

[TEST TONE] OK, so tell me about life in Japan again. How was your life in Japan?

When we came to Japan--

Oh, I'm sorry.

Camera just went into my little booth here.

Oh, yeah, sorry.

Sorry.

Here we go.

Just like, yeah, I'll have to take an inch there more.

Is that it?

That's fine.

So tell me what was life like as a refugee in Japan? Where you were a tourist? How did you occupy your days?

When I came to Japan, Japan looked like paradise itself. It was green, there wasn't a inch of land that wasn't utilized. And the people were the most polite, wonderful people for us as refugees, or as they called us, tourists. The reason that they were so nice to us, we found out being there, was that when the Japanese occupied Manchuria in 1937. The United Nations at that time was the--

OK, we're not going to--

No?

You don't want to--

We can't use that story.

No, OK.

Because I want to tell you why they were so nice to the Polish refugees.

Yeah, no.

No, OK.

Just tell me-- can you hear in the background, Mark?

No, why?

OK. Just tell me your impressions of Japan, what your daily life was like, what-- you know, did you play cards? Did you go visit Temples

OK. When I came to Japan, the first day we looked around, of course, and we went right away to register in the Jewish Committee, which was in the center of the city. From there, we went to explore the city and see some markets full of fruits, and vegetables, and very little meat. But some fish.

And we looked at the Japanese, and they were all the cleanest people we ever saw. And everybody was so polite to us that it's unbelievable. If we went someplace and lost our way, anybody that could help us, helped us.

If they couldn't speak any English-- which we didn't ourself, we knew a little. But somehow, they knew a few words. So they took us to a police station, where they always got somebody that could understand us. Either Russians spoke with the Russian, or the German, or any other language.

And some of them, the richer people, used to put us in a taxi and take us home. I mean, it's unbelievable how nice they were to us.

And our day started, of course, after breakfast. We went to explore places. There was beautiful places in the mountains. There was ballet. There was a seashore, which was white and beautiful. We used to go bathing for a few hours a day.

And then we used to, in the evening, we used to come to the Jewish Committee, where all the refugees used to come together. And we used to see the bulletin boards and hear all the news, where can you go, what country would let you in, and this and that.

And while we lived in the hotels, or the homes what they called, we had a wonderful people there. And we had a good time among ourselves. This one went to the theater or to a dance, and this one went here and there. And we spent our days really in a wonderful way.

Because of course, we came from a little town and a lot of things was new to us. And the country was so beautiful. And the people were so polite. But main occupation was to look for places how do we get a visa someplace to leave Japan and not to go to Shanghai. So our time in Japan was really most of the time beautiful. We really enjoyed being in Japan.

How did you end up going to Shanghai? What-- Wait a second, sorry.

Yeah.

But you know, did they force you to go to Shanghai?

Yes.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

That's what I want to know.

And go ahead.

After our two weeks of transit went by, they prolonged it for two months, of course with the help of the Jewish Committee. And after the two months, again for two months and two months. From March till December. When it came end of November, we got the notice that you have to leave Japan. Wherever you want to go, you can go.

But of course, there was no country that we could go to. So the only place left was Shanghai. And in Shanghai, we had very sad stories about Shanghai. And they were reluctant to go there. But when there was no way, you had to go to Shanghai, you went. So this way, we went to Shanghai.

And when I came to Shanghai, I saw that all the stories that they told us, although in some way it's true, but in other ways, people lived there like kings, some of them. There was a nice Jewish community. There where Russian troops that ran away from the World War I, from the revolution in Russia. And they were established with clubs, with the old the luxurious you could think of.

Shanghai was a city at that time of about 5 million people. And Shanghai was called the Pearl or the Paris of the Orient.

All the luxuries in the world you could find in Shanghai. Best restaurants, there was clubs, all kinds, and night clubs, and organizations. So you could live a beautiful life there, and we did.

