

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Ernest Heppner
May 10, 1989
RG-50.030*0095**

PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Ernest Heppner, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on May 10, 1989 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview cannot be used for sale in the Museum Shop. The interview cannot be used by a third party for creation of a work for commercial sale.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

ERNEST HEPPNER
May 10, 1989

[FIRST TEN MINUTES OF INTERVIEW MISSING FROM TRANSCRIPT]

A: ...I got into a lot of trouble because I got in a lot of fights. Because I was so often called names. Christkiller and especially, you see in Germany, the profession of your father follows you. So any time you started a new class and the teacher would call the roll. "Your's father's name, religion, profession. What do you manufacture?" "He manufactures matzahs." So it didn't last very long. And I got into trouble, and got into fights, through the old blood libel. "Your father kills Christian babies for Passover!" Right. I experienced that quite often.

Q: Do you remember the first time that happened?

A: I think it might have been--I might be off about a year--the second or third year, the second or third grade, possibly. I must have been around 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 years old; 10 years old, that period. So it was already before '33, because I think I was 12 years old in 1933 when Hitler came to power.

Q: Can you tell me about it?

A: About Hitler?

Q: No, can you tell me about your first realization, the first time you recalled being associated as a Christkiller?

A: I cannot remember the distinct incident. All I know, the things usually happened during recess. The school was Gaudic (ph) School. Yes, I remember. Gaudic School was the name. And during recess, I was out with the other boys; and somebody starts the trouble, and starts calling you that. And I was very feisty. And as soon as somebody started calling me names, I was swinging. And there were bloody noses. The next thing happened, I was in the principal's office. Then my parents were called. That happened so often, I don't know anymore when the first time was. And my grades suffered. And I refused to do school work. And then my parents were called. And the teachers and the principal said, in German, _____ (ph)." I cannot translate it. He is telling it; but lazy beyond, because I refused to work. I refused to. It became later, of course, even more pronounced after the Hitler period. When we had the assembly. We had to stand at attention and salute the flag and sing the Horst Wessel song. I tried not to raise my hand. And this led to complications and problems. Then I was forced to. It sometimes reminds me today, when I saw the conditions, when we are also forced to go through certain procedures.

Q: When you faced insults at school, did you try to bring the subject up with your parents or with your sister, for example? Did you ever talk to them about it? Or did you keep it to

yourself? How were these matters touched on at home or weren't they touched on at home?

A: I think early on I must have mentioned something to my sister; but I learned early on that this was a part of growing up as a Jew and in a European country. In a country that has seen anti-Semitism forever. So it was all part of it, and you learn it, and I was not surprised by it anymore.

Q: Your father, I believe, was a World War I veteran. How did he feel about Germany and how did he feel about things like this? Did he ever talk about it?

A: I don't remember talking to my father about it. No. I might have, but I don't remember it. You see, until very recently, until about a year ago, I had a total memory block. And I went to several psychiatrists and psychologists in my home town, in Indianapolis. I didn't...when we were negotiating with the Germany government for restitution, loss of property, loss of education, and all that, I could not fill in all the lengthy questionnaires that I was sent by the German government; because I didn't remember the name of the school I attended, I didn't remember the name of the street I lived on. And if it wouldn't have been followed by a brother, I wouldn't have got a penny. About a year ago, I started writing about it and things started coming back more and more, but there is still some, some blocks there.

Q: Can you remember the very first time you ever heard about Hitler, not necessarily 1933? What did he mean to you very early on as a child? Was it ever discussed at home or amongst your friends or other Jewish families that you knew?

A: Well, all I can tell you is that--(cough) excuse me--I should proceed that by saying that I considered myself almost a German, foremost. I had heard about Zionism, and we negated it. I was a German of the Jewish faith. So were my parents. As you said, my father was a veteran of World War I. And when we heard about the Nazis, it was a passing political phenomena. Like many policies. I do remember once, I don't know when it was, some bloody street fights between a communist and the Nazis. And I do remember as if it was some sort of pin (ph); and several of my friends, maybe my parents, belonged to the SDP (Social Democratic Party) , which was a majority party, sent _____. And others wore the Nazi emblem, the Communist emblem, and more than once, I saw the street flights that really were something to behold as far as violence is concerned. Nothing to compare with today, unfortunately. But, it was just another party that came into power. I think the Jews by in large were perhaps divided into two camps - the pessimists and the optimists. There were some pessimists that picked up and left in the '30's. All our friends, my families, relatives, couldn't even conceive of leaving in the mid '30's. Why? Everybody lived in Germany. Your parents lived there. Your grandparents. Been there for generations who had a vital business. Why would anybody seriously consider leaving? And the Nazis developed their methods so slowly, very slowly, that at least from my perspective, whatever little I remember, there was no forewarning of what was to come. We look at it today with the perspective of hindsight.

Q: When did it first impinge on you? When did you first yourself notice the Nazis or feel that

maybe the Nazis were affecting you. Not the street fights? But you yourself?

A: I think that was the outgrowth of the Nuremberg...the Nuremberg Laws.

Q: It would help me considerably, rather than just answering my question, if you could say something like, "I remember this for me started in Europe."

A: Okay, I think it was...I remember it when I was told I could no longer do certain things. I could no longer participate in sports, contact sports. Uh, soccer. I could no longer participate, unless the ski team--I did considerable ski racing; slalom and long distance. I could... It really hit me I wanted to go to the opera. I was no longer permitted to go to the opera. I saw the sign "Jews are Forbidden. Prohibited to Jews." Wherever we went, we saw more and more of the signs. That is when it really hit me that I was not just a German of the Jewish religion. I was different. Which, until that period, it really hadn't sunk in. But then it did. So it was in the mid '30's that I realized that the vise had tightened a little bit, and we were made to stand out and we were different. And made to suffer for it.

Q: Were you made to feel different in the street? You weren't allowed to go, how did people respond to you? Did you find it on a personal level that things were changing? Tell me something about that.

A: Well, on a personal level, I felt it in school and in sports and when you wanted to participate in certain public events. I couldn't. So many areas were restricted. I think that is the only way I can remember it. I was still active in a very disciplined, highly disciplined, semi-militaristic youth organization, Jewish youth organization by the name of Schwartzefähnlein--Black Pennant [**Ger:** "Black Squad"]. I joined it when I was about 8 and one half years old. And as I said, it was a rather militaristic pseudo-scouting organization. And this is when I had really my best times. I enjoyed life tremendously. And I have many, some fond memories. In retrospect, I am surprised that my parents let me go on a 6 weeks hike when I was 8 and one half years old. It was compared to scouting standards, very tough, just to get to scout. I believe I was let loose in the middle of the woods at night, and find your way home. This sort of thing. And we tramped...hiked all of the way from Breslau [**Pol:** Wroc_aw] north to the Baltic Sea, then took a freighter around to bypass a Polish corridor, to the lake area of east of Poland--as the Polish called it--and hiked to an island where we stayed for 4 weeks.

Q: This was a Jewish youth organization?

A: Right.

Q: Did you have any non-Jewish friends at this time. Did they change at the time of Nuremberg, or didn't you have any non-Jewish friends?

A: I am glad you asked that. I did have non-Jewish friends, up to about '35. After that, I was absolutely ostracized. I lost all friends I had. I did not exist anymore for my non-Jewish

friends. They wouldn't dare to be seen with a Jew.

Q: Did they say anything to you at all? Did anybody ever apologize for the change?

A: No. No.

Q: Did you try to make contact with them or did you retreat?

A: Well, I guess in the beginning you walked up to a boy and tried to talk to him like you always did. And you were left standing when he turned around and walked away.

Q: After '35, were you still ? Did you have to give you name, and who you were, and what your father did? Was there any change in response then?

A: No. No. You see, German school was very disciplined as it was. and I don't when that incident happened. But to give an example, I don't know it was regular behavior, corporal punishment, I was very good in gym. As a gymnast. And we once did a formation in calisthenics. It was new to me. And I was bad to the kid next to me and watched what it was going to be when it was finished. And the teacher heard it, he walked up to me, and slapped my face and I wound up on the floor and I think that's when, perhaps, my hearing suffered somewhat. It is this sort of aggressive behavior by some teachers, was made perhaps more aggressive later than in the beginning, but quite frankly I don't remember exactly what happened where, when.

Q: When did you family start to talk about the changed situation after 1935? Or did they talk? Was it an unmentioned subject? Did life just carry on?

