

The philanthropist raising money for us. The money came in, American dollars came in, and we would distribute them to the yeshiva people. A lot of the German Jews sent their boys to the yeshiva because they got a stipend. A lot of them became religious. In the ghetto itself, we all intermingled with each other. This [INAUDIBLE] that had to go into the ghetto also became involved with us.

But we had doctors, we had a hospital, we had a shechita We had a moel of course. And as life goes on, we had a cemetery. And we had shows. Pesach was Pesach with matzah. I remember in the courtyard of the Ohel Moshe synagogue, my mother's one broken pot and six spoons, and [INAUDIBLE] dishes where we had to table it to make it kosher for Pesach, to be able to use the dishes in Pesach. My mother would make wine, cracked a couple of times. We made it, life, to be beautiful, with the little bit that we had. And grateful for all that we had.

A lot of the boys who came, and I met with them, and spoke to them, who came to the yeshiva-- brilliant boys, brilliant, boys-- left, because they left Shanghai before their parents put them to secular homes. And then they didn't want to have anything to do with the yeshiva world. But they were considered, they got money, they got stipends.

Mhm.

My mother would always tell a story about the soup kitchen, where somebody-- a German couple-- came down, and they knew they were intelligent. And the woman said to her husband, Hans, Hans, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] So, put on your yarmulke. They serve them [INAUDIBLE], which is the soup every day.

I look at Shanghai, I look at Japan, as a lesson of life. Life went on. The beauty of our lives, put there in my parents' home, where they made the house be without complaint. The only thing I remember, and I never really realized until much later, that one day, I came home from school, and my father was sitting on a bench. And he didn't-- and my mother also-- and they didn't talk, they didn't say much, and it was, like, melancholy. And I couldn't understand. It wasn't the happy, jumpy house with all the noise and the children. We had no games, we had no toys. Toys were sand, and dust, and rocks, and frogs, and bees, and anything we could pick up.

And then I realized, much later, that the news came. My mother, a family of 11 children, her parents, gone. My father, the family of nine, gone. It's only two that was left. The young boy is looking at who was, who was alive and who was not orphans. And the mood. But by the same token of the bad sadness, life goes on.

And one of my favorite pictures that I have is, and I quote it all the time, is my pictures of the ghetto, of the shelter that we built. It shows life as a whole unity, as a whole acceptance, as a whole, and love of human beings. It shows women who are married, either pregnant or holding a baby, young girls, young boys, German girls. All of them, life, future, and the shelter through the entrances, the rights of life.

That's a very beautiful image.

Sorry?

That's a very beautiful image that you've just drawn. It's a very beautiful image.

Thank you. And I feel very strongly-- I never heard complaints from my parents, I heard acceptance-- in my life that everything is based on what I heard in the house. Acceptance. Once, I heard my mom say, oy, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. The twins were only nine years old.

Never complained when things were rough. Grateful for-- grateful for being alive. And I feel now, my mission is in these times of turbulent times, when antisemitism is sprouting again so strongly, that a message of hope, and faith, and belief, and kindness to fellow man. A man like Sugihara who gave up his life to save someone, to do the right thing. A man that, when he was finally-- he was disgraced and ostracized, and changed his name because here, he was a superior officer going against the emperor. And when he was found 26 later-- 26 years later-- and the question he asked was, did I save one person? And he saved the world.

And as a reward, When we wanted to do so much for him 26 years later, I said we would. He took nothing. All he wanted-- his son, Hiroshi, to go to Israel and study and get a free scholarship. This is [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH], a kindness with not wanting anything back, but doing what-- doing the right thing.

And if all of us would share this, in this world today, to do the right thing, we would have a better world. Doesn't matter who or what, whether to help the Jew, a Japanese help a Jew, the Chinese help the Jew, is doing the right thing. The right thing, and this is what living is all about.

The experience in Shanghai is just beautifully emblematic of the Jewish community coming together, all this diversity of the Jewish community. But [? Wolf, ?] I'm just wondering, what was the relationship with the Chinese in Hongkou? In the ghetto.

We did not really have much of a relationship in Hongkou because of the ghetto. People in settlements in French town did have relationships with them, because they were in business and intermingling outside. We had, as a child, we had our own community.

