH YOU?

A. No. I cannot give you an exact rundown of how we -- how we took every meal. Certainly in the morning and in the evening, during lunch hour I don't quite know, cannot quite remember how we did this. We had business of different kinds,



and I believe, though, that we did come home mostly for lunch. The -- the afternoon is -- was often very hot and it was somewhat like a Mexican siesta, you didn't do it too much in the afternoons, and then life began again in the later afternoon, in the evening.

My job at the newspaper, I had two jobs, I think I mentioned it in the earlier session, I -- in addition to teaching, I was an editor for a newspaper there, and I had to go there in the late afternoon, or early evening, I think around six or so, and I stayed there half the night. So there was still time for me to have my dinner at home.

Q. WERE THE RATES THAT YOU PAID FOR THE PENSION INFLATED?

A. I think it was a quite reasonable rate. I cannot tell you how much it was. We could afford it. There was no -- no trouble about that.

Q. WHO DID YOU MEET THAT BECAME MOST MEMORABLE TO YOU?

A. Well, the situation was not unlike that in -- in England. There were refugee colonies, they were very large in Shanghai. Altogether there were 20,000 of us eventually. They came in waves. And I usually associated with people who had some literary interests or people who were introduced to us through other friends. And we had quite -- quite a lively social

life.

I had a second editing job. In addition to working for that paper I also worked for a local German language weekly, which one of the immigres -- -gres had started, and it was done by volunteer work except for me, I was the editor, I was paid.

I also joined a short story club. People who wrote short stories. Mostly white Russians. And through them I also wrote -- read those stories over the Shanghai radio station, which was quite an exotic thing to do, to see your name listed on the Chinese radio station program.

So we had a good life there, in -- in this respect. We were not isolated sitting at home. We had friends, girls, women, but we were very careful. Again, it was like drinking water, you were not going to drink any female water. We were told to be very cautious, which was a paradox in the great Babel of sin of the orient, Shanghai, full of all kinds of places and prostitutes and whatnot. We were totally abstinent during the time that we were there. We were -- we were quite decided not to catch any diseases, and that was it.

Q. DID YOU TAKE PRECAUTIONS ABOUT GETTING EMOTIONALLY OR ROMANTICALLY INVOLVED WITH THE GIRL BECAUSE THEN YOU WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO JUST TAKE OFF AND LEAVE WHEN YOUR VISA CAME THROUGH?

A. I cannot say that I did any deliberate program of protecting myself emotionally. It was an easy-going social life. It was social life and no more.

Q. DID YOU SPEND MUCH TIME WITH THE JEWISH COMMUNITY?

A. No, we were -- we were not in touch with the Jewish community, which was unusual, perhaps, because so many had to be supported by the community. But since we were self-supporting and the group let -- we were part of -- was also self-supporting in their own ways. We had no contact with the Jewish community. We had contacts with all kinds of people.

Strangely, for example, I met the bishop of the Jesuits there one time, quite an interesting and intriguing encounter, or the Director of the Royal Asiatic Society which resulted in my friend Kurt Schwantz \*\* getting a position there as librarian at the Royal Society. Or I met a -- a nephew of the former President Hoover who was the head of the YMCA there, not the JMCA, but the YMCA. It was really quite an international intercourse which was not surprising in this international and cosmopolitan city.

Q. WHY WAS THE JESUIT MEETING INTRIGUING?

A. Because it was such an unusual thing for one of us to meet with a Catholic priest to begin with, and with a bishop

at that. And here he was in his palace like place with a great big wall around, an enclosure of gardens. To us it seemed like meeting the Pope. And he was very benign and very friendly, a little unctuous maybe, but it was a friendly encounter, and it was a policy on our part to follow up any sort of introductions that we could get.

We were -- you asked me earlier was I protecting myself emotionally. We were protecting ourselves, we were trying to protect ourselves from a situation in which the Japa- -- war would break out between Japan and the United States, we would be isolated among the Japanese and we would then need friends, not Japanese friends, in as high positions as possible to in some way, perhaps, to help us. We did not want to be unknown flotsam in a million people city. It was a calculated effort to have connections as high as possible.

Now, you can see the three I just mentioned, the bishop, the Director of the Royal Asiaic Society, and -- and the head of the YMCA who was a close relative of the President -- former President of the United States.