A: Life carried on. You have to carry on. And especially on adverse conditions, you carry on. We talked about it occasionally, yes; especially since we had the matzah factory, which was bolaba (ph). Now it was like many synagogues. Not visible on the street. Many synagogues in Europe were in the yard behind the building, which was closed off with a iron gate, you know. You had to have access to it. And then you go through the yard, and the building was behind it. So it was only those people that knew; but occasionally there was some vandalism. But not much more. Surprisingly, my father, as I said, was a very nice, easy-going, mild-mannered man, who helped a lot of people. The factory workers that lived in the tenement houses, the apartment house that we owned in front of the factory, they adored him. They would do anything for him. He always helped them out. Give them money. So he never had any problems. Not even at Kristallnacht.

Q: Do you think his German workers felt okay about him being Jewish? Or were most of the workers Jewish? Or were they Germans?

A: All Germans. But I guess it was perhaps their livelihoods that they perhaps protected. I don't know.

- Q: Do you remember anything special about... Do you remember... You said you were interested in gym. Do you remember the Olympic games? Do you remember thinking anything about the Olympic games?
- A: No. No. No. I heard about it from my wife cause she was a swimmer. And she is from Berlin. And they wanted...she also was not permitted anymore on a swim team. But they lived close to a Olympic stadium, and she told me about it.
- Q: Let's move on now a couple of years. Let's move on to just before Kristallnacht. How were things changed from '35 to '38, as far as you were concerned? You were now a young man, 12 or 13?
- A: Yah. Well, it was about when I was 14 years old, things got very bad in school. I remember the principal coming in once and said, "We don't want the Jew Heppner in this school anymore. Out!" So I left school. When I was 14 years old. I am a kick-out. I took some classes in private school, whatever; and then my mother knew somebody who owned a machine yard--industrial machinery, locomotives, like all the steam equipment. And everybody at that time learned a practical craft, in preparation for possible immigration. And I was good with my hands. I am almost ambidextrous. Actually, when I was left handed, I was forced to learn my writing with my right hand. So I took several courses. I learned welding, I learned locksmithing, I learned out to pick locks, and then I became a volunteer, ____ (ph), that is the name for it. Not an apprentice, but as an apprentice with minimal pay; because we didn't need the money. My parents knew the owner. So I was working there in the yard, welding and cutting and working in the office. I knew how to type. I maintained the petty cash. They had a gas station; pumped gas, and learned all kind of things. One interesting experience I remember, after I took the course in welding, it was a fairly warm August day, I was asked to cut, with a torch, heavy steam piping. And I took the torch and I didn't have my overhauls and I cut off the umbrella bags, put them around my waist, took a piece of wire and fastened it, and another fella helped me turn the heavy piping while I was cutting away. And I smelled some smoke and the flames started shooting up and ignited the umbrella bags. But I had learned what to do, and I hit the ground and rolled and just lost some of my sweater and shirt and eyebrows and hair.
- Q: Were your fellow workers Jewish or German or German-Jewish?
- A: The foreman of the yard, the yard foreman, was an SA man, Brown Shirt. Was an everyday German. Very business-like. Around the yard. No problems. I never knew if he was one of those that were more or less voluntarily had entered the Brownshirts, or not. Incidentally, later, Kristallnacht, he did not... Well, I will get to that later, perhaps.
- Q: Let's maybe move forward to Kristallnacht itself and the staff report. Take me back and set the scene for me.

A: This is the period that I really vividly remember. Of course, it was before the time of the jet age, before the time of instant news. We had to go to the movies, if we could go to the movies, and see the weekly news. I do remember we had a radio at home, a Blaupunkt, with a loud speaker which was fairly new and there were antennas in the form of spools and you had to carefully tune them to get a station. So getting news was not as easy as it was today. There was some rumors then, just about that time, after from Radnow (ph) or vom Rath¹ was assassinated, that the Nazis might look for a way to punish the Jews. Something was expected. We just didn't know what. And I know the night before, or during the night perhaps, I don't know when it was, I heard later in the morning my father he was gone. He had received a call from one of the factory workers to come to the factory. There was trouble there. Come to the factory and close it up. And I was at home with the maid. My brother by that time was married and lived someplace else with his wife and a little baby. And I heard some noise out front. We lived in a residential area in one of these big apartment buildings. Most middle class people, even the affluent ones, didn't own homes unless they had a villa. Large apartment buildings. We lived on the second floor. And I looked out and I saw a truck come up the street with SS troops, stop at one house, and I was watching. Go in and come out a few minutes later with some of our Jewish neighbors and push them up in the truck. Next house. Same thing. Then they came across to my house. I didn't wait for them. I ran to the back room, jumped out the window, got on my bike, got away. Then I was running around aimlessly for awhile and I was afraid of the road block and I got on the train, on a steam car, want to see what is happening. Where am I going to go now, where am I going to hid? So I got off. I want to see what is happening downtown. I was very adventure-some. That was my scouting nature. I did some crazy things. So I got on a street car and I could see the smoke from a distance already. Leaned out, I was standing on the platform. I could see smoke and came to the name of the place, I can't remember the name, and I saw the flames shooting out of the dome of the synagogue. I was just furious. That affected me more than perhaps anything else in all these years. But I remember next to me stood an old German woman and she muttered to herself, translated into English, "Oh, what a shame. What a beautiful building that was." Next to us stood a Nazi in civics and not in uniform and he reached and pulled the cord, brought the train to a stop, yanked her out just for that remark. Time went on and until I got close I decided from there on I am going to go to where I worked. That was a pretty big yard and I figured of all the places, this is perhaps fairly safe and I can hide. I used to be inside steam boilers, you know, cleaning them and so I figured nobody is going to find me there. And I got there and I came through the back entrance somehow and I saw Herr Mischelson (ph) the owner, Jewish, a friend of my mother and they had an apartment right over the office building. And he was walking along with a cigar. I said, gee, that is strange. Here they round up Jews and business as usual. So I thought I got to go in hiding. So I waited a moment and watched and there is a yard man, in uniform. And he didn't. Business as usual. He didn't turn him in. This was an industrial complex, you know. And it was actually as I remembered there was an SS at the roundups and the SA was

¹ Ernst vom Rath was a German diplomat assassinated in Paris by Hershel Grynszpan on November 7, 1938.

involved in the night before, busting up the shop windows and all that. So, he didn't turn him in. but I didn't trust the situation. I didn't know what was going on. So, I stayed out of sight until evening and then made my way home again. In the meanwhile, my father was at the factory and stayed at the factory and stayed in hiding until the next night too by one of his workers.

Q: You say the lorrie drove up. What sort of street was it? Who were the men inside it? Were they young? Were they old? How were they carrying on? What sort of street does a Jew live on?

A: I think the name was Wolfestrasse (ph).² And it was a residential area. And I presume, it was a mixed neighborhood. There were no really Jewish areas, as such. But I think most Jews belong to what you would call the middle class. Quite a few lived in an area there. The general area, in a south area.

Q: Did you recognize any of them?

A: As neighbors, yes. Yes. I neglected to tell you something. Before I went on the train, on my bike I decided to go to my brother's house. I got to my brother's house, and there was my sister-in-law with the baby just about in tears. What had happened (end of tape this side) (phrases missing). There were quite a few men around there that had heard what happened the night before, and they thought of maybe going to Berlin or another city. They couldn't conceive that it had happened all over the country. It was you would have thought an isolated incident there, you see. We didn't know what was going on. So we thought of maybe hiding temporarily, but where. So we decided, well, to go home first and pack a suitcase. But then of course they find out, you know, you can't go in hiding. So all he could do was call up and report and next morning the policemen came and escorted him to the station where he found a whole group of other men under the same conditions and then they were marched through the streets to the railroad station with all the German folk standing by and hooting and hollering and seeing in the opening what was happening.

Q: Did you see the schelshon (ph)? Did you see these people being marched off? What was happening to you that day?

A: I did not. That was the day, wait a minute, that was the next day. Nothing anymore. This roundup was primarily only this one day if I remember right.

Q: Were you back at home?

A: I was back at home.

² Wallstrasse?

Q: Let me take you back just a little bit more? You say you decided to go to your brother and your sister-in-law. Set the scene for me, as you went up the stairs or into the apartment or what. What was the situation? How were you admitted? What did it look like?

A: I think it was just a mess. It was an apartment building. A modern apartment building. And, if I remember right, the place was just torn up. The way it would look, you know, if you had burglars, I would think.

Q: How frightened was your sister-in-law? Did she let you in easily? Where was the baby?

