

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Leo Hanin
January 22, 1999
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Leo Hanin, conducted by Ginger Miles on January 22, 1999 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Los Angeles, California 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 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.

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Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: This is an interview with Leo Hanin, conducted by Ginger Miles, on January 22nd, 1999, in Los Angeles, California. This is a follow up interview to a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum videotape interview conducted with Leo Hanin, in 1990. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum gratefully acknowledges Jeff and Toby Herr for making this interview possible. This is tape one, side A.

Answer: Nothing?

Q: This is one minute of silence --

A: Okay.

Q: -- in our location.

A: I have -- People, some of the people know me by four different first names. Why? How did it happen? When I was born, I was born in Lithuania, in a city called Vilnius. My parents were Orthodox Jews. They named me in Yiddish, which was -- the name was in my birth certificate, which was in Yiddish and in Polish, began with the name Labe. Labe in Yiddish means lion. It's a typical, Jewish sounding name. So, when we came to China, I was three years old and I -- when I was about five, I went to a Russian school to study the Ru-Russian language and all the other subjects. I -- I didn't want to say that my name was Labe, because it sounded too Jewish, with anti-Semitism and other things, I didn't want to be outstanding. So when they asked me what my name is, I said, "My name is Lowah or Leve, which in

Russian means lion. That's how I went through the Russian school. Then, when I was 17, my -- my father told me, said -- advised me -- suggested that I go to studying in a British school in Shanghai to st -- to learn the English language, which he said is important in order to get a job, in order to go ahead in life. So I went to Shanghai, I went to the British school. I didn't want to tell them neither my Yiddish name nor my Russian name, because it doesn't sound good. So I said my name, I became Leo, which means, in English, lion, same thing as the other two names. And that's how I stayed, for many, many, many years, until, in 1948, beginning of '49, we had to leave for Israel. When I came to Israel, I was drafted into the army and when they asked me what my name was, I said, "Leo." They said, "Well, you have to change your name, this is not a Hebrew name." He said, "You, from now on you will be Arie," A-r-i-e, which in Hebrew means lion. So, that's the same name and that's how I stayed and I said, "I don't want to change it any more." When I came to America, Arie, my social security is Arie, my driver's license is Arie, everything is Arie. Some people suggested, "Go on, change it, become Leo." I said, "No. Enough of that." I had some problems by the way, when I was working on my visa to come to the United States, I was in Tokyo -- I will tell you about it later. So, the -- the lady who was asking me questions, her name was Miss Bernard, in the -- in the American embassy, said, "What is this, how can one man has to have four names?" I explained to her, she says, ah, they don't -- she didn't -- I said, "I tell you what. I'll bring you a letter from the Israeli embassy in Tokyo, that will say that these four names mean the same thing in different languages." That was acceptable. And that's it. That's how my name was.

Q: And yet we know you as Leo?

A: Yeah. But I -- M-My documents, my checks, my social security, everything, everything I have is Arie.

Q: But do your -- What do your children call you?

A: Dad.

Q: What did your wife call you?

A: Leo. Leo, Leo, Leo. Sometimes when -- My wife also spoke Russian, it was -- it was Leve [indecipherable].

Q: So it's all right if I call you Leo?

A: Of course it's all right.

Q: So if -- if you don't mind, if we could just back up a little bit and name your mother and even her maiden name.

A: Yeah.

Q: And where she was from.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Your father and any brothers or sisters that you had.

A: Okay. My mother's name was Rachel, her maiden name was Rachel Schwartz. She was from a small place somewhere in Uk -- in Bela -- in Belarus, in -- in -- in -- in Russia. My father's name was Boris or Robert -- Boris, anyway, in Russian it was Boris. And my brother -- older brother, I have an older brother, his name is David. He and his family live in Nahariyya, Israel. My youngest sister, Sheelia, she lives also in Israel, in a place called

Giv'atayim, which is near Tel Aviv. They have extended families, nice children, grandchildren, etcetera. Now, my children, yes? Rebecca --

Q: Before we go to your children --

A: My wife.

Q: I know although you -- you left Vilna at a very early age --

A: Three years old.

Q: Do you have any relatives remaining there?

A: No, I di -- I didn't know. I never -- we never -- ma -- my parents never corresponded with anybody.

Q: And you nev -- so you never returned to Vilna after the war?

A: Never, oh, never, no never [indecipherable]

Q: Okay. And now let's go to your children.

A: My children all were born in China.

Q: And your wife, of course.

A: And my wife. My wife, Rebecca, she was born in -- in China also, but not in the same place where we lived, Shanghai. She was born in Harbing, which is another city in China. Her father, who -- he died very, very young. He was a soldier in the Russian army and they lived in Siberia first, in Russia, then when he died, they moved to China. And that's where I met her.

Q: She was Jewish also?

A: Oh yes, Russian Jewish, her background. Her name was Rebecca Lubarski, Interesting how I met her. She was a pretty young girl, about 14 or so, I was 17 or 18 and during the high holidays -- in Shanghai at that time, there was no synagogue -- during the high holidays, the Jewish community, our older people, got together and rented an apartment where they conducted the prayers for the Jewish high holidays, New Year and the Day of Atonement. And I -- I used to attend those services. At that time I was already working in an importing firm in -- they -- they gave me a job. I clerk in the office to learn the business. They were importing from England, from Germany, from Poland, textiles. Woolen textiles, there was a big market in China for textiles. And from England they imported some artificial silk, printed with beautiful red flowers. And it -- it was nice red flowers and I remember it. And then when I went to these services one day, I saw a -- a young, pretty girl in a dress with a red -- that material that we imported. That was such a surprise. And I looked at material and I said, "That's our material." Then I looked at her. I said to a friend of mine, I says, "That's the girl I like to meet. I think I'm going to marry her." And I did, six years later.

Q: Oh.

A: Was a very interesting story.

Q: Did you go over to her that day?