Mhm.

They left us alone. They liked us.

Did you feel any antisemitism at all?

No way. I said they liked us. But we couldn't speak the language, we spoke Japanese because it's easy. The Chinese have so many dialects. They would always come in to help us, we were always talking with our hands, they were always-- nothing. We had the store, the chicken place, the water place. You had to buy hot water because there was no-- [LAUGHS]. With a little [INAUDIBLE], we had to buy water. We would moved down here to talk with them. They were very good to us. They thought we were strange, but we ate the same food, and we [INAUDIBLE]. We were odd, but they left us alone. They worked for us, we worked together. I saw no discrimination among anybody.

Mhm.

There was no discrimination, there was no I'm better than you or holier than thou. And come to that, no. The Japanese ruled, and the Chinese were terrified of the Japanese. We had Japanese friends. I called him the general, he would come all the time. I had a [? Takashi, ?] I wish I could find him. I had an ear infection, quite severe, and so I needed sulphur. Couldn't get it. And a day later, he came with the sulphur. I never saw him after that. But [? Takashi, ?] I have a picture of him, I have a picture of the general.

No, it was just, like, all together. The Chinese knew we would give them food if they needed food, and things like that. It was, as I remember, in my complex, it was a healthy relationship. They did their things, we did our things, we respected each other.

And I also have, from some of the readings of other testimonies, that the Jews had a lot of empathy for the position of the Chinese. I mean, they were in a very bad situation, they were completely-- they were occupied, they were poverty-stricken in many cases, especially in the ghetto.

Yeah. It was horrible.

A lot of rachmones for the Chinese.

It was horrible. I could go on a rickshaw. When I saw the rickshaw man, with wounds, running out of speed, with shmatas wrapped around his feet. They had nothing. You see a baby sitting and crying and there's nobody else, but the Jews, they help.

Mhm.

The poverty was unbelievable. The poverty was unbelievable. We made do. I had to-- we were so careful what we ate, but [INAUDIBLE].

Very interesting. Coming from a shtetl, and then-- this was part of your rescue. And in your rescue, you are put into this incredible, multicultural environment. Even Jewish multicultural environment. And then, of course, a relationship with the Japanese and with the Chinese population. It's really quite-- it's so singularly unique. It's such a singularly unique experience.

Because we were all trying to survive.

Yeah, of course. Of course.

We're all trying to survive. We were not in a march, we were not brutalized. We helped each other, because we are coming from a shtetl we did not see all that well. So it was easier for us to adjust.

That's an interesting perspective. That's an interesting perspective that I've not really thought about. Thank you, because one thinks of the experience of the Austrian Jews and the German Jews, and their experience was different. They were coming, come on a cruise liner to Shanghai, a very different experience.

Yeah. They survived because they had possession. They had things that they were able to sell, but they couldn't adapt.

Mhm.

And that was so hard for them, that's what--

And you saw that, the difficulty of adaptation.

For sure.

And what are some of those examples that you felt, that the German and Austrian Jews--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Yeah.

Bathrooms.

Mhm.

There's no bathroom. Could you picture aristocrat in the room with a curtain between his apartment and the neighbor next door, having to relieve themselves? It is so humiliating.

Mhm.

I'm just a six-year-old in Siberia on the snow. I've never forgotten how horrific that experience was for me.

Mhm.

And you're in a room with your wife and children, with a curtain. How could they?

Mhm. It's fascinating, the incredible yeshiva life that came out of Shanghai. Would you like to speak about that? You saw the Mir Yeshiva there, and then all of a sudden, the Mir Yeshiva comes to Brooklyn, to your Jerusalem and

everything starts anew?

That's a miracle. That's one of the greatest miracles that ever was, when you think about it.

Mhm.

Every yeshiva.

[INAUDIBLE]

Wait, let me tell you. [Personal name] I just went to see his wife. [INAUDIBLE], he was 16 years old when he gave the keys over to the Nazis. How it was stolen, [INAUDIBLE], everything, everything eradicated, completely eradicated. Nothing came out of here. Nothing except the Mir Yeshiva. But the Mir Yeshiva had the influence of every place. [? Twinklers, ?] [INAUDIBLE] here, [INAUDIBLE] there.