A: I don't know, it was... I see it, but I don't remember. It was in a crib, in her arm at one time, earlier or later. I really can't reconstruct it. It is just too long ago. Some things stand in my mind; like I remember there was a scene of fire shooting out of the skeleton, what was left. I made a vow then. I was so furious and so hateful already. I vowed at that time I was going to fight those bastards whenever and wherever.

Q: Were the people standing around watching? Was the fire brigade there or was it just burning? Just tell me a little bit more about it?

A: I didn't see too much; because it was a side street, you see, and the train was going at right angle to it. So I saw the outline of the building, the great temple where we went to services. And it was a huge building, like a cathedral. It was a dome. And I just saw it for a fraction of a second. I think that the fire brigade was there. You have to protect burning buildings at least, you know. It was one of the buildings that was not in the back yard, but was out in the open, incidently. It was a big building. Red brick building.

Q: What happened to your father? You and your father weren't rounded up?

A: No. As far as I remember, this roundup was only very...just this one day. I don't know. My father never was caught, and I wasn't caught. It's too big, what happened then.

Q: What about your brother? Was your father there? Did you know what was happening with your brother? How did you find out all of that? How did the family respond and how did you respond?

A: Well, I am trying to think. 1938. We had a get-together...we had a get-together in the evening, I think. My mother and my father were not on best terms. As a matter of fact, they were separated, but together again. And eventually divorced, for practical reasons. The only thing I do remember is that Kristallnacht was the turning point. That was the time when we knew that this was for real. No more optimism left. All this time before, we were questioning, "How do we get out?" And I think it is all important. You know, I get asked so often: "Why was it so difficult to get out of Germany?" And I tell everybody, "It is not getting out. It was a question that no county would let you in."

Q: Tell me, if you can, can you see the scene that evening? What was the discussion? You said this was the end of optimism. Tell me, can you remember?

A: Where are we going to go? That followed after the conference of Evian, you know. Where are we going to go. I know that my brother had contacts with some consulate I think in Uruguay. Get visa. Fortunately, he had some papers. And we found out, I don't know exactly when, that the Gestapo made it clear that anyone that would prove to them that they would leave Germany within a specified time, they would be released from the concentration camp. There was a second reason, also, how you could get released. I don't know if it is pertinent now. I think a title, our house title was already sold by that time, sold forcibly.

Q: What do you mean by that, house sold forcibly?

A: We had to sell it to Aryans. It has just come back to me that earlier, sometime in the '30's, Jews were forced to inventory all their belongings, assets, everything they owned, jewelry, and property was sold for a pittance. Our real estate was sold for a pittance. Our _____ title was sold. We had no say and somebody that wanted it could buy it for next to nothing.

Q: I don't understand you. How were you forced to sell? Did someone come along and say to you, sell it, or were you hard up? You say you were forced to sell.

A: Well, I am trying to think because my parents were involved. Not I, personally. The way I think it worked, I vaguely remember now, if a Jew owned a store, a business, and his competitor I'd say, or anyone, would say I would like to have it, I would like to own it, could merely go to the police and say I want to buy that from that Jew, and the price was set, and that was it. Now if that Jew was in a concentration camp --Buchenwald, Dachau or Sachsenhausen--and the Christian buyer was fairly decent and didn't know how to run the business that he just acquired from the Jew; and the wife, let's say, came to him and said, "Do you need some help running it?" Or the fact is the Jew was helping him run the business, which he was required to do, then the Gestapo would immediately discharge him. But most of them was...could get out of the camp if the wife, daughter, whoever went to the Gestapo with proof. This was a crucial period.

Q: You say your brother was arrested. Did you see him? Tell me how did that affect the family, his actual arrest and departure? What flowed from that?

A: Well, we heard it from my sister-in-law and that is all I do know. Because, well, I was so fairly young and I was very concerned about at once things. And I didn't have much contact with my brother, either.

TAPE #2

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Q: Let's just take ourselves back again. You say that you heard your brother was away and you started to talk about things. When did your brother, did you see your brother again, did he come out after?

A: Yes. Yes, fortunately, he had some negotiations with, I believe, the consulate of Uruguay. I understand that many of the consulates took money under the table and sold visas. One of the problems was that our bank account were closed. It didn't matter how much money you owned, you could not get it out. The bank would give you sufficient money to live on, for daily necessities and for anything connected with emigration. I got, for instance, my ticket--steamer tickets, or whatever. Train tickets. But not sufficient money to buy a visa. But my sister-in-law, I believe, had a...what I would call a "letter of intent," saying that they're working on a visa, that most likely you would get the visa. So with that, she went to the Gestapo headquarters, and was told, "Um, yes, okay. We will investigate, and he will be set free." So I heard indirectly that one day, that he, like many others, a loud speaker... He was in Buchenwald. A loud speaker said ...called out the name of the Jews there to come to the gate. And certain procedures were followed; and they were given even money and a train ticket, and they were sent home. Ironically, the town nearest to Buchenwald is Weimar, which I had I think had some connection with the...that's where the Weimar Republic was formed. So he came home. He had survived the winter, which was cold; but since he only reported next morning, he was dressed warmly. So he didn't suffer the same fate as some others, you know, that didn't survive the harsh German winter. He would never talk about his experience there. Never. He said he couldn't. All I know next was that we set around the table to decide what to do now. I understand there was a time limit. What my brother and sister tried to do, they took a course...had taken a course, at one time--or maybe only afterwards, I don't remember--as butler and maid. Because they tried to go to England. And I understand England needed domestic help. So my sister-in-law--which I believe has never been in a kitchen, because she didn't even know how to cook an egg, because we had servants, you know--and so I found out later on, they went out to England on some estate that was owned by Jews who very rapidly found out that my brother was no butler. He learned how to pour the white wine and red wine; but my sister-in-law couldn't cook. But they helped them along and got some other job for them; until, unfortunately, my brother was then interned by Great Britain for being a German. As you know, one of the other ironies of politics. But I think the main thing that happened then... In 1978, I believe it was...

Q: [Do you mean 1938]?

A: '78. NBC had a document[ary] drama on the Holocaust. And I saw a preview; and I saw the family--Wiess or Weiss--sitting around a dinner table there trying to figure out what next, how to get out, and what to do. You know. I saw the scene; and something bothered me. And I said, "Gee, that is...is so familiar. And yet there is something strange that isn't right."

Something was basically wrong with that scene, but I couldn't make out. But I remembered, "My God! That it is what happened at our home!" And I woke up the next night, and remembered. It was exactly what happened at our home, except it was in German. On the NBC documentary, it was in English. I remember the scene in German. I was sitting around. And by that time, there were rumors floating around that there was a place in China--which is the other end of the world. At that time, farther than the...perhaps, Mars today. Or perhaps the moon. There was a place in China that did not require a visa, and Jews could go there without a visa. It was unheard of. So my mother, who was very good business woman, she said she would investigate. Then I think they contacted some of the Jewish organizations; and the Jewish organizations said, "Yes, you can go there. But don't. It is an awful place. We would not recommend anyone to go to Shanghai. That's the name of the city. There is a war raging there, and you don't know if you would even be permitted to land there. All kind of rumors. And just don't." So my mother went to a travel agent. And she heard: "Yes, you can go there by boat. And it takes about four weeks to go there, on a luxury liner. Yeah, but the waiting list is 6 to 8 months. 10 months." So my mother said, "You know, there must be some way of getting there faster." So my mother did...the travel agent had helped my mother several times. And she said, "You own some Impressionistic paintings, don't you? Well, the agent...I happen to know the agent of the Nord Deutsche Lön, the official German Steamship Agency. He is a collector." So it wasn't long afterwards we start to make the preparations. We already...I have a copy of a letter to the Gestapo to give us preference in getting all the stuff out. You know, you had to list and inventory how many shirts, how many shoes, how many socks--everything had to be listed. Get everything in preparation done. And my parents, my sister and brother... And my mother and I were supposed to try, at least, first to go out; and they would follow. Perhaps. My sister--by that time, as I said, she was very severely handicapped--had found a man that was also handicapped; and the two kept company. So she didn't want to leave him immediately. And my father still had to wind up some business. My brother was trying to go to England. So it was decided my mother and I was supposed to go first. We get a call. "Everything is ready. Can you leave in 48 hours?" A couple onboard the Potsdam, or going on board, or before they boarded--I am not sure which--leaving the port of Hamburg committed suicide. They couldn't face it. And the liner left with an empty cabin. My mother and I got the Customs people over, or what the... They had to come to our house and seal our bags, inspect them and seal them. We took the night express to Italy.

Q: No goodbyes?