A: No, no, I didn't go with her that day, I met her later in a -- in a organization for young Jewish people. We met and then I started to take her out to the movies, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. [indecipherable]

Q: You had a courtship for --

A: Oh yes, for a long time, about six years.

Q: Six year courtship, wow.

A: I was 17. Because in 1933, or '34 -- '33, the firm that I was working for -- that's the beginning of another series of events which brings me to Japan, you see? They send me to Japan in 1937, before the war.

Q: From?

A: China to Japan, to open an office there.

Q: With your family?

A: No, I wasn't married yet.

Q: Okay.

A: No, wait a minute, 1936 they send me, I was married next year. '36 -- beginning of 1936, I went to Japan. I got married later in 1936, came back to Shanghai, married and took my wife to -- with me to Japan. The reason why the-they wanted to open an office in Japan -- it was a different Japan in those days, they started copying the British and the French textiles. They used to get samples from overseas and copy them in the Japanese factories and prices were much cheaper, so they said, "We want to import from Japan. Go to Japan, open an office." I was only what wa -- what was it, '36? 19 - 13 - 23 years old. I opened an office, I decided I have to learn Japanese because I'm dealing with the Japanese. I used to get samples, which I would bring to different manufacturers and they would copy it. Then I would export this merchandise to China. And then that was -- that was that period, that was

'36, then my -- my -- we corresponded with my girlfriend -- my -- my Rebecca and then she said, "Well, it's about time we got married." Whatever. So I came back to Shanghai, got married, took her with me to Japan in 1936 and continued with my job. In 1937, after nine months of marriage, my son was born. Now, my wife was a young girl, 19 - 20, she was very concerned to give birth in Japan, she didn't know the hospitals, Japanese doctors, she was used to her mama, you know. And mama was in Shanghai. So she told me, "I'm going to go back to Shanghai to give birth to our child." I said, "Well, if that's the way you feel," I wa -- she was afraid, I said, "Okay." I send her to Japan and there our es -- our son is -- early in 1937, March 29th, was born. She was in Shanghai, I was in Japan. And that's -- And that comes another very interesting cycle in my life. Always in ways, my life is cycles. I was -- Because that brings me to -- to the Fuguclan. You know the book Fuguclan, you read it, didn't you? Oh, the story of the jap -- of the Jewish refugees in Japan, what I was doing there. You know about that, don't you? If not, there is an article here.

Q: I want you to -- to tell about it here.

A: Well, we'll come back to this. I used to go to a small restaurant to eat over there, in Kovay, in Japan, 1937. And I needly -- I knew mostly all the foreigners that live at that time in Kovay, was a small city. Small, foreigner communities, some British, some American, some Germans, etcetera, etcetera. And I knew by face and by acquaintance, mostly all of them. I belong to the clubs, you know. So, I used to go to the small Japanese restaurant called Kovay kitchen. And I was there, one day I see new faces. Never seen these people before in my life, they are in Japan. It really was very rare that foreigners would come in

those days, first of all. In those days you had no planes, you had to go by boat and as -- it was --

Q: Was there a Jewish community in Kovay?

A: A very small Jewish community which was established in 1939, two years later, I'll tell you about this.

Q: But not when you came?

A: Not when I came.

Q: Okay.

A: There was a synagogue wh-which I attended. I used to be quite religious.

Q: There was a synagogue when you came?

A: But not -- You see -- You know what the Ashkenazian Jews are and the Sephardic Jews are? There were about 50 Sephardic Jewish con -- Jewish people living in Japan in those days, in Kovay. Jews from Iraq, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, North Africa, and a very few our people, which we call Ashkenazi Jews. You know, some Russian -- mostly Russian Jews. And we didn't get organized -- we used to -- I used to go to their -- to the -- to the Sephardic synagogue every Friday. They were organized better than we there, because we were -- very few of us. Anyway, so, as I told you, I was in that -- in that restaurant and I saw three new faces. I sat not far from them and as I was listening to their conversation, they were talking among themselves Yiddish, which was a very rare thing. I got very surprised, and very excited, I came up to them. I speak Yiddish, I talk to them and, "What do you doing here, what are you doing here?" They said, "Well, we came here to open an office. We are from

Panama. We have an office in Panama.” They’re exrom -- originally from Romania. They’re now in Panama and interesting again. You know the name Curaçao of course, the visas that [indecipherable]. They had an office in Curaçao, they had an office in Panama. And they were going to open an office because they were starting to buy a lot of merchandise. Business was really good over there. I said, “You’re going to open an office, what -- do you speak Japanese?” “No.” “Do you speak English?” “No.” “How are you going to operate an office?” “We speak Spanish, and of course, Yiddish.” I said, “Look, I can speak Japanese, I can speak English. I will help you to open an office, to hire people.” “Oh.” We’ll -- Became good friends. I was not -- not busy. We became very, very friendly and I helped them to establish an office. Of course, I didn’t want -- they offered me some money, I -- I refused. And we became very close friends. Three months later -- I think it was three months later, yeah, May, my wife sends me this -- a telegram, “I’m coming home with my s -- with our son.” That’s fine. So I came to the boys, I said, “Look, no more going around the nighttime to the nightclubs and then doing things which we were doing, young fellows. My wife is coming home with my son. Goodbye, good luck.” My wife came and I didn’t see them any more, from 1937 to 1939. In 1939, my firm transla -- transferred me back to Shanghai, with my son, my wife, went to Shanghai. He was three years old, went to Shanghai and I was working there, in the office in Shanghai and one day I have a telephone call. The guy speaks to me o-on the telephone, he speaks to me Yiddish. I said, “Who are you?” He said, “Don’t you remember me, we -- y-you -- we were in Japan, we went together. My name is Max.” “Oh, how are you Max? What are you doing in Shanghai?”

