

Today is July 15, 2003. And we are at The Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project. And we're interviewing Inge Schaffer. The archivist, Dr. Anne Green Saldinger and interviewer is Hilde Gattmann. Mrs. Schaffer, what was your birth name?

Lobenstein.

Your birth name was also Inge?

Gretel Inge in Germany.

Gretel?

Inge.

Inge. OK. And where were you born, city?

Berlin, Friedenau, Germany.

All right. And your father's name.

My father's name was Leopold Lobenstein. It was spelled different than they spell it here. He always had two dots on top.

Umlaut.

Yeah, umlaut, yes, in Germany.

And your mother's name?

Fanny France Strauss was her maiden name.

And the birth dates of your brothers, brothers that you have?

I have one brother who deceased. He was born 8 of April, 1928, in Berlin, Germany.

Right. And the other brother?

Was born in Shanghai, October 12, 1940, in Shanghai.

And how did your family support itself?

In Germany, my father had a factory downtown, and fur coats and fur jackets, for stores. And in Shanghai, he started that, too, after we were there. And when we left Germany, we took our grandparents along, my mother's parents from South Germany, a little town which is called Kleineibstadt. And they came with us to Shanghai.

And how did your family get through the depressions of the '30s? Do you know anything about that, in Germany?

No, I don't know. I don't know.

I know you weren't there yet. I just thought maybe--

No. But I know that when the-- try to pick up my father that time for deport, we had some friend who told us that we hid him in my uncle's beauty shop. Because he was already deported to Poland and was broken in. So we put my

father there for a week, 10 days.

That was when the Nazis were active.

Yeah. So we hid him there.

In just a little bit-- can we go back and can you describe the schools that you attended there in Germany?

Yes. Yes, first I attended a public school close by. And then Jewish kids couldn't go there. Then I went to Prinzregentenstrasse. That was behind a temple, the school, which a lady was a principal.

In fact, she was here for many years until she passed away. Her name was Hartwig. She worked at Silver Avenue afterwards. It's funny. And she was in Shanghai a principal, too. So I worked there, was under her.

And then I went from there, they burnt that temple.

And the school?

And the school.

What was the name of that school?

Prinzregentenstrasse. And then I had to go to Fasan-- to another school, Fasan-- Fasanenstrasse, another town. And then, later on, they closed that. We had to go to Siegmunds Hof.

And then we couldn't go on the train anymore, you know, like a BART here. So we had to go on bicycle in the morning to school.

And how long did it take you to get there?

45 minutes about, at least. It was quite a ways.

In the height of traffic?

Yeah, in the height of traffic.

Did you like school?

Not particular. I didn't like the one moving around always, new teachers, new school, new acquaintance. That's what I didn't like.

Three Jewish schools.

Three Jewish schools. Yeah.

And then how about your mother and your father's education? You know anything about that?

No, I don't know anything.

OK.

My father was born in Hamburg, that I know. And he was the youngest of eight children.

And what kind of neighborhood did you live in? Can you describe the ethnic divisions? Were there only Jews that were

there?

No, no, it was a mixed neighborhood. In fact, I only knew one other party in our apartment house, where we rented an apartment-- I mean, my folks rented-- who was Jewish. There was no Jewish-- I mean there was a temple, a little temple, nothing big, like a big temple here, but where we went for the holidays. See, I grew up very Orthodox also in Germany and in Shanghai.

You were living in Berlin?

Yeah.

And what kind of neighborhood was it?

It was a fairly nice neighborhood, a rich neighborhood, not poor people, working people, but nice neighborhood.

Did you have family living there, other families?

Yes, cousins, yeah, cousins.

Cousins?

Yes.

And how did you all relate to each other? From my mother's side, there were cousins. They left in '35 or '36 to Johannesburg, South Africa. And those who are alive, we're very close to. I have been there and they have been here lots of times.

And what was your economic status? Parents were well off?

Yeah, fairly well, yeah, fairly well. I would say, like, an average. We didn't have servants or anything. But we did have babysitters sometimes. And they were sent over from the Jewish day school, who stayed with us a week or two weeks or something when my folks were too busy. My mother worked with my father, so to keep an eye on us, you know.

And what was their business?

Furrier.

Furrier, you said.

Yeah.

What do you remember about Jewish customs in Berlin?

How would I say that? We went a lot to service, Friday nights, Saturdays, within walking distance. Because we walked always. And we always kept kosher.

And we always went to Hebrew school, afternoon schools, until I went to a Hebrew day school. Then I didn't have to go in the afternoon, you know, and kept that up all the time.

Can you describe a typical Sabbath?

In Germany, yes. In Germany, we could afford, like, a chicken soup and a regular pot roast or something like that, which I could not have in China. But that's the best we could do.

For instance, you would have--

A regular Shabbat, yeah. And home baked, yeah, yeah. And home-baked challah and stuff like that, you know.

It would get more and more difficult to have kosher meat, would it not?

That's right, very difficult. Well, we went to fish mostly then, you know.

Yes.

You were pretty young at that time. Do you remember that time fondly?

Yes.

Do you have fond memories?

I was 13 when I left Germany. I was 13 years old.

And are there particular things you remember from growing up?

Yeah.

From before that time?

I remember, like, you bought the chicken alive. And you came home. And you had to pull the feathers out, or the fish, you know, alive. And not like here, supermarket-- on the stands, on the street from the stand. You went in the morning and bought it and carried it home and took care of things at home.

Outdoor markets?

Yeah. Outdoor, yeah.

And how did you and your family interact with Gentile friends? Or did you have Gentile friends?

Yeah, we did have Gentile. But we got along fine.

And you had playmates, Gentile playmates?

Yes, it was fine until the last year, year and a half. Then we were living in-- I think I brought it-- that same apartment all the time, where we had cast iron fence, around the trees and stuff. And often I had ponytails-- I mean, braids, not ponytail. They tied them on that and stuff, I mean, to make us mad, or my brother, yeah, crank. But more so to my brother than me, because he was very high strung the one who deceased, and very his way.

Was anyone in your family involved in local politics or unions?

No, not that I know of.

And how about sports? Were they involved in sports?

No, I learned ice skating a little. But that was an outdoor ring. The weather provided it. But that's all, not really to be perfect or something. And no, my biggest wish was always to get a black velvet with a fur trim. Never got it-- a skirt. You know how you dream about things?