A: Yes, there were goodbyes. Yes, I said goodbye to my father and my sister. And I knew that I would never see them again. My brother took us to the railroad station. Yah, I knew it then. They said, "Aufwiedersehen;" but I knew we would never seem them again. I got a very severe nosebleed that couldn't be stopped when I said goodbye to my sister. I plugged it up, because the cab was waiting and we didn't want to miss the train. So then we got into the train. And through Innsbruck, and looked out the window; and there were the mountains right and left of the station, beautiful...Austria. And then we knew on the other side is Italy. We got to Austria, and come to Zolle--you know, Customs. Oh, before that, my mother and I

were talking. And she confided in me that she took a second watch. We were permitted one ring, one watch--everything strictly regulated. And although I was quite...well, easy-going and adventure-some, when I heard that she had an extra watch, I just threw a fit in that compartment. There was another fellow sitting there, who was also heading to Shanghai I found out later. And I made her give me the thing; and before we got to the border, I got out of the compartment, went to a mailbox and threw the watch into the mailbox. And she loved that watch, and she didn't want to give it up; but I made her. I knew what would have happened if they would have found a second watch, you know. We would have headed back to Germany. And a good thing we did, because when we came to the border town, the control [NB: Customs] went through: "Alle Juden, Raus!" Every Jew had to get out. And with our baggage and everything, out. And so they started examining... Now, the baggage was sealed, fortunately. So they strip-searched us; and the train went on, without us. After we were through, we had to wait for the next train--which was one of these...not an express, but one of the slow pokes, you know, that stops at every station. So we got to Genoa--called Genoa?--fairly late at night. Couldn't board the boat, and boarded the next morning. And we realized, "My God!" We had the two suitcases each, and each of us had 10 marks. Twenty marks between us. The total of eight American dollars. Four dollars each. And all of a sudden, it overcame us. You know, all of a sudden... All my life, I [had] never worried about money. And my mother always played the grand dame. You know, she [was] fairly well off. And uh, you know, travelled widely, and um always had a fairly good life. And all of a sudden, we got to the city and we realized we had no money on us. Do we have enough money for a hotel? You know, we lived from one day to the next. Well, we found a place to stay [for] one night. We were lying in bed; and all of a sudden, an earthquake struck. We didn't know what was happening. We're both sitting in bed and trying to sleep. Uh, was a strange experience, for the first time. And uh next morning, we...

Q: What was a strange experience?

A: The earthquake! The earth was shaking. That's why I remember that particular night. And uh next morning, we boarded the boat. Potsdam. The cabin was not first class, but was touristic--second class. But it was a luxury liner. As we have cruises today in the old tradition and the young tradition. With a menu that long, and service as it is supposed to be. We enjoyed it. Carefree days... We had "board" money. The bank had deposited a certain amount, because it was a German boat. Deposited--I forgot how much. We had four dollars; but we could buy several hundred marks worth--maybe even more--of anything in the ship's store. The first thing, I bought a camera. I think it was a Leica. I bought a very good camera with the rest of that money.

Q: Tell me about the other passengers.

A: Well, there was only one passenger I do remember. There was another young man about my age. I have seen maybe a picture of him, but I forget his name and I don't know who he was. And I have never run into him in Shanghai anymore. I lost track of him. But there was one gentleman, extremely well dressed, who was sitting in our compartment of the train who also

went to Shanghai. He was very flamboyantly dressed, with wife and child Zahlinger (ph) was his name. I do remember it, because he opened a store later in Shanghai and I worked for him for awhile. That is one of the passengers that I remember.

Q: What was the mood on the...on the ship? Was the mood cheerful?

A: Well, it was a mixture of cheerful... You know, you really couldn't worry much because, first of all, we had to pay out our ticket. I still have a copy of it. We had to pay for a return trip, because we did not know we were permitted to land in Shanghai. So you would try not to think of it. We knew there was nobody there; we didn't know anybody in Shanghai. We didn't know the language. I did not know the difference between Y-E-S and N-O. I literally did not speak a single word of English. I had some Latin school, which started in the fifth grade. I had a little bit of French. We got to Port Said.³ We had our first experience with Jewish organizations; because the British tried to prevent us from going ashore. God forbid we might stay! I got ashore. And uh walked around the harbor. A couple of Arabs approached me, tried to sell me dates. I had no money. Cigarettes, yes. So I traded my German cigarettes for dates, which I love. And then there were a couple of Jews--uh met us and asked us to come with them. And they guided us to a house and took us upstairs. It was so ramshackle that I was afraid the house would fall down. And I remember walking up a little stairway into a room, and there was spread out clothing. "If you need any clothing..." And you know, I just couldn't comprehend it. Why would I need used clothing? Not realizing that there are ...were some people who got out with even less than I had. So we had a fairly carefree time. We got to the rest of the ports; sail on Singapore, beautiful harbor. Singapore, we're also met by Jews. The same difficulties with the British. But we had a valid passport, and they really couldn't make a distinction and prevent us from going ashore. Our boat went over [to] Kobe, Japan, where we spent a day. And then came a day when we steamed to Shanghai. Uh, the ship was...waited for a high tide in the Yangtze [NB: Chang Jiang] ____, in the Yangtze River. Then we slowly steamed into the...a tributary, the Huang-p'u [Also: Huangpu or Wangpoo] [River]. And I remember we were all up on deck and we looked out at the right side, starboard. And we saw nothing but desolation. What we saw, without knowing it, was the suburb of Hongkou [NB: Hongkew] of Shanghai--where we would actually live later. But when we saw it, I think everybody was just awestruck. It was quite... You could see the desolation, or ruins. At that time, nobody had seen desolation of that type. Burned out buildings. We saw some wharfs that were sticking up. For some reasons, the wharfs were there along the waterfront. And then we came slowly to the Bund, the waterfront of the Shanghai. And nobody even noticed the beautiful big buildings there and what's going to happen there. We had thought of China--you know, typical Chinese buildings, upturned roofs, and all that. Philippine buildings. Office buildings. Except for this section that we were seeing there. And which was, I don't know what to call it. It was very demoralizing perhaps, seeing that. This was Shanghai. And we came; and the boat couldn't get to Jack (ph) Quay. We were afraid to go over and the lighter in the launch. When you get

³ in Egypt.

to Shanghai, the noise hits you. And I can still smell the street vendors and the peanut oil. And it wasn't...the heat hadn't started yet, because it was March...March '39. So it wasn't...the heat wasn't so bad as it was later. And then our suitcases came. And what bothered...what struck us most was, there was some representatives of a committee there, greeting us. And uh...

Q: What sort of committee?

A: Well, one of the committees that had sprung up to assist the refugees that were arriving there. It was formed by Shanghai --the Jews there, the Jews that had lived there already. There was some Jews living there from the Bolshevik Revolution, and some Sephardic Jews from India--the Sassoons and the Hardoons--and some of the others, that had organized some committees to help the arriving Jews. And we were just through--no customs, no nothing, no visa, no passport control. Nothing! Just was, then. And we were told we would be taken to a reception center. And we came outside the jetty there; and we already got some quick warnings. "Don't do this. Don't do that. Hold on to your pocketbook. Hold onto your money." And a whole list of don'ts. And uh there is a truck. "Will you get on the truck, please." And I found out later, a cattle truck. There is usually not much cattle in China. It's pigs. So we walked up that plank, on a truck. And it is quite a sight. I have a photograph of that. Well dressed Europeans walking up on a cattle truck, standing up there, through the narrow streets of Shanghai and taken to the Embankment Building. Which was office building belonging to [Sir Victor] Sassoon; which he had made a couple of floors available, which were hastily converted to receptionist area. So that's where there was a kind of soup kitchen. And I was...we landed, incidently, and we had about 75 cents left among us--my Mom and I--in American money. Which went a long way in China.

Q: How did you expect to live, with 75 cents?

A: We didn't know. When we got there... And before that, we did not know who would greet us, if somebody would meet us, if we would have roof over our heads the next day, if we would have something to eat the next day. We knew nothing. We heard some rumors: yes, there was some Jews and there would be somebody, hopefully. We also...we didn't know if there was still fighting, if we would be able to land. We didn't hear anything from the steamship line. They didn't make any announcements. We knew nothing. At least, I didn't. Maybe some others knew more. I don't know.

Q: So what happened when you got to the reception center?

A: Well, I got some soup. And I was very spoiled. You see, we had one cooks in the hotel; obviously, we had cooks. I wanted a cook, I wanted this, and I don't like that. And I was really a spoiled brat. And I got a bowl of soup there that I couldn't get it down. And I know I took something of the 75 cents and went and bought a candy bar. I learned the hard way. I had to survive. I learned it, but it wasn't easy for a spoiled brat like me.