You know, in those days, this was not so simple. You couldn't fly by planes, 30 days by boat. It was -- It was a different wor-world. He says, "Look, I'm here already three days and I -- I would like you and your wife to come. I'm in the Park Hotel," which is one of the best hotels, "I'm here buying merchandise," which he was shipping to -- somebody shipping to - - to - -to Panama, to Curaçao, "and I want to talk to you." "Okay." "Come with your wife." I say, "Okay." Came with my wife, I [indecipherable] long talk, talk, talk. He says to me, "You remember there were three of us when you met us in -- in Kovay?" I said, "Yes." "Well, the third guy who was with us, was my cousin. He was managing our office in Japan. He was having a hard time, he didn't know any English, he didn't know any Japanese and he decided to go out on his own, to make his own business. We need somebody to run our office. Would you like to come and work with us in Japan?" 1939. War in Europe just -- just -- just started. I said, "I'm not -- I have a good job here, I'm not intention -- I have a small baby." So he smiled. Max was his name. He was about 20 years older than I was, a more seasoned guy.

Q: His last name?

A: Max -- Max Becker.

Q: Becker, okay.

A: He puts his hand in his pocket, like this, I remember, in his pocket inside his jacket. He takes out a paper. It was an agreement, made by a lawyer, with me. He knew so well that I'm not going to refuse his offer. When I opened the agreement, I -- I -- I couldn't believe it. It was about five times as much money as I was making. It was tremendous offer, I got

excited. Besides, all may -- sou -- may -- my expe-expenses in Japan, paid by the office. A car and a driver and a cook and the apartment, everything, beautiful. I said, "Shake." He says, "One condition. I'll shake hands with you, cause you see, this a contract between me and you." I say, "Yes, what is the condition?" "Can you write Yiddish? All our correspondence has to be in Yiddish, because we don't know English, we don't know Russian, we don't know Japanese, you don't know Spanish. So there is only one way we can correspond, Yiddish." I said, "Yeah, I know how to translate." "You got a job." And three months later, I left my other job, I took my wife, my son, Kobe. Kobe --

Q: That was you -- you went to Kobe now?

A: That was in 1939. That's the time -- you questioned about the Jewish community, we got organized in 1940 or so. I am working for Max, he's teaching me buying, really tremendous amount of merchandise. Had about 20 Japanese, an office and -- was a beautiful job, easy, but responsible situation. The name of the firm was Curaçao - Panama Trading Company, because there was -- we were shipping goods to Panama, to Curaçao, to Peru, to Chile. South American countries with [indecipherable] everywhere. You know, it was a different Japan in those days, it was not a -- the time of wa -- Japanese radios, television sets, cars, etcetera. It was toys and textiles and shoes and -- and underwear and -- and -- and blankets and tablecloths. All those things we were shipping there. And he says, "I'll stay with you two months, I'll teach you." Of course, I didn't -- I didn't know that merchandise, the pricing and everything. He stayed with me and that was the time, beginning of 1940, when the refugees -- the story of the refugees you know, they were coming with the Japanese

transit visas, started to come in. So, my good friend -- later, I was working for him in Japan, Mr. Ponvy, he was there.

Q: You worked for Mr. Ponvy and the same company?

A: Yes -- na -- at that time, no. I worked for Ponvy after the war. In '51, I came to -- back to Tokyo, that's another story. He was a very fine man, a leader, an organizer. And one day he came to me on a Sunday. H-H-He needed a secretary in a Jewish community to -- of course, he didn't know any English correspondence where we thought our organization, he says we're going to get organized.

Q: Where was he from?

A: He was born in Russia. His name was Ponivairski. In 1941, beginning before the war, he emigrated to the United States and he changed his name from Ponivairski to Ponvi. Mr. Ponvi -- Anatole was his first name -- was a wonderful man. A real leader, a real organizer and I was his secretary. I mean, not paid of course, just in the community. He says, "We have to organize the Jewish community." There were about 20 our people, Russian speaking Jews. We made a meeting, we got together, we organized. [indecipherable] organize, the first thing to do, you have to rent a place -- a place of worship. That's the first thing you do, and have an office. We've got to organize. Ponvi, he organized every -- he was a wonderful man. I think one day, on a Sunday, I remember, he was -- he came to my house with a telegram in his hand in English. This was the first telegram signed by six names from Lithuania -- from Kalmus, Lithuania. German sounding names. "We German Jews in Kalmus, Lithuania need Japanese transit visas. We are on our way to Argentina. The consul

here told us --" the consul was this man, Sukihara, "told us that we can -- he -- he can give us transit visas if Jewish community in Kobe will guarantee our stay here. Financial support, political standing, etcetera, etcetera." That was in 1940, be -- be -- middle '40. So, I went with him into the police station. The -- We -- They were taking care of all our affairs. And we told them, here is a telegram, we -- they said, "Will you guarantee?" "Yes, we guarantee, we --" We had a stamp. We -- Already we're organized, had a stamp. We guarantee. These people came. After about two weeks or so, they came with Japanese transit visas, but they had visas -- final visas to go to Argentina. I never met these people.

Q: Now, these would be signed by Sukihara?

A: Yes, this -- these were the first visas Sukihara signed. Then, the Polish situation started when Poland, in 1939 was invaded by Russia from one side and by Germany from the other side. Many Jews from Poland, many from Warsaw, Krakow and other cities escaped. They were afraid of the Germans, they were afraid of the Polish and where could they go? Lithuania. At that time, up north in Lithuania, Lithuania was an independent country. And where you find Jewish community there who could -- who -- they knew that they would take care of them. And they started smuggling themselves over from oc -- places occupied by the Polish one side or by the German on the other side. And they went -- That was before Germany attacked Poland -- Russia. They -- It escaped to Lithuania. And then they started this Curaçao visa story. You know the Curaçao visas, on the strength of which, the Japanese consul Sukihara was giving them transit visas, which we started getting telegrams, 10 people, 20 people, 100 people. Eventually we brought, with those visas, over 3,000 people.