I also met two -- two Jewish people, because you asked about something like that. One was Mr. Sasoon \*\*, Sasoon \*\*, who was a very prominent and important figure in Shanghai. He -- this family comes originally from Baghdad and from a yet earlier wave preceding also the white Russians that went -- went back to the previous century. I don't know why these -- these people came in via India, I believe, Baghdad,

India, and then Shanghai, the Sasoons, \*\* and also relatives of theirs, also a prominent family from Baghdad, Kaduri \*\*, the Kaduri \*\* family. Both prominent Jewish families, oriental families.

The Kaduris \*\* were very charitable and philanthropic. They -- Mr. Kaduri \*\* whom I met ran a school, high school, private high school, and in the early part, before I had my job with the North Channel Daily News, with this British newspaper, I was a teacher in that Kaduri \*\* school, so I did all kinds of things while I was there, this less than a year.

Q. DID CONCENTRATION CAMP REFUGEES TALK TO YOU ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES?

A. Not so much then, but now, in recent years, when I conducted these classes for survivors and participated in their writing their own memoirs, I heard a lot about what went on in concentration camps. Yes. Not there so much.

Q. RIGHT AFTER THE WAR, AFTER ALL THE INFORMATION CAME OUT, DID YOU READ UP ON IT THEN?

A. Oh, I had all the information right then. This -- this -- this -- this was not a secret. There was -- there were enough people that had come out and told their stories,

and, of course, some of these gruesome details came out after the war, especially when the pictures came out, we saw them on television and in the newspapers and in the magazines. Yes.

Perhaps since you are touching on these questions, I feel I ought to make a statement about my own position toward the Jewish community and my own origins. I really did quite carefully in my book, and I do not want to paraphrase that, I have this short paragraph, three sentences, and if I may, I will read them.

Q. YES.

A. They are what you might call my creed. "Hitler and the anti-semitic years made me conscious of my roots. I was placed in a category I hardly knew existed. I was arbitrarily made a target, first of ridicule, then of discrimination, deprivation, expulsion, and finally destruction. Although I escaped the worst, it was during the years of my flight on three continents that I defiantly acknowledged my roots in solidarity with the persecuted, in royalty, in loyalty, in compassion, in acknowledgment of a shared destiny. Jewish diet laws and other restrictions still seem anachronistic to me. And the belief in a caring deity seems almost obscene to me after Auschwitz. My consciousness of my heritage is political, not religious. I accepted it because I identified with those who had survived the brown shirts and in supreme

sacrifice established an island of self-respect in Palestine in a world of hatred and murder."

I felt I had to make this statement.

Q. HOW DID YOU SPEND YOUR TIME WHEN YOU WEREN'T WORKING?  
HOW DID YOU SPEND YOUR TIME WHEN YOU WEREN'T WORKING?

A. Well, I tried to cover this earlier. We had -- we had some social life, and we had this short story club and the broadcasting and we invited each other -- but there's -- there's nothing you -- and of course I had a lot to -- my work took very much of my time. I had a very crowded calendar.

Q. IT SOUNDED LIKE IT. WHAT WAS AN AVERAGE DAY LIKE?

A. Well, it depended on the -- what -- what part of my -- my stay there. In the early part I had this -- this school, the one I mentioned, the Kaduri \*\* school. As a matter of fact, there was another one, another high school that I also taught and sometimes the same day, different hours, so I had to get up in the morning and go to this one school, and perhaps come home for lunch, as you asked me earlier, and then go to the other school, and it was then different when I worked for the North Channel Daily News and again different when I -- when I taught at the university.

We did go out together quite a bit just to learn

about what the -- what the Chinese are up to, and we had no contact with them, but we were very interested in -- in their culture, in their -- in their literature, their hand -- their writing, their customs, their temples. We would go around sightseeing and watch them.

There were so many strange things going in -- on in the streets. There were these horrible beg- -- beggars. It's hard to imagine in a western city what these beggars did, and how they tried to get coins from the people who walked by. Many of them were sick, they're just lying in the gutter there, all kinds of wounds, and we were later told that they even -- even encouraged those wounds, they should look horrible. There was one who carried his mother on his back in order to attract attention. But especially those with those gaping sores.

There was much to see, and both positive and negative. And so many strange things. The music, it -- that's -- came out of the windows. They have their own kind of scale, whatever -- whatever that is, it didn't sound like music to me. Kind of a sing-song, but no melody.

And -- and the rickshaws, I don't think they exist anymore, I wouldn't know, the rickshaw pullers, I was so terribly sorry for those rickshaw pullers. Human beings carrying other humans, and running. I -- I swore I would never use a rickshaw. There were buses there. But it's easy swearing if you don't know the situation.