Q: What did you go to then?

A: Uh, well, we stayed there for about 2 weeks in this reception center. And my mother is very resourceful, as I said earlier. She met the director of the one of the youth committees that had sprung up. And found a job, very rapidly. They needed some help. There were no social workers in Shanghai. So she said she can do this, she can do that. And I guess I learned this from her. I bluffed my way through everything. And so she got a job. In Shanghai, money...it doesn't take much. You know, an American dollar would last you maybe months. It doesn't take much. So after two weeks, we found a room in a Japanese section of Hongkou, in which lived a Japanese family and a ship's captain and another refugee family. And uh my mother started working; and I stayed home with a flyswatter and killed flies. And my mother wrote a letter home to my father, complaining I am not doing anything all day long except catch flies. All of those crazy things I remember. Because I didn't know what to do. Where would I go? I had no job. I couldn't speak the language.

Q: Your mother wrote to your father. Did you ever hear back? What happened when the war broke out?

A: Yes, I have a couple of handwritten letters from my father. And also a Red Cross letter, later on, from my sister. And uh later on, got word that they were sent east; and that was the last I heard of them.

Q: Where was the last that you knew your sister was?

A: Sent east.

Q: From Breslau?

A: I don't know if it was Theresienstadt [**Czech:** Terezín] or where. I don't know. Never found out.

Q: Your father?

A: Yes, my father, too. Never knew what happened to him, where he was sent, where he died. Many things. I don't know. Never found out.

Q: How did the... Did the start of the European war affect you there in Japan? Did that have any affect on the community or on life there? In '39?

A: Well, I guess um we were so concerned with surviving on a day-to-day basis, by that time it got summer. And the summer in Shanghai is the greatest enemy. Besides food, learning how to eat, learning how not to eat, that a drop of water...a drink of water can kill you. Oh, incidentally, very early on I developed a double-sided pneumonia--pneumonia and pleurisy--wound up in one of those makeshift uh hospitals, a converted house. You know, like you see

in "Emperor in the Sun." One of those things. And I also had a very high fever and there was...my mother got me there in a rickshaw. I almost jumped out of the rickshaw, somehow; and she must have told the coolie to keep the two legs high so I wouldn't jump out. Because I was delirious by that time. And the hospital was run by a committee. I know I was delirious. Because I remember one of the scenes where there was a room and there were all men lying around there, with practically nothing on; because you were lying, sweat was running down your body. And summer, the humidity is about 90-95 percent, and the humid...temperature is about that. So it is horrendous. I remember... How much is real, I don't know. I remember the doctor coming in with a syringe and a long needle, and giving what I found out later was a spinal--what you call a "spinal tap"--to another young man. And not much later he was carried out. And I remember the next day, the same thing happened. There was somebody else lying there and he was carried out. And I remember...I remember only a doctor coming to my bed, and I thought he had a syringe in his hand. And weak as I was, I remember I just about doubled up like this and kicked as hard as could right where it hurt most. He was just reeling... And he never came back anymore. Well, I survived it.

Q: You were saying that your mother told the coolie to keep you. How did the Chinese, the Japanese, react to the Jewish community? Tell me about that.

A: Well, the Chinese did not react at all. You see, neither the Chinese nor the Japanese really ever had any contact with the Jews. Except uh they knew they were whites. The whites usually were the powerful class. Those colonial empires. The International Settlement. That is how we... That is the reason we didn't need a visa. The British lived there for... since 1840, or whenever it was; and the French had the French Concession. But they never had any contact with Jews. But what was strange that there was a group of whites that didn't have any money. Well, they had something like it from the... After the Bolshevik Revolution, the White Russians had come to Shanghai, you see. But still, we were poorer yet. So the Chinese didn't react. The Japanese, who were the real power in Shanghai, didn't react. At least, at that time. I lived with Japanese in one house, became very good friends, went bar hopping with them, did business with them later; and they were very correct.

Q: How did Pearl Harbor...how did the war effect what happened? What changes came? When you landed there, you got a part-time job. Your mother was working. What changes took place with the community?

A: Great, great, great changes. A lot had happened in between. Pearl Harbor--I should say between that I joined the Shanghai Volunteer Corps, which was a subsidiary of the British Army. It was founded, I believe, in 1847, after the Boxer Rebellion for the defense of Shanghai. And I did not join during the Jewish Corps, which was primarily Russian Jews; but a transport company. I was driving for armored vehicles-- lorries, things like this. It was very advantageous, because I could get a good meal once in awhile. I had a uniform. So I joined that. And I was very active in a scout group--British Boy Scout Association. So then I did some work, my mother was working; so we got by. And we knew the war would break out. We read the papers. We had English language papers. We had all kind of papers. The

Jewish community really developed out of the...moved into the slums, and we built this community; until it was later on known as "Little Vienna." And we knew the war was coming. But what could we do? We couldn't prepare for it, except trying to get by and survive on a daily basis. We were fortunate we were not among the 8,000 that were in a camp. So we were at least in a room, and the room even had a WC--a water closet. Which was very important.

Q: Tell me about the people in the camp. Was the camp in Shanghai? Tell me about that.

A: There was several camps that were called "heime." "Heim"--home, euphemism for home. They were camps that had been established by the various committees, and then later on [by] the Joint Distribution Community, to house those destitute refugees that couldn't even afford a room or had no money coming from relatives in the United States. And these camps were converted barracks, converted schools, where they were being fed and housed on a daily basis. For most of us, I think, that was a way station; because we had relatives in the United States, and we had an affidavit to come to the United States stating that we would not become a public burden if we were to come. But, as you know, the quota did not permit us to come to the United States.

Q: Explain to me. You had relatives, but you ended up in Shanghai?

A: We had relatives in Washington, D.C. And my wife, whom I met later and married later, had relatives. But the quota [that] was established was so small that we could not get a visa. So we, as well as many other thousands, regarded Shanghai as a temporary way station. And then after the quota number would be called, we would leave Shanghai for the United States. Pearl Harbor stopped it. On the morning of the 8th of December--the other side of the International Dateline--our window... We lived up in a little attic room, with a WC one floor below. Our windows almost shattered, cracked. That was when the Japanese blasted the British warships point blank out of the water. American warships surrendered. I knew that that was it. I immediately dressed in my uniform to report for duty. And I walked along the streets of Hongkou to get to the bridge. There is a bridge across the Soochow Creek, which separates Hongkou from the International Settlement--where I, incidentally, stood guard quite frequently with the Japanese. And this...like the British soldiers, you know; you walk up and down so many paces without pulling a muscle. And everybody walking across there, trying to make you laugh. And I tried to get there and report for duty. And I saw...when I got on one of the main drags I saw the columns, the Japanese columns, by the hundreds--if not thousands--marching to the International Settlement. And I saw what was happening. So I quickly turned around, went to the alley, took off my helmet, my insignia; and quickly got out of uniform and headed back. It would have been a disaster, you know, seeing a British soldier among the Japanese troops there. So things started tightening up, as far as the Japanese were concerned. They got a little bit more violent. We were under the occupation of the Imperial Japanese Naval Landing Party. And the Kempeitai⁴--which was the Japanese

⁴ Actually, these were the Japanese secret police.

gendarmarie--which was a brutal lot, an especially brutal lot. Even Japanese civilians went out of the way to not get into trouble with them. So things got a little tighter. Some businesses closed; of course, everybody was affected by that. Some of my friends were taken prisoner of war. First, they had their arm bands identifying them as British and Americans. Then, through the Volunteer Corps, I met a Britisher who asked me-- through another friend of mine, Pete was his name, who committed suicide, unfortunately--if I could provide him with some information occasionally. That took place over a period of meetings. Wanted to know my attitudes towards the Japanese, and everything. And then he said if I could help him get information; I was very eager to do so. And I tried. It would involve planting rumors; which we measured, you know--how long would it take... In a certain area you plant a rumor; how long does it take before it gets back to you. As to ascertain troops strengths in certain areas, which...

Q: You were a British spy?

A: Unofficially, you might call it this. I have a...I never received any recognition for it. You can't. But I have a medal--which the museum has, incidently--from the British Boy Scout Association for services rendered during occupation. Yes.

Q: The Japanese were allies of the Germans. How did they treat you as Jews? Did they arrest you? Did they subject you to any hardships as Jews?