Q: Now, before we go too far, I'm trying to weave in your own family life, alongside the story of the community.

A: Well, my wife was -- we -- w-we -- when the Jewish committee was organized, of course, I was busy. After office, I used to go there and there were telegrams, letters, we had to -- I was the only one who could speak and write in English. There was correspondence, with Jewish organizations all over, and people started to come from Poland. And they knew -- especially the religious people -- there were about a thousand religious people, rabbis and students, rabbinical students, organized in different groups. They would come for all their problems. They would come to me, because I was the only one who could understand them. Young as I was, they would come to me and I'll tell you some other stories which are very, I wouldn't say comical, but interesting, because they had their own problems, in spite of the fact they were refugees. Well, then our women, our wives, including my own Rebecca, got organized and they started to help the refugees, they had children. Children used to get sick, you had to take them to the hospitals, they spoke Japanese. So, they were helping them. Also, they started collecting clothes. Some people came naked, nothing on them. They started to collect clothes and give it to them and this was -- in -- in the evening. Then, when we got organized, under Mr. Ponvi's guidance and instructions, we got together and we rented a home, which we came -- on the ground floor was a synagogue, on top was offices and a kitchen. We hired some people, our women taught the Japanese chefs how to make good food, etcetera. And we were going there almost every day, especially the women, to play Mah Jong and to play cards and that was a social --

Q: Was it kosher?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: No, it wa -- it wasn't kosher.

Q: Now -- Now, in this same time period, did you have more children? When did your children come?

A: My -- The next children, my -- my -- my daughter was -- was number two, was born during the war. I was in Shanghai already. I will tell you how it happened that I went back to Shanghai.

Q: Okay.

A: Now, as I told you, the firm I was working for, Max Becker, was Panamanian. It was a foreign company under Panamanian flag. And I used to talk to Max and -- when he was teaching me how to -- mainly to buy the goods and the qualities and you know, [indecipherable] a lot of merchandise. And he says, "I'm going, you are ready. I ca -- You can take it over." Then one day I said to him, "Max, wh-where is your family, where is your family? Where is your father, where is your mother? You have any?" He says, "Yes." I says, "Where are they?" He says to me, "They are in Romania," in Bessarabia, which is part of Romania. I said, "Max, bring them over here. I mean, look what's going on. Hitler is marching all over the world." That was before Russia was attacked by Germany, 1941 -- June of 1941. He says, "My father is an older man," I don't know how old he was. "He's very Orthodox, he lives with my mother and my two sisters and I asked him many times to

leave Romania, Bessarabia and to come and we'll work something out." He says, "Where will I go? I don't know any languages." Shows me letters, he corresponds with his father, in Yiddish, of course. "Where shall I go? My home is here, my business is here." "What kind of business --" He was buying and selling some cows and -- and -- and -- and what do you call, sheep. And -- And I said, "Max, the ground is -- is burning under the -- under the [indecipherable] under the legs of our people. They're Jews." He says, "Look, I'm asking them to leave, they said they can't go." I said, "Tell them to come here to Japan, same way the other refugees are coming. I will take care of them and we'll work something out, but get them out." He says, "Look, I --" and he shows me letters he writes to them, was about six weeks before he left. He says to his father, "I still insist and I want you to leave with Mama and the two sisters, 15 - 16, and come here to Japan." Well, so he -- His father writes to him, "You -- I think you ha -- must have gone out of your mind. I should go to Japan, an Orthodox Jew like me? What am I going to do there?" You know. I said, "Max, tell him, if he decides to leave, let me know. I don't know how, what we -- I will do, but I will -- we're bringing thousands of Polish Jews, we'll bring them out somehow. And then wa -- I -- I don't want to worry about what's going to happen then. But get out from -- away from the Germans." He writes the father, his father a letter, he shows me the letter. He says, "If you decide to leave, let Mr. Hanin know about it and then he will -- he will see his way to -- to bring you over here." And he left. He left back to Panama and I was standing there and then Germany attacks Russia, in 1941. Russians occupy Romania, which at that time was independent country, Bessarabia, under Soviet occupation. I get a telegram from Max's

father. It's in Yiddish, but of course, English letters. I'll never forget it as long as I live.

"The book that Max wanted to send me, I need it very urgently." I understood. Well, how am I going to get him out of there? It's already under Soviet occupation.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is tape one, side B, Leo Hanin. -- Going to make a little diversion and --

A: No, you can -- you can change it.

Q: Focus on the --

A: Now go back --

Q: -- the family life.

A: -- we go back to --

Q: Second child.

A: -- 1942, when the war started, '41. Have I told about that, I don't remember? Anyway, I -
- if I repeat myself, it's alright. During -- 1941, December the eighth, Pearl Harbor, I was in
Kobe with my wife and my son. I was working for the Panamanian firm, I remember I told
you. When Panama declared war on Japan, the military came to my office, it was a
Panamanian, enemy firm. I was not -- I was a stateless immigrant without any documents,
without any citizenship. I had my permit to come to Japan because I was working there.
Every six months I had to renew it and it was no problem. My son, who was born in China,
but also stateless. My wife was stateless person. Anyway, in 1942, when Panama declared
war on Japan, the firm became enemy firm. The military came and they put stamps on the

safe, whatever merchandise I had there, whatever money, everything was arrested and I was left with-without my payment, without money, without anything, because, you know, it was -- it was running. And they said, "Look, you are not an enemy subject, but the firm you are working for is enemy, so we have to -- to take these steps." They put seals on the safe and whatever. And they said, "You can do what you want." And that was in December of 1942. In February, things were getting very difficult. Food was hard to get. Everybody was rationed, not only foreigners, Japanese also. And I remember so well there were rumors, fish is going to be distributed. So I remember so -- twice, I got up at four in the morning, run to get in line for the fish. By the time my turn came at seven o'clock, no more fish. It was a hard time. My wife, my child, who was -- Israel was at that time, '37, three years old -- four years old. So, I had family at that time in Shanghai, my father and my mother. My wife's mother and her sister and other family members were in Shanghai, so they wrote us letters coy -- thing was more or less normal, it was just the beginning of the war, before Japan was bombed and all that. And we decided we're going to go. I decided I have nothing -- I have to make a living somehow. I took my wife, my son, and we went to Shanghai.