We would -- on one occasion we went to a show, a theater, and by the time it was over, the buses didn't run anymore. We had a long way to go home, and here were all these rickshaws waiting for us. They knew that we would have to take them. And so very reluctantly we took rickshaws, my friend and I, each one. And here was this rickshaw puller, he was starting to run, and I tried to -- to tell him that I wasn't in a hurry, he shouldn't exert himself, go easy, it's all right with me. There was even a word which I have forgotten, the one I learned while I was there for "slow, slow, take it easy," but I tried to show this with my hands. And so he slowed down a bit. But I was told later that I didn't do any favor to this man, because they know exactly the speed that is necessary. There is a certain trot which allows them to pull the least. If it runs along at a certain speed, then the pulling doesn't have to be so hard. I didn't know this at the time.

So you can see all the kinds of things that happen in a strange and foreign city.

Q. WERE THESE THINGS STRANGE TO YOU?

A. Well, I just told you.

Q. OKAY. ONCE KURT MADE IT TO THE UNITED STATES, YOUR FRIEND KURT --

A. Yes.

Q. -- DID YOU STAY IN TOUCH WITH HIM?

A. Yes, I did stay in touch with him. He arrived with his wife whom he had married in Shanghai, a lady from Vienna whom I got to know when I was there. They -- they brought along a little boy, and as a matter of fact, they stayed in our place for a few days at the beginning, and they later moved to Los Angeles, and they did very well there.

I was in touch with him many times, we visited back and forth. I stayed in their place, they -- they eventually had a very beautiful home, a lovely house. He got sick in later years and passed away. His wife, Martha, is still a good friend of mine, stays in the same house. The little boy who is now -- is now a grown man, married, and we are all still in touch.

Q. DID HE EVER TALK ABOUT HIS WAR EXPERIENCES IN SHANGHAI?

A. What work he did, Kurt?

Q. JUST HIS WHOLE GENERAL WAR EXPERIENCE IN SHANGHAI.

A. Whose?

Q. KURT'S.

A. Yes, he was a rare book dealer, and he made up -- made -- established a business in -- in his field, was a very learned man, he knew very much, and so he continued the business that he originally had in Vienna and later in London, also in Shanghai, and eventually in Los Angeles. There was continuity in this there. He did very well, was very successful, and he was a good and dear friend, so was his family, and still is.

Q. DID THE FACT THAT YOU MANAGED TO GET OUT BEFORE THE WAR EVER COME BETWEEN YOU?

A. It did not, at least not on the surface. I felt extremely guilty for years, and I couldn't look into -- into him, but I can well imagine how he felt, and I believe since he married immediately after I left, that he sought and received comfort from his wife, who was also left behind. And it was indeed a very touchy point, and not until he came finally after the war, he spent the whole war there, and it was not so much the waiting there that caused the guilt feeling, but not knowing whether he would ever make it. So when he did make it, whatever, such feeling remained dissipated.

Q. DID YOU EVER DISCOVER WHY SENOR DOVELLA, SEEMED

UNCOMFORTABLE WHEN YOU ASKED HIM TO LIQUIDATE YOUR GOLD BAR?

A. Looking back now, I have the feeling that maybe we projected into him the -- the anxieties we had, wondering whether a total stranger would really behave in an honest way, since all our fortune was in his hands, all our material fortunes were in his hands.

So when I say that we wondered whether he would come through when he said that at any time that we wanted our gold bar which we had entrusted to him because he was the manager or the director of the bank and natural -- the natural person to be the guardian of that, so when we wondered whether we would ever get it back, we asked for it. So it was probably, from the objective point of view, not justified. This was an honest man and behaved honestly. But, of course, we were so much at the mercy of forces that we couldn't control, that perhaps we could be excused for being worried about that.

Q. WHEN DID YOU PAY BACK THE COUSIN WHO DEPOSITED THE MONEY IN THE SHANGHAI BANK SO YOU COULD GET ON THE SHIP TO SHANGHAI?

A. The money -- money that our -- well, my cousin deposited for me at the Shanghai bank, the New York-based person, never asked the money back, and it was not necessary, because the moment I arrived in Shanghai, when the money -- this deposit had done its duty, namely, it's insurance for this shipping

company, that they would be paid in case we would not be admitted in Shanghai and they would have to take us back, this -- when this money was no longer needed, I -- I sent it back, in the very first days of our arrival in Shanghai. It was not a loan, it was a deposit.