A: Not until 1943. I didn't mention that it was to our consternation we realized we were under the Japanese--who were Axis partners. And as I found out later on, the Nazis tried very hard to persuade the Japanese to do with us what they did to the rest of the Jews in Europe. I found later on that Colonel Josef Meisinger--the Butcher of Warsaw, he was called--plus a fellow from...Puttkammer, from Bergen-Belsen⁵, and a third Nazi--whose name I can't recall right now--had a meeting with Japanese officials around 1942. They went to Tokyo, trying to talk to the Japanese. They refused. You see, under the oriental religions--Buddhism, Taoism, Shintoism--they really do not practice hate toward other religions. And there was another factor involved, why they preserved us. Shall I go into the story of what happened in 1904? During the Japanese/Russian War⁶, under the Tsar, the Japanese, as well as the Russians, needed finances. They both applied for finances from the United States. They both went to the investment company [of] Kuhn, Loeb, and Schiff. Mr. [Jacob] Schiff hated the Tsar, because the Tsar was anti-semitic; but Schiff made a substantial loan to Japan, which helped Japan's war effort against Tsarist Russia. Incidently, Schiff later on was received by the Emperor himself, and received the Order of the Rising Sun. At the same time, there was

⁵ Baron Jesco von Puttkammer served as head of the German Information Bureau, a Nazi propaganda office, in the German Consulate in Shanghai. He was mistaken for a commercial attaché by one Japanese official with whom he had dealings.

⁶ Officially: The Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905).

some young Japanese officers that, at the border or somewhere, come across the Russian edition--was the original edition--of the Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion, which claims Jews practically run the world and own the governments and own the banks, and all that stuff. They never met a Jew before. "Fascinating people! Wish we could ever meet those people, you know. Maybe we could utilize them. We have whole Manchuria they laid upon us today. Maybe we can resettle them in Manchuria." And these young officers became advanced, of course, with the Japanese government. And, eventually, became the Jewish experts in Shanghai. They...we were under their control. They believed every word of what they had heard. So they were very cautious. "We have to protect these people so we don't get in trouble with their relatives in England and in America." As a matter of fact, before the war, they persuaded the leadership of the Jewish communities to send a cable to Morgenthau,⁷ trying to stop the impending war. As if they had any power to do so.

Q: Let's move on. What were they actually doing to you? You say that things changed in 1943. What happened in '43?

A: Well, the pressure was so strong. They refused what... Meisinger had proposed three solutions: medical experiments, a camp--in a Yangtze area, on an island--and the most plausible one was to load us all out on barge, load us on barges, tow us out to sea and scuttle the barge. All 18,000 of us. The Japanese refused. There was some other things that...things that leaked out. And the Japanese said, "**We** would never do anything like that." So I don't know really how much was resented or didn't want to do it. It was not Tokyo. Because Matsuoka⁸ really went on record--I believe it was Matsuoka: "We will not harm the Jewish population." It was a matter of official record. But the Japanese didn't have to report to Tokyo on that. They could have done it. As I understand it. So in 1943, February 1943, they issued a proclamation that as of May 18, all stateless refugees had to assemble in approximately a square mile area, where most refugees already lived, in what was called a designated area--the euphemism for ghetto. Everybody living outside had to move in. Now, you should know that this area--about 1 square mile--was already populated by approximately 100,000 Chinese. So I once figured it out; it must have had at least twice the density of Manhattan. Uh, there were no rooms available. Now many of the old uh batavo (ph) had been rebuilt. But still, if you lived outside--my wife once with her parents lived on Bablinger Road and Hardoon Road--how do you find a room? Enormous prices. Blackmail. Enormous prices were demanded. And huge exchanges were made. A nice modern apartment with steam heat for a little room--no kitchen, no bath, no toilet, no WC. Or... So in a certain time, everybody had to move in there.

Q: [inaudible]

⁷ FDR's Secretary of the Treasury was Henry Morgenthau.

⁸ Yotsuke Matsuoka was Japan's Foreign Minister at this time.

A: It was a ghetto. It was surrounded by barbed wire. And we were under uh volunteer service--called the Pao Chia⁹ -- under the Japanese uh supervision. Self-defense, kind of self-protection. They wore arm bands. And they had to be at the ghetto exits, entrances, to guard against anybody leaving who was not authorized. And at that time, conditions were such that the ghetto was governed by the very brutal, sadistic Japanese named Ghoya. He was paranoid, he was a psychopath, and he called himself the "King of the Jews." He was under Kubota.¹⁰ Kubota was one of those officers that I mentioned earlier. I could talk an hour about Ghoya, what he did. He was so...he had such an inferior complex, he would ask you... You stood in line for a day to get a pass if you still had a job outside. You leave the ghetto provided you got a pass from him. The pass could be valid for one day or for months, up to his pleasure, for certain areas of the city. And you had to be back in the ghetto for a certain time of the day. And he started interrogating you. "Ah, your English too good. No pass." Or: "You don't speak English. No pass." And if he didn't like you, he would jump on the desk and slap you. And if it really got bad, he would send you for one night into the bunker. The bunker itself was a death sentence. One night. Because a bunker was full of typhoid. Typhoid. If you got out of the bunker the next day, it would take about a week or two before you got ill; but every knew already you have about two weeks to live.

Q: How did you eat? How was food brought in? How did the ghetto survive?

A: Well, I again had a job. I became a night shift supervisor in a bakery. There were two bakeries that baked bread for the camps. And the bakers were the old style. You know, you pushed the wood in, lit the wood, and then you scrapped the wood out. And I had a corps of about 12 bakers, Chinese bakers; with one supervisor, Chinese supervisor. And I ran the bakery at night. And part of my pay were two rolls. You know, about 13 ounces; I believe what you call the French or Italian bread. Nice. I took it home--fresh warm bread, straight out of the oven. I would share it with my wife.

Q: Your wife? You suddenly mentioned your wife.

A: Yeah. OK. So many things happened all at once, it is hard to do it chronologically. As I said, I was involved in the scouts. And there was a youth group called the Chaverim, to which there was some boys, girls. And there was a young rabbi who said it would be nice to get these together. Our scout group, the 13th August, and the scouts were all Jewish refugees. So I met my future wife then, planning for a big charity ball that was held, benefit ball. The ball, in a Jewish club, that was in the International Settlement, but was for the benefit of the Japanese. But since we were the scouts we would, of course, preparation. And I still have a picture of my best friend and I--both in tux--and my girlfriend at that time, long dress. It's incongruous, I know. And I also remember this event, because I made a mistake of going to

⁹ These were the Jewish auxiliary police.

¹⁰ Tsutomu Kubota was in charge of the Bureau of Stateless Refugees in Shanghai.

the bar with a couple of friends to ask for a drink. When somebody called a round of drinks, I said, "I will buy a round of drinks." And it set me back one month's wages, because they were imported drinks. Which I didn't know. And I had to quickly go and round up some money, borrow some money, to pay for the drinks.

Q: Was your wife there? Tell me about this young girl you met?

A: Well, I met her in a bookstore. I was selling books by that time. You see, I didn't know English. So, I was working first for this Mr. Zahlinger. Let me start from the beginning. The first job I got was for a toy store. Russian. And I lived with a Russian family during the day, had lunch with them, and opened a branch office. So I became the branch manager. And I started making a little money. And it was half the store; half the store was a Chinese bookstore called "Home of Books," selling English language books. Pirated editions, because they did not recognize the copyright. And then this business didn't go. And then Mr. Zahlinger opened office furnishing company, selling oil typewriters and Monroe calculators. That is how I got into office machines and computers later on.

Q: Your wife came in here.

A: And then I didn't work for Mr. Zahlinger anymore. I started working for "Home of Books." And there I started reading, English. And I went to the movies, reading American movies with Chinese subtitles; and put two and two together. And then my wife was supposed to... She worked in a Western art gallery, selling antique books--rare books. And she was supposed to be on committee with me for the charity ball. So that's how we met.

Q: I am a little bit worried because of where we are with the time. So let...you met your wife. How did you come to get married? Was it a relatively short courtship? Tell me something and how was the wedding?

A: Very proper. Because my wife's mother was very... Her upbringing was such, you know, that I wasn't even permitted to go to the movies with my wife without anybody else present. I think I was already fairly well along, after knowing her for a year before I even had a chance for even the first kiss maybe. So, unfortunately, my mother-in law...I think in 1942--I am sorry. No, it was already the ghetto--after '43. She contracted bacillary [**NB:** bacterial] dysentery, and died in one of these hospitals. So I didn't get along with my mother; and my wife didn't get along with her father. And we had been going, what you call, steady already for quite awhile. She had come from Berlin by the civilian railroad. And her mother... And so we decided to get married. The question is, where do you live? And she had lived with her father and her mother in a little, very small room--with 3 couches, very narrow couches, and suitcases. Nobody had any furniture there. So some of our friends knew that we wanted to get married. But they finally twisted her father's arm to live together with somebody else and give us this room. So we got married.