Q: And where did you live?

A: We lived -- My sister's -- My wife's sister had a -- lived in a very large house. And she just -- There was for her -- her husband, who was -- he was a French guy. And she had rooms there and we -- she invited us to stay there, sharing all the expenses, whether it was rent and food and everything, and that's where we lived. And making a living was pretty -- you know, it wasn't -- jiha -- it's hard to explain, it was an open market, an open black

market. You could get any merchandise from this guy -- this guy had this, you could sell it. And this is how we made a living, buying, selling, and it was going on all right. Organized life was pretty good, the Jewish community was pretty good and strong. We had our club, we had our synagogues, we had our libraries, hospitals. It was okay. And then my s -- my daughter -- my daughter Miriam was born in 1943, during the war. My wife said, "Let's have another baby." I said, "No, it's hard, war-time." She wanted it. Okay, she was right. Of course, sh-she is the apple of my eye now. She is looking after me, my daughter. The women are always more attached to their fathers than th -- th-than the men are. My sons are also good to me, I'm very grateful. Anyway, Miriam was born, we call her Mimi for short, in 1943 and then the war was over. Then we were -- we just managed. There was no clothes, there was a little bit of a -- I don't know if you read about, or heard about it, the -- on the -- Ja-Japanese were allies with Germany. Under German influence, the Japanese military were probing -- were thinking of, under German influence and pressure -- there were about 20,000 Jews that escaped from Germany, Austria and Poland, came to Shanghai. They could come there without any visas, they just would come -- be-before the war, including the 3,000 Polish Jews that we saved, brought to Japan and then they came to Shanghai. And they -- the Japanese, under the pressure from the Germans, decided to take all these stateless Jewish Germ -- who came out in '37, and they put them in the ghetto. You heard about this? In Shanghai ghetto? They didn't take us, they only took those that came before -- after '37. The reason for this, I still don't know if it -- 60 years went by and why did the Japanese

hesitated to do to us what the Germans did? After all, the Germans were already getting ready for the Holocaust you see, and --

Q: And why -- why do you think 1937? How did they choose that date?

A: Who? Why did what?

Q: How did they choose the date, 1937?

A: Who choose the date 1937? Oh, why the Japan -- because that's -- that's the date when -
- when the Japanese and the Germans signed their military alliance, number one, and number two, many, many Germans, Jews and Austrians were allowed to come openly to Shanghai. They came by boats and they came -- except those that came by Japan, that we took care of, you see? And they put them into ghettos, from 1943.

Q: Okay. So we're in '43 and you're in Shanghai?

A: Shanghai.

Q: Okay.

A: And that --

Q: And that's where you were when -- when the war ended?

A: I-In '45, when the war ended, we were in Shanghai, yes. And when the war was over, we were, of course, happy and relieved because some American planes bombed Shanghai. Not where we lived, but where the German Jews lived, in the honque Japanese areas. But that's where they ja -- I thing American military thought, or whatever it was, I don't know the reasons that they had some factories that were making materials for the war effort. Anyway, a few bombs fell in those areas and they killed a few hundred Jewish refugees, the American

bombs. That was one of those war stories. And 1945, the war was over, the Americans came and I had in my mind all the time, China is a huge country. Now, there's no more Japanese occupation, it will open up and there'll be a lot of business to be done. So, I knew where my -- Max Becker and -- had an office in New York. I knew [indecipherable], and then five years went by. And I said, "I'm going to write him a letter," telling him possibilities of doing business in Shanghai, and I suggest that we send this and this and this kind of merchandise.

Q: You had not been working for a company all this time?

A: I was only for myself [inaudible] with my father and my father was in the -- in the -- in textile retail business, he was selling people suitlinks for wearing -- woolen textiles. So, the first American plane I remember, with American pilots came, about 30 of them. I don't remember -- they had a special name. They landed in Shanghai. We were so excited, Americans are here. And the Japanese were surrendering. We would rather they surrender to the Americans than to the Chinese, because we didn't know what's going to be with the Chinese. Communists were fighting Hatsunists, you know. Was a ver -- it's -- it's -- it's another world. I wrote a letter to them i-in New York and I couldn't mail it because there was no communication. So I mi -- took my bicycle -- in those days, w-we all had bicycles because cars were not -- expensive and not available. I pedaled to the hotel where I knew the American flyers were and I came in there. There was a big sergeant,, I remember so well. "Hello, Sergeant." "Yes, sir. What can I do for you?" I said, "Look, here is a letter. I have to mail it to New York. I can read it to you what I write there, because it's in a foreign

language,” it was in Jewish. He says, “I don’t care, the war is over.” I said, “I can’t mail it because there is no -- no mail yet, no communication.” He says, “We are leaving tomorrow for Honolulu. I’ll mail it for you.” I said, “Sir, thank you, how much this is?” “I don’t want any money.” Anyway, he took the letter, I was very grateful and then about three, four weeks, I get a telegram from New York. Already communication started to -- excuse me -- and he says, “[indecipherable] we received your letter and don’t worry. We’re old friends and we’ll send you the merchandise and you’ll be all right. We’ll send you and I will give you credit,” and etcetera, etcetera. Anyway, to make a long story short, from 1946 to 1948, Max send me a lot of merchandise, open account. And business was fantastic. Was making a lot of money. Then one day, he came to check out. Of course he was sending me a lot of merchandise, I owed them a lot of money. Of course, I paid everything, everything was all right, under control, I had papers. Well, he wanted to see what’s going on and I don’t blame him, it was his money. He came, I met him and I don’t know if I said so -- if I said that in the old tape, about his parents, what happened to them, did I say that? You recall?