Yeah. Mm-hmm. Pity. And did you have any idea what you might want to be?

No.

At that time?

No.

Did you have any close friends who were non-Jews?

I had one close friend, but I don't know what became of her, ever.

Can you describe the first time you noticed antisemitism?

Yes, when I went to the school, the first school. And it was in flames. It scared us a lot in the morning, coming there. And you can't go in and the flames are there. And then, seeing the windows of stores and my father's business all broken in and stuff, that scared us in, scared us to go out.

When was that?

'39, beginning of '39.

Was that Kristallnacht or before that?

No, it was Kristallnacht, after Kristallnacht.

It was after--

Yeah.

Before Kristallnacht, did you have any inkling of antisemitism?

A little bit. Kids yelled at us, you're Jewish, and stuff, going to the streets or something. But later on, we didn't go out anymore. We got scared. We didn't go. We weren't allowed to go.

What happened at the first school that you went to, the one that everybody--

The public school, yeah, no, that was OK. It was fine.

And then what made your parents change you?

The school wouldn't take Jewish students.

Oh, I see. They were ordered.

They refused to take--

They refused us. It was ordered.

Mhm. So what happened Crystal Night at your home?

It was OK. My house was OK-- I mean, our apartment. But knowing about it, we all hid in the apartment. You know, we didn't go out. We didn't buy groceries. We just hide in the place.

And you said your father--

My father was hidden in my uncle's beauty shop, which he had, because he was already deported to Poland.

When had that happened?

I think that was-- could have been the end of '38, 1938, somewhere around there, or the first week in '39.

So this was after Kristallnacht?

I don't know if it was after or before.

But close to it.

I don't know. Yeah, close to it.

Crystal Night was November 9.

Yeah. But that was in '38.

Mhm.

Yeah, it could have been before or after. I don't know any more.

You don't remember--

I don't know. But I know he had a beauty shop. And they broke the glass, I remember like today.

And he was deported to Poland. He had a mother there. So he went to his mother at that time.

He was Jewish?

And his wife followed him. When we left for Shanghai, she left for Poland with one child.

But before that, he hid in the beauty shop?

In the beauty shop, yes.

Mm-hmm. And do you know if your parents' business, your father's store, was affected earlier by the boycott?

It was taken away from him. That's all I know. It was taken away.

It was closed up and taken away. It was a factory more than a store. It was in a factory building, downtown Berlin.

And just from one day to the next, without warning?

Without warning.

How were you able to live without that?

Little savings and stuff. But all the big things, we had to turn over, the silver, and jewelry, and stuff, legally. And my father had a customer who was British, who bought a lot of furs from him, for herself, and traveled back and forth.

So he'd given her a fare. I mean, he paid her fare to England. And she took some of the stuff out to England for us. And then the boat we took was a Japanese boat. I brought a picture. Gordon was the ship.

She put it on the ship before we entered in Naples. Some of it, some she kept. I can't help that. But I don't know the lady's name or anything anymore.

But she took some of jewelry, and candlesticks, and stuff like that, which we sold in China to live on, some of it. But that's how we got it out before the silver was turned over to Hitler.

And as a school girl, as this started happening--

Yeah.

--how did you understand what was happening?

Not too much. I mean, we just knew that they didn't like Jews. And we knew that we couldn't go and play with the neighbor kids much and stuff.

And I knew that I used to go downstairs to the manager's apartment, which was like a cellar, and saw usually the Christmas tree and stuff. And I couldn't go anymore, because the kids hated the Jews. They were brainwashed.

And so I couldn't go. Even I have a letter, I just saw it yesterday, from her, still. I mean, she passed on and all that.

When did you actually first hear about Adolf Hitler?

As a child already we heard about it. It was talk at home.

And so you became aware of his attitude towards Jews--

Yeah.

--and heard all that. When did you--

Did you have personal experiences of antisemitism?

No, not really, not really.

When did you first see Brown Shirts?

That we saw already, quite a few years before I left, two, three years before, and boots and whatever came with it.

And parades?

Yeah, parades and boots and flags and all that.

And the night parade with the--

Yeah.

--torches?

Yeah.

Did you ever see somebody you knew, a customer or friend, in uniform?

I really don't remember. I mean, I might have seen it and never give it a second thought. I know we weren't supposed to

talk to them anymore and play with them anymore, and stuff like that.

Was that difficult for you?

Yes, it was difficult.

When you lived in a mixed area, and then you're kind of put into the house and stay at the house, you kind of felt funny. But also, we're too small to think what's going to be, or too young to know what's going to be.

Do you know anything or remember anything about when the Nuremberg laws were passed?

No.

Or anything like that? You know, when they really-- when they interfered with your-- they made laws about how you were to live, whether you were allowed to have a maid or not, and all of those laws.

Yeah, no. I don't know.

You don't know anything, how it affected your family? When did you first hear about the Gestapo?

I don't know, really. I don't know. I don't know.

Do you think you came to fear them before long?

Yeah, you got frightened. You got frightened on the street. You didn't take the bike and run, drive anywhere, or anything. You just got scared of everything.

How about the SS, the Black Shirts?

I don't know.

You don't remember seeing those. You think your parents tried to protect you?

Yes. My parents tried to get out to Africa. And they went to a school to learn how to do gardening. Because my cousins couldn't get us out as a family, so they were going to adopt my brother and me-- I mean, me and my brother. I'm the older one.

And we were going to go as farmers, because they needed farmers. But it didn't work out but they tried everything to get out. That I remember.

When your father went back to Poland--

My father never went to Poland. My uncle went to Poland.

Your uncle, I'm sorry. Was he caught between two borders? Did he have difficulty--

My husband was, in the train. My husband was deported, and his father was deported, and one of his sisters was deported. One was later deported.

Were any of them caught between borders? I mean, was it a difficult thing to get out of one and go into the other country?

They were three days in a train over the border in Poland, till the Polish people came and rescued them at that time. And the sister, his father, and him were in different areas. The people put them up in different places.



So the Poles were friendly?

They were friendly, very friendly, especially the Jewish Poles. And the father never got out. The sister never got out. They were deported further and further. And then another sister whose family was deported later.