Q. WHAT WAS YOUR TRIP ON THE COLBY MIRU \*\* TRIP?

A. That was quite an uneventful trip, the trip back from Japan to the United States. Well, I should say back to the western hemisphere because I didn't come from the United States, I came from Canada. There is not much to say. There was some -- I think three other immigres on that ship. I shared the cabin with one of them. And they -- the dominant feeling on that trip was one of supreme peace and rest, the feeling of security, that finally being out of the storm, finally not being exposed to the whims of all kinds of authorities of unknown forces in strange countries, being hunted, waiting for the visa, waiting -- waiting for this or that paper, not knowing whether you would have money enough for groceries the next day, wondering whether you would be stranded in a -- in a country that was the axis partner of the Nazis. All this was over.

I remember my lying there on that deck chair with a good, warm blanket just -- just closing my eyes and being at peace with the world. Whatever would come now, it could not

be compared with what we had gone through before. We were not on the run anymore, like a -- like a drowning person reaching -- reaching an island and reaching shore. But we had -- or I had reached the shore and there I was, happily exhausted.

Q. WHEN YOU ARRIVED IN SEATTLE, WHAT CULTURAL DIFFERENCES DID YOU NOTICE FIRST?

A. Oh, the cultural differences were the same as the cultural differences when I arrived originally on the trip out from Liverpool to Halifax and I reached Canada. Those elegant railroad cars, upholstered, comfortable dining car people, well dressed. I came from a city in which two-thirds of the people ran around raggedy, tore clothes, no shoes. And here everything was relaxed, easy going, nobody seemed to have any worries. I know it was deceptive to believe that, but that was the feeling I had.

The lady that picked me up from the arriving boat in Seattle and took me to the railroad station, she too, she was so well dressed, and shiny car, and for me to see a person that even had -- has a car, it's a great luxury in my eyes for somebody to own an automobile. And here she was, and invited me in -- in and she wanted to do something for me, did I need this or that. I -- I said, "No, thank you," I -- I couldn't think of anything that I -- I needed, I don't know what she exactly meant, perhaps to buy me a hat or what. But I could

see the attitude, the generosity of this woman. A stranger, she had never met me, of course, she was only alerted by the committee that somebody was arriving from the Far East and would you give him a hand.

She was so eager to do something for me she -- when we -- when we passed a newsstand, that she picked up a Life magazine just -- just to buy something for me. And so on -- on the way to Portland and later to -- beyond Portland to Oakland and San Francisco, I read this Life magazine.

Q. YOU SAID IT WAS DIFFICULT GETTING COMFORTABLE WITH THE NAME KNIGHT?

A. Yes.

Q. WHAT DID CHANGING YOUR NAME MEAN TO YOU?

A. I was very uncomfortable. I had so many friends from Austria, and it was quite obvious that this could not be my name. It -- it sounded like -- like having to hide something. I did it because I was told by -- by a friend before I came to this country that German-sounding names had great trouble in the first world war and since then a war was about to break out again, it, he thought, would be wise for me to Anglisize it in some way. And so I did this.

When I arrived in Seattle, the immigration officer

asked me, "What would you -- do you want to call yourself?" Well, I wanted a short name that had the same initials as my original name, and so I didn't have to change the painting on my suitcase where the initials were painted on, or my handker-- handkerchiefs, they had the initials embroidered on it, and so I wanted the same initials and so I took that name on the suggestions of some friends on the ship before we arrived, it was picked out of the telephone book.

And I was always uncomfortable, really, until -- until my first book was published and had favorable reviews and then I began to identify with that name that was cited in the reviews, and with more books coming out later, that was the case more and more. And then after that, my wife, Charlotte, is American, both my children were born here, so they were of the name legitimately, you might say, and so I grew -- grew into it. I was thinking for some time of changing back because there was really no -- no reason, it turned out that the Germans in this country during the second world war didn't have any trouble with their German-sounding names. And -- but it was too far gone, all the documents were already under that name, so I -- I let it go and now I'm used to it and I'm no longer embarrassed, and when somebody asks and when the history comes up I say, "Yes, my name is Kuhnel, K-U-H-N-E-L, two dots over the U, but otherwise I'm now accustomed to it completely.

I did have a strange feeling when -- when I first



came in and the immigration officer asked me, because I thought changing the name, that is a major process, you have to go to court, maybe, or have some papers. No. This fellow said, "What do you want to call yourself?" Such and such. He wrote it down, that was the end of it. I -- I -- I felt rather humiliated by that, which may be unusual for you to hear that, but that -- that this fellow would regard immigrants as so nondescript, like cattle, it doesn't make any difference. "Whatever you called yourself before is of no consequence to us. Now pick a name, anything, and it is okay with us."