Q: Th-They were killed.

A: They were killed by the Nazis.

Q: Yeah.

A: He -- He knew about it, he came, and that’s another story. Anyway, business was good and he says -- we continued it with the business and he went back to Panama and I stayed in Shanghai and everything was going fine until the rumors. First of all, the Americans left. The Shanghai international concession in those days, was partly occupied by the American

Marines, by the British army. They left. And we knew that the Chinese are fighting, the Communists and the Nationalists. And we -- The newspapers, we got information that the Communists were winning the war and they were advancing toward Shanghai. No, in 1948, beginning of 1948, I was working and I was conta -- connected with one of the refugees that we helped to come from -- I made quite a few friends in those that we helped, you see? And somehow, they wanted to pay me back, I think. One guy asked me to work for him and they didn't offer me any money, of course. If they did, I wouldn't have taken it. And one was -- I was working for him, he couldn't speak a word of English, but he was a very bright man. And he says to me one day, "Things are getting worse and worse, you know, the ja -- the -- we hear the Communists are advancing. They're already in Nanking, which is six hours from Shanghai." And they were all leaving. He comes to me and he says, "What about you? Where are you going?" I said, "I don't want to go anywhere, I like it here." I was making good money, I have a wonderful apartment, my wife, my -- my three children. He says, "You are going to go to America." I say, "What?" And, in my mind --

Q: Who said this to you?

A: One of the Polish refugees that I was helping him in doing his business, cause he didn't know any English, there was -- he says to me -- and he -- he says, "You are going to go to America." I sa -- I say, "I -- I -- I'm not going to go to America, I mean, I -- I don't want to go anywhere, I'm here." He said, "You are going to go to America, we're all leaving. This one is going to Israel, this one is going to Australia, thi -- I'm going to America, I --" he

says, "Come with me." I say, "Where?" "We go to the American embassy. He took me in this --

Q: What year was this?

A: '48.

Q: Okay.

A: He took me in the car to the American embassy, it was still operation -- before the Communists occupied Shanghai and I got there application for a visa to go to America, which I filled it up and gave it to them. Then, the Communists started advancing and we were all talking, what shall we do? Business is finished, stopped. The Chinese are fighting each other. What to do? 19 -- In May of 1948, the state of Israel was established and we were, of course, very happy, we were celebrating and then everybody's leaving. They were -- were -- My wife says, "Leo, we -- we got to do something, we got to leave and -- three children." I say, "Where are we going to --"

Q: Oh wait, wait. You didn't mention the third child. When -- When did he come?

A: Oh, he was born in '48.

Q: In Shanghai?

A: In Shanghai. Yeah, in nine -- beginning of 1948. So -- And then our people got together and they said, "We were going to -- the state of Israel is established, we'll -- let's send a telegram to the newly established government there, telling them that we would like to emigrate to Israel, because nowhere else we can go." We were stateless people, without any nationality. And we send them a telegram. And sure enough, they send a man, by the name

of Mr. Yowell, he was a consul and they started registering us, organizing us, who wants to go to Israel? So, we went the first. My wife, myself, we went, registered ourselves and about 800 of us got together and they send a ship after us, the Israeli government. It was a Panamanian ship, under Panamanian flag. United Nations somehow got involved with the state of Israel and the United States, I don't know. Anyway --

Q: Remember the name of the ship?

A: Yes. Wooster Victory. And we're going, packed everything. And the Communists are still not in Shanghai, they came six months later. But things are terrible. Mobs of Chinese, hungry, no business, and demonstrations, all kind of things. I said [indecipherable]

Q: Who was demonstrating?

A: Chinese people. They were poor, they had nothing to eat.

Q: Against?

A: Against themselves, against us, against foreigners, demonstrating. They were yelling in Chinese, I don't know what they were yelling. Someone's -- Banks had to close. Everything became very disorganized. There was -- Nobody's in charge.

Q: Chaos.

A: Chaos. Nobody's in charge. So, the Wooster Victory came and we were allowed to take out anything we had. I remember packing the piano and the carpets and the --

Q: So, it was the United Nations that paid for the passage of everything?

A: I think United Nations or was it Jewish or Jewish organizations, I don't know. I know the flag was Panamanian flag with the -- with a -- captain was a Greek, the crew was Italian. It

was a nice ship, but one of those ellessgees that was -- became a -- that could carry people. 800 people it was.

Q: And the a -- the -- most of the people were of what nationality?

A: It was the -- About 90 percent were German and Austrian and Polish Jews. The rest were us Russian Jews. And we -- we -- we went from that ship, the first ship.

Q: So you felt very lucky to have that?

A: We were very lucky just to get out, just to get out. Also, another thing I had in my mind, I knew the relationship -- it was during McCarthy time, I think -- before McCarthy time, and I was Russian born. I wasn't kosher, as far as the American government was concerned, because -- I also -- there was a time when I had a Soviet passport. I took out a Soviet pass -- because I had no papers, nothing, which I gave up when I came to Israel.

Q: You're talking about the reason that maybe you didn't get a visa to America?

A: I thought that if I stay back and become under Communist occupation, maybe at that time there will be difficulties to get a visa to go to America, they will ask me why. Why did you stay? Maybe you were sympathizing with them. In those days, it was a different way of thinking. I say, "We are going." So we came to Israel. It took us about 52 days in that ship, Wooster Victory. We couldn't go by Suez because there was war between Egypt and Israel. We had to go to Singapore. From Singapore the ship went to South Africa, Cape Town, West Africa, Dakar, Italy -- Italy, Marseilles, France. We were picked up by a Jewish ship by the name of Negbar, Israeli ship came and picked us up in Italy.