The only thing, we had to look for ways to make a living there. And we found how to make a living. After eight days being in Shanghai, Pearl Harbor, the war broke out, American-Japanese War. After three days, the Japanese kept us-- for three days, they kept us in the houses. You couldn't go out. After three days, we were free to go any place we wanted.

So right away, I pooled my resources with another two friends of mine and we went out where to buy-- money in time of war is, you can not do much with it except when you have merchandise so you can buy for it something. So we went out and bought six sacks of rice, 200 pounds each. 1,200 pounds.

And we figured, people have to eat and the imports won't be anymore. So Japan had so much foreign merchandise in its warehouses that we are bursting of it because Shanghai was its distribution place for all China.

So I went to-- in Shanghai was with us also a yeshiva, the Mirrer Yeshiva, which they brought them over from Poland, through Japan, to Shanghai. And we went to the head rabbi and we told him that we have six sacks of rice. You have to feed 300 people. They had 300 students.

So we says, we will sell you. We want a small profit. I paid so much. And so he got a nice, small profit, which really wasn't much, a small percentage. But for us, it was enough to live a month on it. And from this, we started to buy all kinds of foreign goods and resell it to the population, to the Jewish population there.

And also, we started to get connections with Chinese merchants, which they were the most skillful, most excellent merchants in the world. We thought that the Jews are good merchants, but they could sell us and buy us twice a day.

And we started to ask them, what kind of goods are you looking for? Or what kind of goods you want to get rid of? And we're starting to go and try to sell it. And we succeeded and we made a nice living there. And we didn't make money. But if you made a transaction once a week, you had enough for the week to live. But so we did it, and this way you existed. And life was beautiful in Shanghai for us.

But the only thing that the Japanese, after about six months or eight months, they want put us in a ghetto. The ghetto was actually like a part of New York, like Hong-- like the Bronx or Brooklyn. You could live only in the Bronx. Where they put us in is Hongkew, Hongkew was a suburb of Shanghai.

But in that suburb were two million people or one and a half million. Chinese mostly, some Russians, and some Jews. And we had to find quarters there. And we lived there. We could live anyplace we wanted in Hongkew, but not in the main part of Shanghai. The main part was the French concession, the English, the Japanese-- Japanese was in Hongkew, actually. French and English mostly.

But you have to live only in this part of-- and they put up barriers in each street that you came out from Hongkew. Like to go to the main part of Shanghai. And then they put there some policemen, civil policemen. They selected from the Jewish people. The Jewish Committee had to appoint policemen, who they paid a small fee.

And in order to get out to go out of Hongkew, you had to get a passport. A pass which is good for, let's say, from 8 o'clock in the morning till 7:00 in the evening. In order to get this pass, you had to go to the Japanese police.

And there was the head of the police, of the Jewish section in the police, was a fellow by the name of Goya. Goya wasn't a giant, he was, as a matter of fact, under five feet. And he was a scroungey little guy. He didn't look more like a 12-year-old boy.

But he was a tyrant. When you came to him for a visa to get-- for a passport to get out of Hongkew, you had to show that you have employment outside of the ghetto. And this was for us a small problem. We had friends and came to them, give me a letter that you are employing me. And then they gave us willingly. We came with this.

And with this, we got a permit for five day, six days a week you could get out, except Sundays. And from, let's say, from 8:00 to 7:00 in the evening.

But he was a tyrant and a stupid guy also. And some people who didn't know how smoothly to answer his questions, he used to hit them. That he couldn't reach them where do we hit a person in the face. So he used to stand up on a chair and hit people.

And who got most of the beatings were the German refugees. Because in Shanghai was 20,000 German Jewish refugees and 1,000 Polish refugees. But the Germans were guys that were professionals, like lawyers, doctors, professors, chemists. All these guys didn't know how to go around them.

So when they asked him a question, they told the truth. And the truth wasn't good. So he used to climb up on a chair. It could be a professor, a doctor, and he used to hit them in the face.

And when you had to go to get the permit, every month you had to renew it. And they were dreaded it. We weren't afraid. We were very smooth in telling them what they wanted to hear. So we made a very nice living. But some refugees lived in homes. We lived in private rooms or private houses. But there were a big a part of the refugees lived in homes.