I think parents with large families would send their children to the yeshiva so they would have a meal, their boys. But the poverty, [INAUDIBLE]. And then when the whole group went out of Vilna to rebuild that's when I saw there was some [INAUDIBLE] who was with us in the ghetto. And when it was bombing, she went in the house by us when the bombs came down, and we all went to the shelter. And I was chasing my little kitten, and we had a fight on the street because she wanted me in the shelter and I wanted my little pet. [INAUDIBLE].

And I went to tell Rachel that my husband is not in this world anymore, and she hugged me. [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH], my child, my child. Don't you remember, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. I saved you. And I remember just struggling on the Earth, and she wanted me back in the shelter, and brought put me back in again. And the next thing she said, it was too late, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH].

Would you believe? Same thing with [INAUDIBLE]. Says all I want is [INAUDIBLE]. Who would believe in this day and age? [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. Revolution. Who would believe that wherever you go-- I go to Chicago, and I see the [? cycle ?] guys. Everybody's walking with the [INAUDIBLE]. Who would believe they were building?

It came out of Shanghai and Hungary, later, because their war started there much later.

Mhm.

And to see yarmulkes on the head, [INAUDIBLE] flying. All in 50 years. 70 years, sorry. And all those who came out of Shanghai, they weren't looking for money. They were looking to rebuild, and they rebuilt. And what we have today is beyond amazing, not only in America, but the whole world. I'll tell you something interesting about my grandfather, the Pinsk Rav.

Please.

I'm not good with dates. My grandfather was a powerhouse. Little guy, but a powerhouse. He was imprisoned for speaking his-- for practicing what he believed in. And in 1924, he came to America. The first [INAUDIBLE]. They wanted to establish a agudas Rabbunim.

And he came in with a German rabbi. I don't remember the name of him. I have a picture. I can show it to you.

And the base [INAUDIBLE], he wrote 22 books. One of them, the base [INAUDIBLE]. America, this is the place where it will be rebuilt. This is the future for the Jews-- America. Agudas Rabbunim started. He went back to Pinsk, and he was asked to come to America. No, no, I can't leave my people. And he was there. He was killed in-- no, he died in a hospital. But he was in the ghetto. So, this, in his memory, I want to mention his belief in that.

Mhm.

I feel-- I don't think Chicago, because when we came to Chicago, it was a wilderness. Who would-- my father, what with his-- oh, even better than that, I love that story. I'd like to share this with you. Again, I told you, I don't talk about what was, I talk about the future, what we were doing. [Personal name] you've heard of him.

Mhm.

[Personal name] had this fantasy that he wanted to build a yeshiva after the [INAUDIBLE]. But he only wanted the American boys. [Personal name] didn't speak a word of English. The American boys didn't speak a word of Hebrew, because they all went to public schools. There was not such a thing as a yeshiva world at that time. And he wanted-- and he recruited all the American boys, and he built up what we have today.

And I remember when I came to Lakewood, we were all about 15 or 18 of us, everybody an American kid. Everybody went to public school. My husband went to college and public school, and yet his uncle is Rabbi Feinstein. He did not go to [INAUDIBLE]. One and only son, his mother wasn't going to let him go to New York. That's what he wanted, and he did it. Time to rebuild.

Mhm.

And we're rebuilding. And we're rebuilding.

Chaya what would you like to say to conclude in terms of the importance of the Shanghai experience for you? You were a young girl, and it formed your perspective in so many ways. And you said snippets of it throughout the interview, but, how would you like to just-- would you like to just reflect on that as an ending? Because this is the story of a young girl experiencing all of this.

I'll make it very simple.

Of course.

[NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. Again, three-- [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] are three things the world [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. Torah, you know, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH], believing in God, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] is not just for the Jews, but for the world at large. We see that from those who helped us.

If we can remember that the world exists on three things-- [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. A kindness doesn't have to be taking out a million dollars and giving it to you. A kindness could be a smile. Can I help you? Can I do something for you? Doesn't matter where it comes from. If we do these three things, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH].

Thank you very much.

I hope my message comes through.

Thank you.