Q: That's Marseilles?

A: In -- In Negbar, in Italy. In -- In -- What was this, na -- not in Naples. Got a city in a -- in Italy. I forgot. They came after us, of course.

Q: From Israel?

A: From Israel, a ship, and --

Q: So they met your ship in --

A: They didn't meet the ship. We came on -- on the -- on the -- the -- on that United Nations ship, the Wooster Victory, to Italy. And we had to get off the ship and the Negbar was already waiting for us. There was -- Somehow there was communication between people on the ship and they were there. They're waiting for us. And in general -- I think it was in general. Anyhow, we came to Israel in 1949. Was it '49 or '48? I don't remember. '49, I think. End of '48.

Q: And may I ask you how you were treated as a refugee from China?

A: Where?

Q: In Israel.

A: They -- The -- That was the time where thousands of thousands of Jews were coming to Israel from -- those people who were remnants of the -- of the camps in Europe.

Q: That's [indecipherable].

A: Ships were coming full every day, were coming from all ar -- and it was -- it was a -- most -- now, the Israeli government that time, just green and new, young, they were treating everybody the same way and they were just say -- they organized certain camps in tents by the thousands. They would put people over there and I don't know about the food, because I

didn't want to go to the camps. I had enough money, I had small children. And we went to a hotel, stayed in the hotel and then we went -- I had some friends there who were there 10 years ago, went from China to Israel as -- as a -- pioneers They met us, they were friends [indecipherable] and the guys I went to school with. They helped us out and I had -- as I said, I had the money. And stayed in a hotel and bought a condo in Haifa and was -- took about three months that year it was built. And --

Q: So, you lived in a hotel for three months?

A: Yes.

Q: Mm.

A: Expensive, but had no choice. And one of my friends, he was a truck driver and he said, "Look, I have a good idea. A lot of refugees are coming in from Europe, from Germany, from Poland, fra -- those that remained alive and they need storage facilities, for they're bringing with them -- they stayed a year or two in -- back and they were buying furniture and goods and machinery. And th-th-they're coming in, they can't put it into camps where they -- where they had the -- the -- what do you call it? Tents. They have to take storage somewhere to keep it and we will organize a storage company." And trucking and storage, I -- I liked the idea. He says, "I have a truck, you have the money, we'll put it all together." And we rented a hou -- a -- a warehouse and we started working.

Q: Did you have a direct connection with Zionism at all?

A: Where?

Q: In Israel.

A: Israel was -- is -- is a Jewish state, there was no need. I mean, the parties, you mean? The -- The -- The -- The political parties in Israel?

Q: I'm just asking a question.

A: No, no, you know, you come to Israel, you are a Jew, you are an Israeli, y-you don't have to become to any political, unless it comes to vote, you vote with this party or for that party.

Q: You didn't feel pressured to be one thing or another?

A: No, no, no, no. Nobody would -- pressured me, nobody.

Q: Uh-huh. You had a very different experience, I think, from -- from a lot of people, that's why I'm asking this from you [indecipherable]

A: I see. Here again, you know, it was interesting. My time when I was helping some of these Polish immigrants, Jews from Poland, when they came via Japan, eventually, on my rone road, they would -- somehow I would meet some of them and they never forgot how kind we were too them, how good we were to them. And one of them is instrumental, I'll tell you this story in a minute. I don't know if I told this already. If I did, how I -- why did I --

Q: I'll tell you, if you did.

A: Why did I have to leave Israel and go to Japan, in '40 -- in '51?

Q: Ah well, before we leave Israel, is there -- is there anything else about your personal experience? I know you had lots of friends who helped you and you had --

A: No, they didn't help me, because I had the money and I had -- I needed contacts and -- and [indecipherable] by the way, when I came to Israel, the first thing I did, I went to the American embassy. And I said, "I applied for a visa in 1948, would you please contact, and --" No, before I left Shanghai, I went there and I said, "I'm leaving for Israel. Would you please send my file to Tel Aviv, to Israel? They did. I came to Tel Aviv one day after we came there. It was there, and they asked me, "Do you want to continue on your work on the visa?" I said, "Yes." We'll let you know, and that was it. I didn't see them any more, until later. So --

Q: Before we leave Israel, I wanted to ask you -- I know you have a -- a strong sense and had a strong sense of being Jewish?

A: Yes.

Q: But, how about the religious aspects of your faith? Did this contribute to a strong sense of your belief, your faith? Your spiritual life?

A: It's a good question. I wasn't really very religious, I mean I was what you call my heritage -- my -- growing up at home, in a Jewish home, big -- be -- my wife was a very for -- come from a very, very assimilated Russian family. She didn't know anything about Judaism, very little. Kosher, forget about it, she was not interested and I was also not so much -- course, I knew, my children had to have Bar Mitzvah and that I followed all the way through, and -- but the big holidays, I used to take my wife, my children, we go to the temple. But at home, you know, in America, when you think about Judaism, I'm sure that you are aware of the fact that there are Orthodox Jews, Conservative Jews and Reform Jews.

In those days in Israel, there was no such a thing. There was Orthodox. And for me it was a little strange, those people with the long beards and the -- I didn't believe the -- I didn't believe I belonged to them, because I was -- I didn't ever wear a hat and -- and I didn't keep kosher at home. I know my father would have been upset with me if he found out, but that was my life, [indecipherable] busy. Anyway, in 19 -- we were working, we had that warehouse and wa-was making -- making a living and until in 1951, after two years working, '49, '50, '51.

Q: Living in --

A: In Israel.

Q: Where? In what? A house? A condo, you said.

A: Haifa. No, a condo -- in a condo. Things are not doing so well and I speak to my friend, my -- my partner. I says to him, "We've got to do something, because we are not making enough for a living. He says, "I tell you what we do, we have to go and buy a truck, another truck. And we'll hire a driver and things will be all right." I was in charge of the warehouse, he was in charge of the transportation, you see?