Q: So you lived there? Tell me about the end of the war. What happened at the end of the war?

How did the war end for you?

A: Well, there were constant rumors. We had access to a shortwave--which was sealed, but we had access to it. So there were rumors. And then we heard there was peace and some of the hotels weren't occupied. And the police station rebelled, because it wasn't peace yet. We lost a few. And I also wound up on a firing squad, when I was outside the designated area.

Q: So at the end of the war you went where?

A: Well, now, that's part of...

Q: [inaudible]

A: Well, the war finally came to an end. We heard that there was. The "goodwill mission" came, quote unquote.¹¹ This was a group of army officers, and Manny Siegel from the Joint, that came to our ghetto area. And we were told that there would be...in this group compound, in this Jewish group compound, where they raised an American Flag and had a ceremony. And that was the end of the ghetto.

Q: How did the war actually end for you? Did you hear it on the radio? Did you see planes or what? How did it actually end for you?

A: What I do remember of that period is one of the newspapers, I believe it was the 7th of August 1945, a little column from the Domi news agency--the Japanese news agency--stating "An Atomic Bomb Was Dropped on Hiroshima. No Considerable Damage Resulted." Or something to that effect. I don't...I am trying to find this news article; I don't quite really remember it. I don't exactly remember it. So we didn't know what an atomic bomb was. But it came with a...we saw that all the Nazi flags disappeared, the big Japanese flags disappeared. The Nazis, the Japanese was still in control for quite awhile. They were appointed to keep control, you see. Which we didn't know, but it was rather uncomfortable then. But we celebrated with one can of jam that we had saved.

Q: I believed you ended up by working for the Americans. Were the Americans the occupiers?

A: Yes. Yes. Both my wife and I, there were again rumors that the Americans were hiring and paying gold dollars. American dollars called gold dollars. So, by that time I spoke fairly well English already, I think. And I came to a building, many people all trying to get in the same little door there. And people...American soldiers with white armbands saying "MP"--I didn't know what "MP" stands for. And they're trying to push through there. And I also remember there came a...Pat, the British contact of mine, was just released from camp. He came, escorted by some MPs, through that throng. And he saw me and I saw him. So he

¹¹ This was the American Rescue and Goodwill Mission.

pushed his way through, and he grabbed me and got me in. I was one of the first refugees to get a job. I was inside there; there was a sergeant sitting there, American sergeant: "Want a job?" "Sure!" "What can you do? Can you drive a truck?" "Sure I can drive!" My first job...I had a first job as check out on the wharf, heavy vehicle operator, grease monkey... Until finally we moved to Nanking, where I became a very high paid civilian for the United States Air Force advisory group to Chiang Kai-shek.

Q: All this time you have had relatives in America, and you haven't been able to get here? What happened? When did you finally make it?

A: After the war, we had contact with our relatives and my wife had contact with her relatives. They again contacted the State Department; we contacted the consulate in Shanghai--who were was less than helpful. And we just have to wait for a quota. And it was only when I was in Nanking I heard I should come to the consulate. And I was working rather hard for my General McConnell. I had to fly on military time, on military aircraft, to Shanghai. And I passed everything. Then came the health exam. "I am sorry, you won't pass. Your pulse is too fast." Back to Nanking. And I reported to the officers, "You will have to call me back." So there was talk between General McConnell, the chief of Armed...Air Force Surgeon General, and the embassy. I am sorry. I got a total health examination from the Surgeon General. Because of the Embassy, the Army doctor. "Nothing wrong with Ernie Heppner. Sorry, you have to fly back...back to Shanghai, to have your pulse rechecked." This is perhaps indicative of the problems, how difficult the State Department made it for the Jew to get into the United States.

Q: What did you know about your family? When did you learn about the Final Solution? What did you know about your family?

A: We heard before that there were some rumors coming through of what had happened in Europe, but then the first communication came from my brother to...from England. His parents-in-law happened to live in Shanghai. So they had contacted them. We had contact. And we heard there was no sign of life from my father, my sister, other relatives. Later friends, after a little bit you started to think about other names and about people. You couldn't even talk about it because everybody had the same problem. Everybody was trying to search and what happened, when did it happen, what happened? You lived with that for awhile until you just, I couldn't comprehend, you couldn't comprehend it. I mean, who can comprehend it, you see, what really happened?

Q: What about your...?

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

TAPE #3

Q: Let me take you back to the years in the ghetto. I believe you were subjected to some rather nasty bombing? Tell me about that.

A: Well, we felt very safe. There were bombings going on all the time. We could hear it in the distance. We knew and heard that American forces, that the war had finally turned. You see the first years, '42, '43, the war went bad for allies. We were very worried. Then it started to turn, and when we heard the American bombers and something you could see, our spirits rose. And we felt safe because we knew that the Americans knew the location of our ghetto. And besides also in the ghetto was the largest jail in the world. And there were some American prisoners of war in there. So we were not concerned about the attacks. Then on the 17th of July, I changed shifts. The day supervisor asked me to take the day shift in the bakery. Which was just around the corner where I lived. And I came home for lunch, I bought my two breads home, and that's not very nourishing, but it's nice, fresh bread, so I made a meal. And just finished that and I was ready to go to work, and we were just married in April, you know, newly married, and my wife said to me, "Do me a favor, I have bad feelings, I have a precaution alarm. Stay, stay awhile longer, would you?" So I was still, I said, "Okay, I'll stay." And that moment, we heard the bombers approaching. And as always before, I climbed out of the window to see better. Some of them were low level flights and you could even see them. So I hung onto the window sill and waved to them as they passed by, except this time we were the target.

Q: These were American bombers you were waiving at?

A: B-29's. Later on, I met one of the bombers. We became a secondary target because the Japanese had put fuel dumps in our area, ammunition dumps, and a transmitter that directed naval communications, and Americans had to knock it out. So we got hit. To this day, I don't know how we got down from the attic to the ground floor. Everything collapsed around us. The houses were very, very flimsy built. We took fairly heavy casualties and the fire started in the lane there. And I was not one of the guards that had to guard the ghetto. I was the assistant fire chief, so have you ever stood on top of a burning building to get a fire brigade going? It is impossible. But then I went back to the bakery. I want to see what happened there and when I got there, this was one of the worst hit lanes. There was nothing left. My office was on the second floor and as usual, the foreman had laid flat on my desk and fanned himself, and he was down under the boiler and everything else. And I want to see if there is still anybody alive. There must have hundreds and hundreds of casualties there. And I made my way to see the store room. We had just gotten a load of flour. And I saw two Chinese trucks roll up with Chinese soldiers, puppet soldiers. So I hid to see what they were doing. They came into the store and loaded up the flour, loaded up the flours. So as they were driving off, I ran up to the truck and jumped into the truck and hid among the flour. So as we rolled down through the ghetto, I saw one of my friends there. And I called out to him, from the rear of the truck, what was happening. "Call Wallach"--the owner of the bakery, the Russian Jew. So I didn't know where we were going. We left the ghetto. But anyhow I was

captured and arrested.

Q: Why were you captured and arrested?

A: Because they took the flour to the barracks, you know. They found me among the flour at the rear of the truck. But they didn't know what to do with me and tried to beat me up. Not much happened and the next day I was released because Mr. Wallach paid \$500,000 for me, in Chinese currency. That must have been, maybe, \$200 some dollars.

Q: You were taken into a Chinese puppet barrack because you were in back of the lorrie which was stealing. Then you were released. Who paid the money to release you?

A: Mr. Wallach. He wanted the flour back.

Q: The owner of the bakery?

A: We got the flour, we got the flour back so we could at least furnish part of the bread for the camps. See the camps were very badly off because the Joint had stopped sending money to Shanghai. The State Department, under the act of trading with the enemy act, you could not lawfully or legally transfer funds to the Japanese occupation in Shanghai and they didn't take a hint as I understand to route the money to other countries. So these poor Jews in the camps had to get by on 3 cents per day per person.

Q: How did you get 3 cents?

A: I had a job. I am talking about those 8,000, 9,000 that were in camps. They were down to nothing. Some of them didn't even have literally a shirt or trousers anymore. They were walking along with burlap bags around them. We lost about a total of 3,000 people out of 18,000 to the starvation, disease, heat prostration, some due to Japanese torture, malnutrition. What bothers me in this whole period is that so many Jews could have left Germany, could have left the concentration camp.