My husband got out because he was 19. He had bought a ticket to Shanghai from his pocket money. He was going to get a bike. And then he lost a job as a tailor for a department store and had no money, had no job.

So he bought a ticket to go to Shanghai. And to go to Shanghai, you did not need a sponsor, like to America, or an affidavit. You could go as long as you could pay the fare.

And so he had bought it. And his family was very upset about that. But that's how he got out of Poland. But he was handcuffed through Germany on the train to go to Naples.

And his mother was at the train station, but only saw him from the window that time. And that's how he got to Shanghai. He did make it.

How old was he then?

19. He made a tape before he died to each of my kids. I mean, without saying how he got out. Because they wanted it. And we knew cancer was-- so that's how he got out. But they know more about that.

His sister later on was deported with two kids and her husband, another sister. He did get his mother out. After one year in Shanghai working, he saved, and he got the mother to Shanghai and came with her to America.

Had you met before?

No. But my brother being a furrier and my father and mother being a furrier, the one who deceased, and he was a tailor in Shanghai for a Russian or French company, they did suits to order. See, you didn't buy clothes ready made. You got it to order.

And he needed a fur trimming. So he came to my brother. And my brother sold him a fur trim for a suit or coat. And that's how they knew.

And when he arrived here, my brother interviewed him to me. That's how we met. Both had different friends, both had different intention, but that's how it came.

That's interesting. So how did you finally decide-- I mean, your parents-- to go to Shanghai? They got the ticket in Berlin?

They got the ticket in Berlin. And they had two tickets for the grandparents, for my mother's parents. And we had two lifts, I don't know, to take to China. One arrived in Shanghai and one never got there.

So '39.

Yeah. We got into Shanghai on the 16th of August, 1939. And the 3rd of September, the war started. So we just got out in time.

I should say. Now you went by way of Italy?

Just one night. We took the train to Naples, we got into Naples, and the next day we boarded the Gordon, Japanese ship. And I know we were very thirsty that day to get something to drink. And they had these stands in Naples, you know, lemonade.

And my father said, we have no money. The few dollars we have, we needed. We have to do without it. And we couldn't drink that water. So I remember that.

Might have saved you a few problems.

Yeah.

So what was it like on the Japanese ship?

Was all right. Because my father had enough money to have my mother, my grandmother, and me go first class. And he and my grandfather and one brother went the cheapest way.

Really?

Because he felt my grandmother was up in age, and my mother wasn't so well, so he did that.

That was very thoughtful. And the train ride down to the port?

Naples. It was a long train ride, I remember. But not sleep--

Did they give you any problems?

No, no, no, no.

Do you know if your parents tried to smuggle anything out with them?

No, not that I know. We were only allowed a few dollars. I don't remember how much exactly. I think it was three or six mark. I don't know, not very much.

So that took you about how long on the ship?

I think it was four weeks. I think it was four weeks.

And you stopped at other ports?

Yes. We went through the Panama Canal, what I remember.

Do you remember any of the other ports?

No, I don't.

So what happened then, when you got to Shanghai?

In Shanghai there was a Jewish agency who met you at the pier and helped you somewhere to go to sleep, to live. So we got a place on Tong Sen Road. I don't know, 600 something, the number. And we stayed there a couple of months or so.

I don't know. I think we paid for it. Because my cousin from Johannesburg, Africa, wired some money for us to Shanghai to help us.

OK.

So that's how we started out. And work, my mother did alteration and stuff, just to earn some money.

She knew how to do that?

Yeah. So after a while, we got one lift. And then we moved into another place, only two blocks, block and a half away, where we had one big room where my brothers and my folks lived. And one room we used for the fur business.

And then we rented a room across the road or across the street, a small room for my grandparents and me. It had a little kitchen corner. We did have a stove, which very rare people had in Shanghai.

And we did have a toilet. And we did have a tub, but no warm water.

You had to buy the water?

We had to buy the water. Yeah. We had to buy the water.

But still, as you say--

Yeah, we had that. Yeah, we had that. That helped a lot.

And so your father had work and your mother had work.

Yeah, they later on started the factory again, after the fur machine came and all that, they started to do coats, fur coats. I mean, not mink coats like here or something. They were more of cheaper animals, lamb, goats, stuff like that.

And they did pretty good in Shanghai. Except later on, they took a partner in who had the money, but nothing about the business to do with. And that didn't work too well either.

What happened when the Japanese came?

We were interned to a certain area to live. But luckily, where we lived was in the intern. And so we didn't have to move. And when you crossed the bridge, you needed a permission to go out of the area from the Japanese.

And you had to bow, for every Japanese you see, you had to bow. And often, the older people didn't bow deep enough. Then they got hit over the head often, because they didn't bow enough.

But you need always a pass if you work out of the town. Like, my husband worked out of the ghetto. He had a pass. Every month or two, he had to renew it to go out. I worked in the ghetto, so I didn't bother.

You said your younger brother was born in Shanghai.

Yes.

What was the medical situation like? Mom was gone to the hospital?

My mother went to the hospital. And she had my brother on Yom Kippur. And being religious, she kept fasting.

And she didn't know she was pregnant. She thought she was in a change of life because she was 41 at the time. And that's where I found it-- didn't bring it-- where she wrote her last will, thinking she had cancer and she will die, she thought.

So she wrote, in German, actually, a note, not thinking at first that she was pregnant. Then she also didn't think how she can support the child. She wrote that we should adopt it in case she dies and all that.

And here he was a healthy boy?

Yes. He's a big.

Right. And did she have good care when she got to--

We never had any milk in all the years. So he grew up on rice. We boiled rice with lots of water, and he drank the rice water.

That's how he grew up. We never had meat. And we survived.

My father was diabetic since Hitler took the business away. And he used to take insulin, shot insulin. We took a lot of insulin to Shanghai. We give away some. We sold some later on.

He never had to take a shot in insulin. Because of the hot climate and the poor eating, no fat, no butter, no milk, no meat, we were all skinny. And therefore, his diabetic never showed up. Till he came here, and we were one week here, and he ate a little whipped cream, a little butter stuff we hadn't seen, started up sky high again.

Mhm.

So it had to do with the weight?