No trace is left of this name now except on the back of my naturalization paper, there the former name is still listed, on the back, mind you, not -- not on the front with the printed text. So this is the end of my name story. I have now three names, don't I? Kuhnel and Knight and Fabreychews \*\*.

Q. (INAUDIBLE). WOULD YOU TALK ABOUT MEETING CHARLOTTE?

A. Oh, yes, that was one of the most pleasant episodes in my life. I told in my -- in the previous session that I was a guest for one year in the house of the British author C. S. Forester \*\*.

And Mrs. Forester \*\* had a kitchen with a note pad. So whenever she would go out shopping, she wrote down what she

had to buy, some bread, some eggs, milk, and so forth. This by way of introduction.

After I had stayed with the Foresters \*\* for one year and had started my first job as a shoe shine for the family, I had the opportunity to engage in my second job which was a laborer in a shipyard. The war had broken out, anybody with two legs and two arms was accepted in the shipyard, so I took a job as, quote, ship fitter, unquote, this was my official designation, in the -- in the Kaiser \*\* shipyards in Richmond, together with my friend Joe also -- who also became a ship fitter there.

I knew as much about ship fitting as I knew about Manchuria when I was hired by the Office of War Information to monitor the text -- texts that came out of Manchuria. I had to look at the map where that place is. But all this was told in the earlier session, or I think it was told. And so I became a ship fitter. It's just an elegant name for a laborer, all I had to do is snap the chalk line sometimes, if you know what that means. There were steel plates, and they had to be cut by welders, now, a welder in a shipyard knew his job, he really was a craftsman, but I didn't know what I was doing. And so there are two people at each end of the plate and in the middle is a piece of string, chalked string, and one person has to snap it so that it makes a straight line and the welder can then cut it. So that was my egregious job there.

Now, this was only by way of explaining that I now had an income and I no longer needed the charity of the Foresters \*\*. So I said to Mrs. Forester \*\*, "You know, it's been a long time, almost a year, and I don't want to be a burden anymore. I can stand on my own feet, I can pay for an apartment, I want to start life in the United States now, and I want to get married, I don't want to be by myself.

The expected answer was that she would smile, but she didn't smile, she took it very seriously, and she said, "So you want to get married. All right." As though I had ordered something which she was going to take care of. And this is precisely how -- how it was.

Shortly after I had told her that, it was in November or early December, I think early December, maybe, she one day came with a little envelope, and she said, "Here's your wife."

I opened the envelope. She said, "I have to give you your Christmas present a little early and you will understand why." And in the envelope was a membership card to the Sierra Club, and the Sierra Club has every year an annual dance, and she said, "You -- you are now a member, you can go to this dance, I paid the membership for you, and you go there, and there you'll find your wife." And this is what happened. Although there was a slight detour with that.

When I got there, I was very shy, there were all these people, they all seemed to know each other, there was

all this noise, many, many people, music. I didn't dance. For hours I was just sitting there and didn't dance.

Then came the last dance, midnight or 1 a.m., and that was ladies' choice. And in that ladies' choice, a blond came along, and she asked me for a dance. So I -- I danced with her. She was quite an aggressive gal, and the -- the dance was fairly long because it was the last one, and before it was all over she asked me if I would visit her. She -- she lived in Berkeley. I said, "Well, yes. " So I wouldn't know how to say no, and I had no particular reason -- reason to say no. I cannot say I was particularly impressed by her either, it was just -- just a dance.

So she asked me to -- to come to -- she said "to our place," "our" meaning that she shared the place with -- with another girl, young woman.

So a few days later, sure enough, she had -- they had a party and I -- when I came close to the house, it was in Berkeley on Euclid Avenue, and there were a few steps before you reached that place and on top of the -- when I reached the top of the place from the street, she came running out of the house, took me under, and escorted me into the house. I was her catch. And inside there were other people. And she introduced me also to her roommate, to her housemate. And that housemate that came in with a tray, coffee or tea on it, in a very inviting and welcoming posture.

I had always said afterwards I -- I remember the

picture on -- there is a -- is it tea or coffee? I think tea (hutin) on the can, there is a picture of a Danish woman with a little hood carrying this cup, she reminded me of that picture. In a very caring way she had -- she had auburn hair but a white strand right in the middle of it, a prematurely white strand, and in that strand, there was a flower, and that impressed me greatly. And I liked her off the bat, the other one, not the one that had brought me in, but her roommate, her housemate.