Q: You said there was malnutrition. Does that mean there was lawlessness as well? How was the community cohering at this point? Was there a sense of community still at this point?

A: Yes, very well disciplined as a whole. I do remember, I heard about one case, a lawyer--a Austrian gentleman--was caught stealing a piece of bread from somebody else in the bunk next to him. And he was so embarrassed he committed suicide. All in all, the discipline among the community was extraordinary. There was practically no criminality. I think during the ten year period there were two murders. We governed ourselves. We had our own community organization, did our own arbitration court, the right to appeal. So it was really well functioned. What did not function so well was the various committees. They didn't have experience, until the Joint--and Ms. [Laura] Margolies there from the Joint, who was a trained social worker. She arrived sometime in 1941, and then she was interned as an enemy.

So she had only a few scant months to really do a job. But whatever she did, she did extremely effectively.

Q: How did most of the community that survived in Shanghai survive? Was it because of the Joint? Could that be true?

A: No, that wouldn't be fair. Because the Joint, I think, sent until the war ended, I think maybe... I don't have the amount. Maybe \$2-1/2 million. But, you see, that was before Israel, before the Holocaust. The Joint was in the business of raising money. But there was no money. They didn't have it. And, unfortunately, some Jews from the Shanghai Council tried to persuade and cabled back to Europe, "Do not send any more Jews here." And the American government finally cabled to various other steamship agencies, tried to prevent more Jews from going to Shanghai. And Jewish organizations were involved in that. To prevent more Jews from going to Shanghai, because there was no money there.

Q: New Jews in Shanghai would say the same thing?

A: These were the old time Jews. Yes.

Q: I believe you were arrested on one occasion?

A: Yes, it was just shortly before Pearl Harbor, fortunately. We were on a scout trip on bicycles on a Sunday, came to an area outside Shanghai. We had no green, we had no lawn, no trees. Nothing. And besides, I wanted to see what was going on around Shanghai. So we had a fox hunt. You know what it is. Yah. A fox hunt is one fellow on a bike would lead the way; and we didn't have paper. Paper was very precious and hard to come by. Had a handful of rice and scatter it, and the hounds would try to follow the fox and find it. And we got to village where the chickens had already picked up the rice. But, anyway, we finally find the fox. He got into Japanese barracks area, military area. And there is a Japanese guard. And there is a foreigner on a bike scattering rice on the ground, which is a holy concept. Symbolic. Same as bread to us. So he arrested him. And one after another, we got in the trap until they had all of us. And no communication. And so we finally got on a truck, tossed on a truck; we were hustled on the truck, and driven to headquarters. Behind the headquarters was a building. One side was a building, and the other side was a rifle range. Saw the targets there. And there were several squads doing target practice; and they line us up there. It was not a very comfortable feeling. We didn't know what was happening. And knowing the Japanese, you see, you shoot first and ask questions later. We are so used to seeing dead people, babies, every day in the street. The life is absolutely nothing there. I have seen people murdered point blank there. So we started communicating, but they called some Japanese which was POWs camp. Apparently from there, they came from a different area. They couldn't understand our China...Chinese Kaishengka dialect. So things didn't look good. All of a sudden, they tried to find out who we are and what we are doing. So my friend--who is in Australia now--said, "Deutschka (ph)."--Deutsche, in Japanese. "Deutschka? Deutschka?" So everything was on hold. So sometime later, the staff car came up. High

ranking officers jumped out. And as you may know, Japanese officers are sent to Germany for training. Out came two officers who spoke fair German. "Who are you? What are you?" You try to explain fox hunt to them. But we could at least tell them we are Germans. We were stateless, you see. As stateless, we have less right than a dog in a street. They could shoot us, and nobody else would ask questions. So we heard that he called an aide and talked to him; and the aide disappeared while he talked to us. And the aide came back shaking his head. And then he said...he let us go. Promised to never come to this area again, and had to promise we would meet him and give him German lessons. Later on, I found out through Pat--my British contact--he had called the German Embassy to verify who we were and nobody answered. If he would have found out we are not Germans but Jews in a restricted area there...

Q: What was the situation with your mother? Did she leave with you in '47? What happened to her during the war? Did she keep her job all the time? How did she...?

A: No, she kept her job until she... I had a letter from Miss Margolies of the Joint, as a matter of fact. She had to be discharged, because there were no more funds for her anymore. So we had soup kitchens. We lived in one part of the ghetto; and my wife lived in another part of the ghetto with her father. And then I moved in there. My mother also had a handcrafted fur coat, that she had done in Kraków. The Polish furriers were the best in Europe. And she had smuggled it across the border. And she had this; and she sold this to the General Manager of Standard Oil of the Far East. And we lived on that for, I think, about three years. So we sold all our belongings. A Parker fountain pen would become a symbol for Chinese businessmen. Brought good money. We sold everything down to what we just...the bare necessities, you see.

Q: What did it do to you? You felt German when you left? Did you feel more Jewish as a result of being there? How did it actually affect you, Shanghai?

A: Well, I must say, before we emigrated, we finally didn't eat kosher anymore. It wasn't possible. You said, you know, this is really not the intent of being a Jew. You wouldn't be any less of a Jew by not eating kosher. So having solved that problem, I would say, as a whole the community became tighter knit. And those Jews that were perhaps Agnostics or not religious at all--Atheists--became conscious Jews again. Very much so. We had holiday services with our own synagogues. We had quite a few rabbis there, services, it was a very integrated Jewish life there. Perhaps like a shtetl. The foretaste of life in Israel in a way. Very cohesive bible community; based on nothing, financially. But it worked.

Q: Why would religious feelings become stronger? Europe was in wreckage, people were refugees, what was it that was pulling people back to Judaism?

A: Well, I think it was adversity, to try to survive on a daily basis. I think that must be it. People seemed religious. I think when people are on dire straits, you know, perhaps they turn to God again.

Q: Those people that you knew there, tell me what actually happened to the community? What became of the community? You, yourself, got to America. What about the rest of the community? How many died? What happened to them?

A: Out of nearly 18,000, 3,000 died, and there were several thousand White Russians from the Bolshevik Revolutions. Now the European refugee community lasted for 10 years ('38 to '48), completely disappeared. A few years ago, there was one Jew left. He is no more. It was a civilized community with a tremendous amount of culture. We had operas, operettas, plays, dramas performed. It is unbelievable what the Jewish community did there. It's all gone. Totally swallowed. As you know, Mao Zedong took over in '48, '49. I left in July 1947, with my mother and my wife and her father, on the troop transport. And there are no traces of the Jewish community anymore, at all.

Q: Where did the Jews go to?

A: Well, those that had relatives and an affidavit, of course, went to the United States. Quite a few went to Australia. Those that couldn't get a visa from the United States or didn't pass the very stringent health requirements went to Israel. By that time Israel had gained its independence, and they went to Israel.

Q: If you had but one statement to say about this whole period from Kristallnacht to the end of the war that you would wish to leave with somebody as to what it means, what it did to you, what would you say? What is the thing that affected you most? Was it Kristallnacht? Was it being in Shanghai.

A: Well, I think it was a conglomerate. It was, of course, Kristallnacht, seeing the temple, and seeing the free world stand by. In retrospect the free world knew what was happening and didn't move a finger. I saw how anti-semitism really preceded the whole Hitler period. The free world must share in the responsibility of what happened to 12 million people there, 6 out of the 12 million were 6 million Jews, and the lack of help originally by the Joint Distribution Committee that was unable to raise money and send professionals there. That was unfortunate. Later on, the Joint really got money back, got communication again through neutral countries, to feed the thousands of Jews there. The Joint did a tremendous job. I don't want to take anything away from the Joint, but the beginning, it was a disaster. So what it meant to me, I think it was a school. A tough school.

Q: What would you say to people looking at this tape later on? What would you, if you had the sum knowledge that this gives to you that you would wish to give youngsters who come to see it, what would you say to them? Is there something you would want to say to them about what has happened to you and your family.

A: Well, I think it has a meaning. It is definitely of importance for the younger generation, Jews and otherwise, to know what happened, because I think we have to involve ourselves in

Jewish life and in community life. We have to make sure that we involve ourselves in a democratic process, especially here in the United States. Because if we don't, if we are apathetic as the whole population is and the Jewish community is, we may wake up one day under a dictatorship. Most of the people are turned out by politics and politicians. And this is the danger that I see.

Q: Mr. Heppner, thank you very much, indeed.

[NB: MISSING TEXT THROUGHOUT THIS TRANSCRIPT]