Yeah, with the weight, with the whole thing. And so my brother, he's about 6 foot tall in all and survived all this, without meat, without baby food, or any other stuff.

Did he nurse, though?

My mother nursed, yes, Yeah, she nursed.

That and the rice water.

And the rice water was--

Which I guess is what the local people lived on as well.

Yeah, and we ate a lot of rice. And when we got here, the brother who deceased said, I'm never going to touch rice anymore. And went for 10, 15 years, and then he started to eat it again. But it's funny how he was sure he's not going to touch it.

Did you ever go hungry?

Sometimes, yes, yes. I remember my father had some gold teeth. And he had it taken out to sell the gold so we had food. And I know that my mother and father often didn't eat dinner. They said we eat later, because there wasn't enough food. I knew that. But as a child, you take what you're told and finish.

And your grandfather?

My grandfather died in Shanghai.

He did?

Yeah. Poor nutrition, I mean.

You think malnutrition was--

Malnutrition was-- I know that the older people went sometimes to a gathering in the afternoon where they had some

cookies and stuff. And we found out it was the church doing. So we told him can't go anymore and he was mad. Because he looked forward for the cookie and the social life.

But your father had the forethought to send the machinery for the business.

Yes.

You said they had a fur machine.

They had a fur machine. They had the tools they got through. They got-- one kitchen cabinet came, and one table and two chairs, which he bought when his first money was, when he wasn't married, single. That came through.

Then one, you would call it a china cabinet, which would be now antique, came through. And also one couch, which was a hide away, came through. And one closet, where you hang clothes and had drawers on one side for shelf. That we got all to Shanghai. But we sold it all in Shanghai, leaving for America, to pay the fare to come to America.

I see.

We sold it to pay the fare.

You used it while you were there.

We used it there. And my brother and I, we slept on cots, which every night was open up, all the years.

Now could your father get the materials that he needed to make fur coats?

Yes, he got that in Shanghai. I don't know how. But he got it. But like I said, there were inexpensive animals. And a lot of people had it all the time, inexpensive fur coats. Because it was warm.

We got army blankets during the war. And people who couldn't afford food could go on ration food and stand in line every day at noon and pick up food for each person, one ladle, or something. We never got that.

And so when we got the blankets, for a while, we made coats out of them for the winter. They were all, like, the moss green color. And we made coats and jackets out of them. Most everybody had that during the war.

Good way to keep warm.

Yeah, yeah.

Do you remember particular things that you had to leave behind, that as a young girl missed, or thought of, or had special meaning for you?

No, I don't remember that. I'm sorry.

And when you got to Shanghai, what did you do?

Went to school after a while. The school was called Choudhury School. I didn't go too long, but I did go to school.

What was the language?

English, English.

And where did you learn English? Out there?

In Shanghai, in Shanghai, we learned English, yeah, at Choudhury School. They were British teachers from London, or from England, rather, British teacher. And we learned. And I went for a while.

And then we needed the money. We went to work, my brother and I, at night. And we went and packed oh syringes, I would call, for companies. We packed that for a while at night, to earn extra money.

So after school?

After school. And then later on, I went to beauty school and learned hairdressing. And she was not Jewish, but the husband was Jewish. And the name was Lewald.

And she had a beauty shop in the ghetto. And the apprenticeship was three years, where you don't get paid, or hardly anything, where you work. The first year, you just learn to clean up the place and wash the towels by hand, and hang them, and this and that.

Second year, you hold the pins to the operator, bring her the comb, the bobby pins, and hold them. And the third year is when you really do your own thing and sample. And I got the diploma and all that, that I graduated, and that was it. I did take the California license out here, when I came here. Yes.

Did you work in that already in Shanghai?

Yeah, yeah.

In that same shop?

No, after I graduated, a few months later, I decided to go on my own. What we did is we went to people's house and combed their hair every morning and washed it once a month, or twice a month, how the contract was. And you get paid. And you go in every morning and you do their hair.

And at the time, they had a lot of hair going up on top. And you lose a lot of bobby pins. And so we went from one house to the other, and that paid better than being in the store. So I did that.

What was your social life like as you were growing up?

Oh, there were a lot of coffee shops in Shanghai and stuff, if you could afford it. I mean, I didn't. My folks didn't have much to-- so that I could afford it.

But we had a little social gathering in the street. We sat every night outside the building, because it was very hot, and with other our age people and sit and talk. That's what the library-- and if you could afford once in a while to go to a coffee shop and have a piece of cake, fine, but not regularly.

Were there any dances or any groups?

No, no, no dances, no, no groups, no dances.

The social life took place mostly in the street.

In the street. There was a few movies, but not very often. But mostly, everything was in the street. And everybody knew everybody.

And even here, my social life is always people I grew up with, more or less, who were in Shanghai with me, most of us.

Because you share similar experiences?

Yeah.

Do you think the refugees supported each other psychologically?

Yes, I think so, a lot, helped each other.

And what happened to your religion? I mean, what happened to the synagogue, going to the synagogue?

Yes, in Shanghai was one Russian temple, which is still existing. And a lot of Polish people who came through Poland or Russia went to that temple. We mainly went there before Pesach to have our pots koshered there for the holiday. We didn't go the regular time there.

And that's about all I know. The other way we prayed is, like, a hall in a school or something in Shanghai, where we prayed and got together.

Did anybody, in your family, or your friends, have to do something illegally?

Not that I know of.

That you know of.

Not that I know.

And what was the relationship with the existing Jewish populations and people in the ghetto, people like you refugees? Were they helpful?

Yes, they were helpful. But in the ghetto, we all knew each other. And you help each other.

But I remember I had a date with someone. And I couldn't afford a pair of hose. I borrowed a pair of hose from a friend. We did that between friends.

And the people who came earlier, I mean much earlier, through Polish people or Russian, they didn't have to be in the ghetto. They could live in the upper class in Shanghai and a better life.

But that's how it was. We just didn't know any better. We took it for--

They were helpful, what's needed?

I don't know. They had their own crowd. And we had ours.

What kind of news came through to you in Shanghai?

What was going on in Germany or the war?

Very little. We did have the radio. And I remember the radio was a Telefunken we had from Germany. We brought that in.

And we could hear a little, but not much. We didn't know when, until the war was over, what went on in Germany. We didn't get any of it.