So she was very good looking, very charming. So there was this party, I forget what happened to her at the party, but a few days later I called up that first one, the one that had brought me to the house, and I said, "Can I talk -- I'd like to talk to Charlotte," that was the other one. "Oh," she said shortly, "she's not here." I said -- no, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm not telling this correctly.

During that party, the first one, her name was Sue, Susan, had told me some -- in -- in some context which I do not remember that on Saturday she would not be at home, had to go somewhere. So I called on Saturday, and it was Charlotte who came to the phone. And when I said who I was, before waiting for anything else, she said, "Sue is not home." She thought that I was phoning for Sue. I said, "I know she isn't home. That's why I'm phoning now. I want to see you." "You want to see me? Well, okay, come along."

We got married six months later. It happened

precisely as Mrs. Forester \*\* had said except for this little detour via Sue. Sue became the bitter enemy, of course, of Charlotte, but after a few years, good Sue got herself another catch and married, and so the friendship was rescued and there were no bad feelings and Christmas cards were exchanged every year since then.

Charlotte and I had a very nice wedding. It was nice for several reasons. One was that neither of us had any relatives. Hers were in Canada, mine were in England. The -- my friend Joe Fabrey \*\* was the witness, or one of them. Another reason why it was nice was that we chose as a place to get married the rose garden in Berkeley. It's a very beautiful setting. It was to my knowledge the first time it happened. It was afterwards written -- written up in the local paper as a novelty. So it was in the evening. July 11, 1942, we got married there and had a nice reception at the Foresters \*\*, the Foresters \*\* did everything, all the food and the -- they invited friends, and then we had a honeymoon at Fallen Leaf Lake which was very pleasant. We took a -- a horseback trip up a little lake which is up from there, I forget the name now, and later on I moved in instead of poor Sue, in the -- in the place on Euclid Avenue until a few years later we moved in our own place (inaudible) and there she has become the mistress of the house and we've never regretted it. We have lived happily ever after. And next year we will have our golden anniversary. That's my story.

Q. THAT'S A WONDERFUL STORY.

A. Isn't this a good ending of it all?

Q. WELL, IT'S NOT THE END OF THE INTERVIEW.

A. I mean of your interviewing.

Q. I DIDN'T MEAN THAT, YOU MEANT THAT (??).

A. I didn't mean the end of my life exactly, although it's -- it's not likely to be very far off, I just had my 82nd birthday.

Q. THAT'S A WONDERFUL STORY.

A. Well, why don't we leave it at that?

Q. WELL, ACTUALLY I HAVE QUITE A FEW MORE QUESTIONS.

A. You have more questions? Well, all right, you have more questions.

Q. WHEN YOU WERE IN THE SHIP FITTING JOB --

A. Oh, back to that? Yes.

Q. BACK TO THE SHIP FITTERS, YES.

Q. WHAT WAS THE WORK ATMOSPHERE LIKE?

A. The work atmosphere? My goodness, they tried to make it very patriotic and they -- they told everybody what -- what great patriots we were. I think everybody took the job because it was -- because it was highly paid. I -- I -- but -- but I must say that we -- the newcomers were very much aware of what it really meant. I doubt that many were too much aware of -- of the fact that we were here -- we were building ships that would help defeat the Japanese and the Nazis. We -- we did feel that there was a cause, and from the working point of view, it was nothing to boast about. It was very much a waste of a person's time and, I'm sure, funds. But they put out those liberty ships, great festivities every time one was launched.

Q. WEREN'T YOU ON THE -- THE SHIP THAT WAS BUILT THAT WAS AN EXPERIMENT IN FIVE -- TO DO IT IN -- COMPLETE IT IN FIVE DAYS?

A. We were there, my friend Joe and I, were there at the same time, and we indirectly participated in this. This ship was built in -- in -- in parts, and that was the whole idea, to -- to build the various sections on -- on the various -- what they call the ways. And so in -- in some way he or I or



both put on some brackets, I suppose, and -- but we do not claim that we built that ship. It was one of those bravura exploits, it was much written up, and there was a story in the Reader's Digest to our grief because we wanted to write that story ourselves, and then we discovered all too soon that they had beaten us to it.