There was five homes, I believe. They gave them shelter, they gave them there. And they gave them some provisions for the day. And once a day, a hot meal. That everybody could come, and even if you lived in a private room or you had money, you could come to get a hot meal during the day. But we didn't need it.

But these people existed only on these provisions. And a lot of them we were really desperate. And a lot of them committed suicide among the German Jews.

But otherwise, we-- myself and my friends-- we lived a pretty normal life. Of course, we were unattached bachelors. If they said we couldn't go out of the ghetto, we played cards. At night, we played cards. We had there coffee houses.

We used to play, in the coffeehouses, we used to play cards. Then one day, they surrounded the cafes.

Great. I don't need that story. That was good. How did you finally leave Shanghai?

How did I leave Shanghai? We started to look for a way to leave, of course. When it opened up, I had a brother and sister in Israel. We got in touch with them. They sent me papers to go to Israel.

But somehow, the papers or the certificate that I was supposed to get got lost. It didn't get lost, somebody else got it. The people that were taking care on it-- somehow, when they got the certificate, they divided among people, probably, that they knew, or cared, or from their organizations. So I couldn't get the visa. My brother and sister were despondent there. But the communications was very bad at that time. It was 1945, '46.

So next, I started to look for a way to get to the United States. I had two uncles here and some cousins. So in order to get here, I had to get a letter from an organization that I am employed or they are going to employ, like a school.

I knew Hebrew very well so they sent me a letter as a teacher. I'll be employed in a certain school as a teacher. With this, I went to the American consulate and I got a visa. And that was in 1947. In September '47, I left Shanghai and came to the United States.

When did you find out about the Holocaust? And who did you lose in the Holocaust?

Wait for John. OK.

In 1945, by the end of '45, rumors started to come in that there was a Holocaust. But we couldn't grasp the enormity of

the thing. So by bits and pieces, started to get the truth what happened there.

And of course, I left a family of father, mother, a brother, and uncles and aunts. In the family was probably, in the extended family, about 50 people. And with the cousins, lots of cousins, from babies to older. And we found out what happened. And then it started, the newspaper started to publish what happened.

Could you tell me again when you found out about the Holocaust and what happened to your family?

We didn't know what happened to our family. The details, we couldn't get any.

Right. But tell me when you found out what happened to your family. And tell me that they were killed. I'm not telling the story. So you have to tell me the story.

The details, I found out in the United States.

OK. But start with-- when did you find out about the Holocaust, and then go.

We found out about the Holocaust in beginning of 1945.

I'm sorry. Could you just tell me that you were in Shanghai when you found out about the Holocaust. And then tell me how long it took for you to find out what happened to your family. And tell me what happened to your family.

In the middle of 1945, when the German-Russian War was finished, they started to publish in the newspaper about the Holocaust, but no details about how they destroyed the European Jewry. This was hard to come by. You had to talk to eyewitnesses.

But then, I got letters also from Israel that our family is no more. Nobody of our family is alive. Of course, when the war was finished, I tried to send letters to my hometown, but they got lost on the way because communication was horrible at that time. And little by little, drips by drips, we found out more and more what happened.

But I didn't know anything about my family, where they are, if they are alive or not until I came to the United States. When I came to the United States, I had friends of mine that I left that came out alive from the Partisans and from the woods.

And I heard right away that my wife with her family is alive, which was-- we are distant cousins. And I knew all the kids since they were babies. And my wife is 13 years old-- younger than I am. And I knew her as a little child. But she had a family, aunts and cousins.

And when I came in touch with them, then they told me that they are alive. And told me that most of the people are dead. And then I met some people that were already here, some friends of mine who were the Partisans and came out alive.

And they told me the story what happened in our hometown. That they took out all the people in 1942, in the fall of 1942. First, they put them in a ghetto and later, they took them out three kilometers beyond the city. And they shot them all and put them into graves, into mass graves, and covered them.