Didn't know anything about the concentration camps.

Nothing, nothing, nothing, till after the war. But I know we had the bombs coming, the American, quite often over our area. And let's see. You went to work or something, then you laid on the floor till they passed.

And we often have to walk over bodies, or Chinese. If they had girls, they don't want girls, the Chinese people. They want boys. Sometimes they killed their kids, or they suffocated. And they laid on the street. And you had to walk over them to pass.

Mm-hmm.

But that's the way it was. You had no choice.

That's their culture.

Yeah.

Did you have any relationships with some of the Chinese people you were living with then?

No, no, no.

Did you learn any Chinese?

I didn't. My brother who deceased, he worked with the Chinese in the fur business. And he spoke quite well. And my husband spoke quite well, because he worked also with-- but not fluently, but enough to get along. But they both are gone. And that's the way it is.

So what year were you able to leave Shanghai?

I left Shanghai-- I arrived here on the 16th of May, 1939, on a army transport. The army transport was a Gordon. And I think before I said the Shanghai was Suzhou Maru, the ship.

Oh, it was a Japanese?

The Japanese was Suzhou Maru, and the troop transport from Shanghai here was a Gordon.

Gordon, right. And that was '49?

'39.

I mean from Shanghai to here?

1939. No, 1947. I'm sorry. 1947, I'm sorry. 1947, I came. And I came the 16th of May through Hawaii. One day they stopped in Hawaii and then went on.

Was that pleasant?

Yes, very pleasant. They had buses who picked us up, the Jewish center, and took us sightseeing and give us a lunch.

In Honolulu?

In Honolulu.

That's a nice town to pick you up in.

Yeah. But my grandmother couldn't come off. I don't know why. They had certain ruling that some people can't get down. Now why, I don't know what the why or what, if it was the age or something. I don't know.



But you had a good time?

Yeah, we had a good time. Just the idea to get up and see everything, how the--

You were how old then?

Let's see. 21, I think. 21. I'm born '26, and this was '47, 21.

So the trip over was good, then?

It was very good, very good. We also came, again, first class, the women, my grandmother, my mother, and me. And meanwhile, I had two brothers, and my father, and grandfather.

My grandfather died in Shanghai. So with the three men and three women.

All right. Did you have to go through the clinic here when you arrived at the time?

Yes.

And so then where did you go?

Where did I go? Where did you live here?

We lived in San Francisco on Grove Street.

Ah, yes.

We got an apartment, partly furnished. And we lived there.

Well, did the Jewish community help with that?

No, not really that I know of. Like, I said, my cousin left money here, again. And so we didn't burden. It was a small apartment. Then another one was empty on the same floor, so we took the second one on the same floor, which always was, like, two or three rooms. you know, to make do.

And I lived on Grove Street when I got married. I still was on Grove.

So you met your husband?

Through my brother.

Here?

Here.

Yeah, that's what I thought.

So you arrived in San Francisco and stayed here?

Yes, yes, yes, stayed here. I was supposed to go to Vineland, New Jersey.

Oh, really?

That's where the papers came but never had enough money, and my folks liked the climate. And so they did work for

different furriers, like Benioff and this and that at first. And then they opened here their own. But my older brother went into-- yeah, my oldest brother, the one deceased, was also in the fur business. Yeah.

And where was the place that they opened?

They didn't open a store. They just made it from the house always. They then moved to Haight Street, Haight and Ashbury area. And they had a room where they had mannequins. And they made it to order for people, coats, or got it for them sometimes, altered it, repaired it, and stuff like that.

What was the business called?

Loewenstein Furs. I think I brought a business card from Shanghai here.

And your husband's business, was this furs?

My husband? No, my husband wasn't in furs. He worked for Lilly Anne as a cutter and pattern maker when he got here. And he also worked for another. I can't remember, another factory, suit factory.

And then he was tired. He had so much acne from the dust. And he went into the liquor business. A friend talked him in and was a salesman in the liquor business, wholesale, for McKesson, for-- for different company.

OK. And did you have to work?

Yes, I worked as a hairdresser.

As a hairdresser, then.

I worked at the Emporium that time. And before I worked at the Emporium, I didn't have a license here. I worked for Fort Ord, for the army. Because you could work with your overseas license and doesn't need a California license.

And Fort Ord is?

It's in San Francisco.

Oh.

Yeah. It's where the people were shipped to overseas, the soldiers. And then the wives followed. And they had a beauty shop. And I worked there. I was hired by the one who owned the beauty shop or paid license for it.

So I worked there while I went to school. Then I went to the Emporium to work. And then I worked for different small beauty shops for a while. And then after that, I worked in the United Movie House in the office, because I couldn't stand on my feet so much anymore, as bookkeeping for a while. And then I gave up.

And then later on, I worked-- after the children were born, I worked at Silver Avenue at the old age home, for many years, as a hairdresser. I still have pictures of that, too, at home.

Just by your expression, you felt very good about that.

Yes, I still put a lot of time at Silver Avenue as a volunteer. Yeah.

And your children, you have a daughter?

I have a son and a daughter. My son is 49-- half, really. He's a doctor, a pediatrician.

His name?

Stanley Schaffer. He's a pediatrician. And he lives in Rochester, New York. He studied medicine in Israel.

He had two bachelor and a master's here and he went to Israel. He couldn't get in here, let's put it this way, and spent nine years in Israel altogether, one year, junior year before. And then did it in Israel, got his license, and all in Israel.

And then he came back and had to do this three-years residence again and was exchanged to Albert Einstein in Philadelphia through Israel for three years in there. And then became Chief of Residency, stayed an extra year.

Then he decided he wants to teach medical school in pediatric. He was transferred to Rochester, New York. And on a Friday night dinner, he met his wife. And she was a nurse at Albert Einstein before. And she had left by the time he got there and worked.

And she works Blue Shield-Blue Cross in the East Coast, in the office. And they have three children. And they live in Rochester.

And he works at a hospital for many, many years. And I don't know the name right now. I'm sorry.

That's all right.

I can't think of it at the moment. And my daughter also went to junior year to Israel before. Came back. They were both at the same time there, one in Tel Aviv, one in Jerusalem.