It was a great day when that ship was launched. I -- I -- I liked the work there except for the long waits in between, sometimes for hours I had nothing to do, and I felt I should do something, I wanted to earn my pay, I wanted to contribute something, and I felt very frustrated that they didn't make use of the manpower. And Joe was in a better position than I was because he could read blueprints. He -- he almost was a ship fitter, really, he -- and he also was promoted faster than I was, and rightly so, because he could tell these plans, what they were, and as a matter of fact, even showed the other ship fitters who couldn't read these blueprints what to do. So -- but I -- I was really the fifth wheel on the wagon. I had -- I didn't belong there, I knew I didn't belong there, but I also knew that this was the basis, I first had to find footing in American life, and I had to start it at the lowest part, low in -- in -- in terms of any sort of preparation or training, but I -- I never felt declassified. I -- I knew what I knew, I knew what I had to offer, and I was quite certain that eventually I would get to the place where I belong. But I was not resentful of it, that

I had to do this work, and it didn't in any way discourage me.

Today I saw it -- I say it with some smugness that I began as a shoe polisher and a laborer; a shoe shiner, I should say, not a shoe polisher.

Q. DID YOU NOTICE ANY PREJUDICE TOWARDS THE BLACKS IN YOUR WORKING AS A SHIP FITTER?

A. I did not notice any prejudice towards the blacks, but then I wasn't keyed up to this. Perhaps if I had -- had a better hearing I -- I might have noticed something. But I was preoccupied with what I was doing or not doing, and the blacks and the Hispanics and the Indians, they were all there, they -- we didn't treat -- I certainly didn't discriminate, and I was myself a minority, and it was very harmonious as far as I could -- as far as I could tell, and I can only say if it would be like this generally in American life, it would be so much the better. No, I could not find anything wrong with the race situation in the shipyards. We were all in the same basket.

Q. WHEN YOU WERE GETTING YOUR PARENTS INTO THE COUNTRY -- WHY DON'T YOU SHOW YOUR PICTURE OF YOUR MOTHER NOW?

A. Well, I will show this in a minute. The -- the war was not over yet on the Japanese side. I applied for my parents

who had lived throughout the blitz in England, they were bombed out on two occasions but survived, and I applied for immigration for my parents. It was a long process, quite bureaucratic, and frustrating for that reason. All kinds of affidavits and support and papers.

The climax was that I had to go to Washington, D.C. There was a commission to decide on whether to grant the visa or not and to interrogate me as the sponsor. It was not very generous, I believe, of the government to demand that the applicant have to travel to Washington if you had immigration officers right here across the bay in San Francisco. It -- it was a great expense for me to do that. I had no more money than paying for a bus, not even enough for the train. The bus took three days or four days, on and on.

So -- but I did go to this -- of course, when I was called to meet this committee in Washington, there were -- I don't know, either three or five people on that panel, I cannot remember now. But they were sitting in front of me, above me, I was a little down below. I was very anxious to appear as a good, solid, middle class citizen. I didn't want to look outlandish, foreign. I knew I couldn't do anything about my accent, but whatever else I could do, I wanted to do. I wanted to dress in an inconspicuous, quote, normal, unquote, way.

I remember the -- the very last item in my preparation was when I -- on my -- already on my way to -- to

that meeting, I wondered whether men in -- in America use a tie pin. I wore a tie, I -- now, in Berkeley I don't wear a tie anymore, or rarely, on special occasions, when I have to tell the oral history in my first session, I wore a tie.

Now, so that worried me. I thought this pin I wore, would that look conspicuous and outlandish, or, on the other hand, if I didn't have it, would that look sloppy? So what I did was I -- I stood at the corner of one of the main streets and one of the side streets and just watched the men walking by, and I took a count. It turned out that few had tie pins, there were one or two who did, so it wasn't totally out -- so -- but when I saw that most of them didn't, I took mine away and I put it in my pocket.

And so I appeared in front of this commission there, and they asked me all kinds of questions. Actually, I could see what I anticipated, that they -- what they really wanted to know was whether, heaven forbid, these parents of mine would be Communists. They were worried about Communism, about nothing else. They didn't say so, but all their questions were that way. When I said I worked for a newspaper in Vienna, they asked me what kind of a newspaper it was. Perhaps it was a Socialist newspaper, that -- that would have been almost or perhaps just as bad.

Well, I was so innocent at that time, and since I never worked for the political side of a newspaper but only for the literary side, I didn't even quite know what kind of

a paper that was politically, I didn't care about that. And I was a little vague in my answer, but these people had a fat book sitting there which apparently listed the newspapers of the world or of Austria and Germany, and one of them looked it up, sure enough, the subtitle of the paper for which I worked was "Neues Wiener Tottplatt," \*\* that was the main title, the subtitle translated "a democratic organ," that saved the day, was a democratic organ, so I didn't work for the Socialist paper and not for the Communist paper, so they -- so that -- that part of it was fine.