And none of my family came out alive except one brother of mine, who ran away into the woods. But the Russian Partisans killed him. Him with another 16 boys just finished the middle school. 17, 16, 17. Beautiful people that I knew them as children.

And the Russians came, the Russian Partisans came to the place where they were in the woods, and they told them that they are going to take them in into the Partisans. But they have to come two by two, two people at a time, because otherwise the Germans might have spies and see if many people are going.

And when they took them away, about a kilometer from their hiding place, they killed them, killed them with knives. And in this way, they killed 16 young boys and girls. Except one was left for dead. But he was just wounded.

And he came back to the Jewish people, the Jewish Partisans and people who were hiding in the woods, and told them the story. Of course, the non-- the Jewish people were hiding from the Partisans, also. So they had they were in double jeopardy. So that's how I found out what happened.

OK. Can you condense it all down and just tell me, I was in Shanghai when I found out about the Holocaust. It came in. But it wasn't until I got to the United States that I found out that my mother, and father--

And my brother.

--and brother were killed. That's all I want.

And all my extended family.

And many of my extended family, OK.

All of them. None was left.

Well, your brother and sister are in Israel.

Well, but they were in Israel since 1935.

Right. But we don't know that. We don't know that. But you do it.

Oh, OK.

But very short.

In Shanghai, I found out in generality what happened there. I didn't have any details and no newspaper. And then--

Sorry, sorry. You have to start, in Shanghai, you found out about the Holocaust. We have to know what you're talking about.

In Shanghai after the war was finished, I found out about the Holocaust. But I didn't have any details because it was hard to get by any information more than in general. When I came in '47 to New York, then I found out actually what happened, all the details.

And I found out from eyewitnesses and my whole family were killed, except for one brother that ran away into the woods with many other Jewish young people. And he was later killed by the Russian Partisans.

I had left for my family in Israel. I had a brother and a sister, which left before the war. And this is all my family that was left. And all, about 50 people of my family, were all killed.

Great, great. What role do you think your youth, or your luck, or your willingness to take risks played in your survival? In your story, your whole story.

Wait for John to finish, please.

It was all luck, except a little initiative, and a little drive to--

Again, you have to tell me what you're talking about. So you could say, your survival or your being a refugee was all luck.

The way I left my hometown and my survival was all luck. Maybe a small part was initiative because I was willing to take risk and do everything I can to survive. And that's how it happened that I am still alive today. Of course, on the way, there was many risks. Even in Shanghai, I took risks which was a stupid risk, but I did take them.

And all in all, somehow, 90% was luck. Because they most clever, the most intelligent, the most learned, and the strongest people died. And some of the weaker people came out alive. So I attribute it mostly to luck, except for a little initiative.

What role do you think that you were young played in it?

A very big role. When you're young, you are liable to take many risks. You see, I had an episode in China, if you want to hear it. When the war was finished, we started to deal in American goods, mostly.

And we had some news from China, from Tianxin and Harbin and Peking that in Tianxin, for an American dollar, you can get a five Chinese yen. But in Shanghai, you can get four American dollars thirty yen. So we went.

Again, we pooled all our resources, myself and another three friends. We sold our dollars, whatever we have. I had, I believe, \$400. And altogether, we had \$1,000. We went to Shanghai-- to Tianxin by train to change the dollars and come back five for one, let's say six for one and be able for 400 to buy 2000 dollars in Shanghai. So we went by train. By overnighter, came to Nanking and stayed overnight there.

From Nanking, we started to go closer to Tianxin. But on the way, the communists broke up the lines, the railroad lines. What they did is they took a couple of villages and pulled away all the ties, the railroad ties. And you couldn't go anymore. But there was one where you could go by foot for, let's say, 10 kilometers and catch another train. Well, they couldn't take all the railroad ties away. So from there, we went to the next station.

But on the way, the communists caught us. And they didn't know what to do with us, so they took us to their headquarters. We were four, myself and my friends, plus about seven Russians. And they brought us to their headquarters.

This is too long, sorry.

Too long.