And came back and studied-- what do they call-- in Berkeley. Both went to Berkeley in journalism, kind of, and was hired by Channel 2 first, and then Channel 4 here for many years. And then she got a transfer, after she had just bought a condo, she got a transfer to LA to Dan Rather's office in LA.

And she had met her husband in Israel through cousins, her girlfriend, who is related, a Canadian girlfriend. And that's that. And she lives in Los Angeles.

And her name?

Judy Shore. And my son, by the way, is a Strong Memorial Hospital in Rochester. Sorry.

Actually, if we could go back a bit?

Yes.

Tell us when you got married and your husband's name.

My husband is Werner Joseph Schaffer. And he was born in Berlin, too, in a different town of Berlin. We married in 1950 on McAllister Street at the temple in San Francisco.

And we were married 43 years. He died in 1993 on cancer. And that's it. And his mother had died earlier here. And that's the way it went.

Yeah, my daughter, I said before she worked for television. Yeah. And her husband is now a writer for television.

Oh, really?

He was a lawyer and now is a writer. And he writes different shows for television.

OK. Do you feel that there may be anything that happened during your stay in China, or just your experiences, let's say

Germany and China, anything that lingers today that influences your life today?

Yes. Like, I read yesterday a letter. Here we can buy anything for money. Let's put it this way.

There, we couldn't buy anything. In Germany, we couldn't buy anything even if we had money as Jews. And I remember all this from Kristallnacht, the broken stores, and all that, depressed.

And in Shanghai, we didn't know any better. Like, if I needed a blouse or a dress, we had to have it custom made. And we couldn't afford it mostly. Or we saved. Like, I saved for a purse for years to get a certain purse. And then, when it came, I was already tired of it, you know.

But I'm yet saying everything. I remember my brother, the younger one. He came here with short pants and a pair of shoes we had made for leaving Shanghai.

He went to school. My mother and father didn't speak English. And the principal called. And I had to go in to see. He said he should wear jeans.

Now I didn't know what jeans were. And we didn't have the money to buy things here. So there was a lady, an older lady, I think her name was Barnett. She bought us some jeans for him-- she brought us some jeans from somebody.

They were way too big. My mother altered them, to the best of knowledge. And we put them on my brother. He hated it, because he never wore long pants or anything

But that's how it was all different. And often I tell especially my daughter, if I had to live it over, I would live it different than I do now, completely different. Not as far as investment or something. More enjoy life, more do things, go places, do things.

Instead of worrying what will be, or saving. Like, we got married. We had to pay my mother-in-law's support. She was up in age. She did a little alteration.

But we gave her, every first of the month, \$300 to live, which was about \$100 some, the rent.

That was a lot of money then.

That was a lot of money. And that's why I always went back to work after the kids were born. And either took them along, like to Silver Avenue, and let them play in the corner, or I had a babysitter for a few hours.

And I would live different. I would think different. I wouldn't always worry if I can afford it. I would enjoy life more.

Now that I'm alone I, could go places, but I don't go. You know what I mean? You think about it, what you did wrong or so.

Do you belong to any organizations, any survivor organizations?

Yes, I belong to AMIT, which is for Israel, a Jewish organization. I'm quite active in that. I belong to Ner Tamid Temple and all the facilities, whatever goes on there, and help. That's about it.

I used to belong, in Shanghai, to BETAR, that was a Jewish organization. We belonged a lot of that.

So I hope you received some reparations, did you?

Only for school, not for Shanghai yet. All my friends got it for Shanghai. And I applied, and I had my brother apply.

And they lost our paper. So we sent it again. They lost it again. And I call every month.

And last month, the lady said, I'm sorry, it's in somewhere where they read it up. So on Friday, I called. And they said we lost your papers again. And the deadline was already.

How could that be?

So I went through Scott Street, which handles it. So I called them. And anyhow, yesterday morning we got together, and I had copies of it, and they faxed it again. And they said we straightened it out.

So I don't know. We're still hoping. But my husband, my brother, we cannot apply.

Only after 1999, they said. You cannot apply who passed away before '99. That's their rules. So that's about all I know.

How was it for you to adapt to coming to live in America?

It was fabulous. Like, my father always said, and he died very early, he said the houses are different colors. To see the houses in Germany, all the houses are off-white. In Shanghai, the houses are all the same color too, or shacks.

So the colors alone, that was something you wouldn't believe. You wouldn't see or believe in it. Because my father died very, very young.

I think bright colors are mainly in California.

It is. Also the flowers are unique. Like, I came up here to the Temple. The flowers this week were just fabulous. I stopped and walked around a minute. You don't see that every day.

So that was something you remember--

Yeah, unique, and also that you can go to a store and buy a blouse or something ready made, that kind of cotton.

And you actually spoke English?

I learned it in Shanghai.

Right. And you spoke English when you came here. That wasn't--

Yes, yes, but still not that fluent. Like, still, where was I last week, and somebody said, oh, that's quaint. I had to think what does quaint mean?

I asked someone afterwards I think it was a secretary at the temple, when I paid my bills. She said, that's quaint of you, or something. And it caught me, you know, a word you don't hear every day.

Do you fear that another Holocaust could happen?

I hope not, let's put it this way. We hope not. We hope not. And I don't think so. I don't think.

At least not from Germany, because in Germany, the Jewish Museum is very big. And the man who runs it was with me in Shanghai.

Blumenthal?

Blumenthal. And he came to that Shanghai reunion. He was with my brother in the class, in fact. And they wrote to each other.

And I knew of someone who went to see the exhibition in Germany. And all the students in Germany have to know about the Holocaust, which here, they don't. Here the kids only know if they hear it from their family or something.

But I think a lot of kids who are born here, where their folks are here more than I am, longer, or before the Holocaust, they might not know. My kids are very interested, especially the son is very interested in all these things.

Did you talk to your family about your experiences?

Yes, yes. And my daughter always wants to tape it. And I never let her. Because she drove to Toronto, her husband is Canadian, and she drove to Toronto with me. And I couldn't help her drive because her car was stick shift at the time.

So she had a tape. She kept saying, Mom, come and talk, talk. But I didn't. I slept instead.

So she'll be happy that we're doing this today?

She is. She is very thrilled about it, both of them. I don't think my son knows about it. I didn't tell him too much. Thought I'd surprise him.