But there were more questions, and they all -- how much money did I make and would I become a public burden, maybe, and who were the people with whom I associated, on and on. As I say, I had anticipated that, and because of that, when I told about my parents and what their social position was before, my father was a vice president of a bank in Vienna and my mother was a lady. "What do you mean by a lady?"

And it was then that I pulled out a -- a picture of her which was painted on ivory, it was a miniature oil painting, nicely framed and bronzed, it was always -- I always treasured it very much. And I showed them this picture, and they passed it from hand to hand, smugly smiled, you can see she sits there rather prin- -- like a princess with -- with a shawl draped around her, and so the whole thing looked like a good, non-Communist, middle-aged, bourgeois woman who would not be a danger to the government of the United States of

America.

And so she -- this little picture took its part in the eventual admission of my parents who were indeed allowed to come and join us. It still took six or eight months until these gentlemen made up their minds, but eventually they came.

Q. WHAT WAS YOUR MOTHER LIKE?

A. What was my mother like?

Q. YES. REMEMBER, I WAS GOING TO ASK YOU THAT THIS TIME.

A. Well, you are asking a prejudiced person. My mother was a woman who had a wonderful sense of humor, was very much down to earth, very practical. She was an excellent cook, recognized as that, not only by me, even -- even -- even when she -- after she had come to this country, she demonstrated in various service clubs how to make a Viennese strudel and things like that. And after all, this cookbook is a result of her art, I call it an art. And she was a person who particularly showed her mettle in tough situations, in a crisis.

When my father wanted a higher position, when he wanted to change from the job he had to one which was recognized as a more important post, it was she who made it

possible through pulling strings and getting him this job. When we were in London together and were evacuated when the war broke out, because we were not allowed to stay in -- in London itself anymore, being aliens, we took refuge in a very small, very primitive house that, through friends, were rented to us. There was nothing but a single gas burner there, no kitchen. It was she who made it comfortable for my father and myself and, of course, herself and my friend Joe Fabrey \*\* who stayed with us there. She made a home out of this shack with very limited facilities, not much food.

When I'm here mixing up chronologies, there was an earlier occasion when -- when, again, she came to the rescue, that was a time long before the Nazis came in -- in the '20s, when inflation hit Austria, there was a runaway, terrible inflation which resulted in my father's fortunes being wiped out entirely, and when I say, "entirely," I mean everything.

I like to tell the story how he called me into his study and showed me a postage stamp, one that was for first-class letters, the kind which at the time of my saying it here is 29 cents, by the time this will be seen, it will be probably 50 cents, a stamp like this. He moistened it, put it on an envelope and said, "I want you to see this." This is all that has been left of all I've saved all these years for you and your mother. That's all we have now." He had life insurance, wiped out; he had savings, stocks, everything was wiped out. It was she, my mother, who in -- in this crisis,

found a tactful way of approaching my great uncles, her uncles, the brothers of her mother, who lived in Paris, to support us. I mean, it's very difficult to write to a relative for money. It was her way of approaching it and her way of doing that. She took the initiative that resulted in our rescue. These uncles were very generous and immediately came to our help.

So this is -- this is a -- again, my mother, during the -- when they were bombed out in London, they were taken in by friends whom I mentioned in an earlier session, a young British fellow and his wife. They -- they took my parents into their house. Well, my parents had no funds at all, so it was she, again, who kept house for these people who were very happy to have such a good cook. And she maintained the standards.

She was very popular, she got along, she was a -- had a very good relationship with my father. He was the one who played the chief of the family, but she was the boss without any doubt. And he was very -- very respectful of her and affectionate, so was she, very affectionate. They sometimes disagreed about things, but I never heard them quarrel in all my life and never heard a harsh word. She was angry with him sometimes, but that was -- it never went beyond that.

This attitude, this home atmosphere was, of course, of fundamental importance to my own development. It shaped my



views. She was very much liked. She had an open house, often dinner parties, large dinner parties. She was liked in England, she was popular when she came to California. I was the beneficiary of all her warmth and affection and love. And if today -- if -- let me dramatically say, the end of my life, I have to say something about what is important in life, I can only say a cliché because clichés have become clichés because they are so true, this is why everybody uses them. So the ultimate word I can say what is important in life, it's love. If I'm remembered by that by my children, by my lovely grandchild, that is all what -- all I can expect. Nothing survives some of the printed books we kick around for a few years. But if I'm remembered as a loving person, I will feel like that was what matters, and let's end it here.