Well, what do you think about the reunification of Germany, East and West?

I didn't take that much interest, no.

Do you know much about it?

No, not really.

Did you ever go back to Germany?

Yes, once, in '91. I was invited from Berlin and my husband, too. I was invited in '90. And my mother was dying on cancer, and I said I couldn't leave her. She stayed with me at the time.

So they give us the year later. They invited us for, I think, a week to Berlin. And my daughter flew with us to see where I was born, to see the house, to see things.

And so we went back. And we went to the cemetery to find the family and all that. My husband had a brother who died in Germany, because no doctor could come to the house anymore. So we went to see that grave and fixed it up and stuff like that.

And we also went to my mother's hometown in '91. Then from there, no, we came back. We didn't go on to Israel. We wanted to, but we didn't.

My son got married. We flew back after a week. 10 days, I think, we stayed, all together, in Germany.

What was that like for you?

Very hard, very hard. Even they give us a lot of sightseeing tours and stuff to make up for us. But it still was very funny-- very hard-- I remember we ate white asparagus, because we didn't get it here at the time. And that was something we all talked about at the time and stuff.

But all in all, it was an experience. But still, went to different temples, different things.

You must have gone in the month of May?

Yes.

White asparagus.

Yeah. Now we get it here.

Not quite as good.

No. The one in the jars is better, the white one.

[LAUGHTER]

Was it emotional at all for you to go there?

It was very emotional for me. They put us up in a hotel close to the zoo in Germany. And I didn't live in that area. So it was more-- and took us to department stores and stuff like that.

But still, somehow, it still-- I don't know why. My family from my side never wanted to go back to Germany. My mother never wanted to and never applied. My brother who deceased said I want nothing to do with a country who threw me out.

And my husband felt the same way. But then we talked him into going. My daughter had to pay her own way, I mean. But to go and see what's going on. And that's it.

What are your feelings about Germany?

I'm not very interested in it anymore, you know. It was nice. It was OK when I grew up. But I lost interest in it.

And I don't think I would go back on my own to see it. I don't think so. Even I write to some people from my mother's hometown, older people, and the daughters write to us. They were here, daughter and son. But the interest isn't there anymore.

Do you feel American?

Yes, much more, much more.

Do you have anything that you would like to add before we finish?

We sold a lot of stuff in China. Sold the jewelry, like I said, my father's teeth, gold teeth, a lot of it. And it gave us an opportunity to live very poor and very-- how you would say in Shanghai-- depressed, not knowing what will be of change as a young girl.

But all in all, we survived it. And like I said-- and now, I'm very happy to be here and to live in a country free as I please, you know, and to enjoy life the best of knowledge.

How do you feel about the sacrifices that you made in Shanghai?

I feel good. I feel very good about it because I feel better than staying there. I mean, what would have been? I would have been deported like my mother's sister or other relatives. So I really feel good about it.

But at the time, of course, you didn't know exactly what the alternative was there?

No, no. No, I wouldn't have known.

But was that difficult as a young person, that you had to forego a lot of things?

No, it wasn't. It was extremely hot in Shanghai. We had no fans, no air conditioning, no nothing. But we all made it. So many people didn't have bathrooms or stoves in the kitchen and survived too. And like I said, we hardly ever ate meat or anything-- or chicken, just vegetables and rice. And we made do.

You made it and you feel that you're stronger for it.

Yeah. Yeah, yeah. And like I said, we didn't miss it because we didn't have it. When we came here, we were so thrilled with everything that we ate everything we could find a hold of, like whipped cream, butter, meat.

All this was-- when we first came here, we stayed in a hotel. The hotel was called Ridgely, downtown, where the family service put us up. And I know my mother bought a hot plate-- I think I still have it-- with two burners. And we cooked a little in the hotel because we couldn't afford eating out, just enough to make ends meet. That's how it went.

You handled whatever you were dealt.

Yeah. You handled. You get used to everything. You get used to everything.

And you we're a very industrious family.

Yeah, yes. Yes.

Really managed to.

Yeah, we made the best of things.

Right.

We had no choice. And we didn't know any better, let's put it this way. We didn't know any better to do things.

What would you like to pass on to the next generation as lessons that you've learned from your experience?

I would like to pass on that you shouldn't always fear what will you be, like always worried, can you afford sending the kids to college, doing this, doing that? You should, at the same time, enjoy life more-- within reason, I mean not gallivant or travel that much, but just enjoy more of life than now, because since my husband died, I only go to the kids. I don't travel much.

And it's not the same. I mean, I could afford it, don't misunderstand me. But I don't go or do it. The kids want me to do it, but I don't do it. And I think people should really enjoy more, make the best of things within what they can afford, naturally within reason.

Would you care to go with a group?

I have gone once with a group, with my cousin, to Hawaii. And I hated every minute of it-- but the group, she booked it. And they were older people. And I didn't like it-- not a Jewish group, was a regular. And I didn't like it. No. I have traveled with her a little bit. But she's much, much older than I am.

But I'm just saying, I think when you're younger, you should really not only worry always, should really-- a little bit live it up. All we did is meet friends, play cards, sit together. I mean, go sometimes places. I'm not denying that I go there, and there, and there. But make more out of it than always worry about it.

If you have the choice.

If you have the choice, and if you can afford it, and all that. Yeah. If you can afford it.



You've been on the other side.

Yeah, I've been to Israel since my husband died, I think twice with my daughter, and her husband, and family. My son-in-law has two brothers who are in Jerusalem. And so they go very often. So I have joined them a couple of times.

Feel all right?

Yeah, that feels fine. That's feel fine.

I will finish the interview portion now. And then we will put on some photos.

Yeah, whatever you want.

But we want to thank you.

Well, you're very welcome.

OK. On the left, the picture is my father. In the middle is my uncle. His name was Siegfried. And on the right is my uncle, John. They all passed on already. And on the right side is my mother, Fanny.

Wait just a minute. About that photo, do when it might have been taken?

In Hamburg before-- in the 1920s, '18-'20s because my father married in '25. And he was older on the picture. So that's why I think about 1918. And on the right is my mother and her sister, Kate. She was three years younger than my mother.

And she went to concentration camp. And that was taken in South Germany, by Frankfurt am Main somewhere. And I'm just thinking it must be around 1918, 1917, '18, something like that. I don't know.

And the little girl Kate, you said she was--

Married, and had a child, and was left on her own to Poland, since her husband was deported to Poland, and then went to camp and died in 19-- I have it at home-- 1943, I think was gassed in Germany-- in Poland, rather.

In Poland.

Yeah. I have the name of the camp at home. I'm sorry.

And her full name?

Wiur, the husband's last name-- W-I-U-R. And his first name was Herman. He survived. Yeah. He survived, and came to New York, remarried, and had two boys again. And one carries the name of my nephew. That's all.

I saw him once. And he passed on over the years. I don't know about the son. I think one lives in Florida or something, but I don't know. We never kept in touch.

My mother and father's announcement of their engagement. I don't know the date of when. And they got married November 11, 1925 in, I think, Frankfurt, Germany.

And could you repeat their full name?

Yes. My mother's name was Fanny Franze Strauss, her maiden name. And my father was Leopold Lobenstein, with the umlaut-- L-O-B-E-N-S-T-E-I-N.

OK. These are my mother's parents in their town of Kleineibstadt, which is Unterfranken in Germany. My grandmother was Lena Stern, maiden name. And her husband, or rather, my grandfather, is William Strauss-- S-T-R-A-U-S-S. And they had a little store in front with threads, and needles, and candy, and spices in the house. And he went from town to town, and sold material to sew, and came back at night on the train.

In Berlin, where I lived, or where I grew up, and where I was born in the house. And my brother was born in the house. It's in Berlin. The town is Friedenau. And the street is Wilhelmshoher Strasse 6, number 6. It's an apartment house.

This is me and my brother in Berlin. Like I said, I'm born on September 5, 1926. And my brother was in Germany, the name Adolf. He changed it in America to Al. We called him Bubi. He was always called Bubi. He was born April 8, 1928.

This is my mom, my dad, my brother, and me in Berlin before we left for Shanghai. It must have been 1939-- beginning of 1939, approximately.

This is from Berlin before I left for Shanghai, I mean, a few months before. And that's how I had my hair, in tails. What do you call it? Braided? What?

Pigtails?

Yeah, I couldn't think of the name-- braided.

And you were how old here?

13. Yeah. That's '39. I'm born '26-- 13.

It's such a childhood picture.

Yeah, it is.

Do you feel like you lost a part of your childhood by having to journey as you did?

I think I matured faster. My children or my previous boyfriend, I mean, before I married always said, I don't know how to smile. I'm always--

Serious.

--serious-looking. And I don't get very excited about things. That's what they always blame me. My daughter always says, I never see you smile. And so that's why I say that's what they say. I think I matured earlier than if I had a normal grown-up style.

And my son's kids are more quiet than my daughter's kids. I don't know why. But I have found out that they are also more mature, maybe because my daughter-in-law works, maybe partly of that. I don't know. But I think they're much more mature than the others.

It reminds you more of yourself?

Yeah. Yeah, they do. My daughter always says, my nieces and my nephews, they're also grown up, so quiet, so quiet. I never see any joy in them-- especially my son-in-law says that-- any joy in them. But I don't know why. They have no reason to be, you know, not like I had a reason. They have no reason. But that's the way it is.

This is the ship I left Naples to Shanghai. And I think we were four weeks on the boat from Naples to Shanghai-- Susu Maru.

Susu Maru?

Doesn't it say on there? I think.

Suwa.

Maru, yeah. I think it was also a troop transporter, like the one we came. I'm not sure.

That's when we got married, on the 29th of October, 1950 in Webster Temple off McAllister and Webster Street in San Francisco. You want to hear a funny part about this? We wanted to get married earlier. We couldn't because we couldn't afford it. We had to pay my mother-in-law to support us so much.

And he worked for Lilli Ann as a cutter and pattern maker. And he didn't want to lose any money. So he said, the only time we can get married, when we get laid off. So we picked that date. Within two weeks, we got the cards printed. We got married. And then he had to come back after two days. We never got time for a honeymoon. So we rented a car. He just learned to drive. And we went to Sonoma Mission Inn.

Oh.

That's where we went. And going home the next day, he got stuck. He didn't know how to hand the reverse. And we didn't have the right insurance. We got stuck. We got panicked coming home because we didn't know the gears.

We didn't know much about it. I didn't know anything. And he did. But it was funny how we went-- planned it, and planned it, and then still didn't get time off. But it was funny. I should have brought my mother-in-law's picture. I had some of her. But we can always--

And your husband's name again?

Werner Schaffer.

OK. This is a family picture of our family. I don't know how old the kids are-- about 10, 10 and 1/2, Stan, and Judy, maybe 3 and 1/2, 4. And that's the way it was. I don't know if it was in our house or at a studio. But I'm not sure what year.

Taken in San Francisco?

Yeah. Yeah, in San Francisco.

This is my son's wedding. And it's Judy, his sister, in Rochester, New York, at the temple, on the bimah, in May 1991.

This is the family picture for Daddy's birthday. And I think it was 1985, approximately. I'm not sure. In fact, that was taken on a cruise, I think. The kids paid us a cruise to the Caribbean for a week. And I think that's when it was taken.

And he was already at Albert Einstein in Philadelphia, my son. And he ran to get some money for the trip, and slipped, and broke his right arm. That's why he's standing so they don't see the cast on that picture. That's why I remember.

That's Stanley and Elaine's children. And the oldest is Aviva. And she's 11 years old now. And I hear she's the size that I am-- 5' 2". That's what I hear over the phone. She's very good in swimming. She loves to be a swimming instructor. And she is also very good in ice skating. And she plays the saxophone.

OK. The second one is Aaron. Aaron is nine years old. And he plays soccer and different games. And they go to Hebrew day school, all three of them. And the youngest is 5 and 1/2. And his name is Jacob. And that's about it.

Wonderful.

And now we're seeing?

Judy's and David's children. And Jesse will be next week seven. That's why I'm flying over. And Sydney will be five in September. And the baby, Rory, was one year on the 26th of June recently.

And on that happy note of the next generation--

Yeah.

--generation to come--

Thank you. Thank you, thank you.

--we want to thank you on behalf of the Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project. We want to thank you very much for sharing your experiences.

Thank you. Thank you for having me.