Q: Do you have any idea why, as you look back on it, why things were not going well? For everyone, or just for your business?

A: It was beginning of a state that starts it to build itself up. And first of all, I didn't know the language too well to go and get a job, you see, if I wanted to. I didn't know Israel -- Hebrew too well at that time. Why didn't go well? The economic situation was not so very good and people -- it was a different -- a different way of living in those days. Everything

was -- food was very strictly rationed. You have to be a professional man in order to get a good job, an engineer, a doctor. I wasn't -- I was a businessman. That's why, I think. But, I was still hoping that things will be all right. Now, in the meantime, we were living in Haifa. In Tel Aviv -- I used to go there, about two hours by -- by car, once in awhile to visit with my friends and so forth. And one of my friends, whom I helped him in Japan. Very int -- I have to tell you this story, I don't know if I told that, but it's a very -- he's responsible for me [indecipherable] yesterday. His name was Yaglem.

Q: How?

A: Yaglem, a Polish Jew. When I was in charge -- when I was secretary of the Jewish community in 1940 - '41, when the refugees would come in --

Q: In Kobe.

A: In Kobe. The Japanese police gave us strict instructions that refugees, they allow them to come for two weeks, transit, but we extend it afterwards, their visas, that they were not to have their documents with them in order not to allow them to travel if they wanted to go by train to another city, see? In Japan. And so, I had to have -- in my office, in the community, I had a big safe and all the documents, I -- we insisted when they come from the ship to surrender them, I would register them and I was looking through them. One day I look, Yaglem, Yaglem. We used to import merchandise from Poland from Yaglem when I was in Shanghai. And there he is, the same Yaglem? I don't know. I started to check, "Where is Mr. Yaglem?" They said, "Oh, he's -- he's not on the -- this -- the community supervision,

he's a well-to-do man, with his wife and children. They're in a big hotel and they are there. I say, "I'm going to go and see him."

Q: This is Tel Aviv?

A: No, that was in Japan. When they came to Japan, where we brought them from Poland, Lithuania, Poland, Japan, that was Yaglem among the refugees. Am I making myself clear?

When I saw the name Yaglem, he was a refugee from Poland in Japan. I went to see him in a hotel. I came to the hotel, Oriental hotel, and there, I said, "Where is Mr. Yaglem?"

"There he is." And I see it's a man, well-dressed, his wife, children. I came up to him. I said to him, "A-Are you Mr. Yaglem?" He says, "Yes." I says, "When I was in Shanghai, we used to go -- import goods from Yaglem." "Oh," he says, "that's my factory. You imported from me." I said, "Yes." "Oh, very good." He started to cry. I said, "Mr. Yaglem, what's the matter? What are you crying?" He said, "I lost everything, they took my factory away, and - -" I said, "But look, you're here in a hotel. That means to say that you have means. You are on your way somewhere, I don't know where. You can tell me about it and if there's anything I can do to help you, with paperwork, with permits, just let me know. I'm the secretary of the Jewish community, I can help you." He s -- He's -- We spoke and we became very close and he says, "I need to extend my visas for 10 days." I said, "Give me your documents and I'll take your documents." And I went and I extended it for -- for a whole month and I did very good. Anyway, I don't know what happened. Then the war came. I'm talking now about 1940 -- '41, you see, when I met Yaglem in Japan. Then, he left. I understand he was in England during the war.

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is tape two, side A, of an interview with Leo Hanin, conducted by Ginger Miles on January 22nd, 1999, for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

A: Okay, now? So, when we came to Israel, in 1949, I found out that Yaglem, whom I last saw in Japan in 1940 or '41, is also in Israel. I went to Tel Aviv -- it's a small country, very easy to find people, I found him. When he saw me, he didn't know what to do with me.

"I'm here. I have a factory, a woolen factory. It's already doing well." He says, "If there is anything you can do --" I said -- he says, "Look, you helped me." I said, "Oh, it's all right, for -- don't worry about it." He says, "No, no, you're here. If there is anything you can do, you're a refugee. I'm doing well, I'll help you." I said, "Fine, fine, fine." And every month or so, I used to go to see him in Tel Aviv and we were good friends. He [indecipherable] his family. Then one day I get a telephone call from him, from Tel Aviv to Haifa. He says, "Leo?" "Yes?" He called me Leo. He says to me -- we spoke Russian -- he says to me, "Do you have a partner by the name of so and so, Danny?" I said, "Yes." I never told him about it. He says, "Come [indecipherable] Tel Aviv, I have to talk to you about something very serious." I said, "What happened?" He calls me from Haifa to Tel Aviv. If he says, I am going. I came. He says, "Look, I have bad news for you." I said, "What's the bad news?" He said, "Did you people buy a truck just recently, you and your partner?" I said, "Yes, how do you know?" "Well," he says, "how much you pay for this truck?" I said so much and so much. He says, "Your partner stole from you 600 pounds." I say, "What are you talking about?" He says, "How much did you pay for the truck?" I says, "3,600 pounds." He says,

“Well,” he says, “I was in a cafe in Tel Aviv and I heard three people talking between themselves and they mentioned your name. When they mentioned your name, I am there.” I said, “Look, you’re talking about Mr. Hanin, he was in Japan, he helped me and the whole story.” He says, “Yes, we heard about him, that he is a fine man and all that, but this partner bought a truck from us for 3,000 pounds and he asks us to make the receipt for 3,600 pounds.” And 600 pounds, which was a lot of money. In those days I needed a hundred pounds for a -- living a month for the whole family. He says, “Your partner is a thief. He stole from you 600 pounds.” My heart went down. I’m new in this country, just started a business, what am I going to do? And I went back home to Tel Aviv -- to Haifa, I told this to my wife. “What shall we do?” I said, “I don’t know. I cannot work with him any more, he’s a ga -- he’s a -- he’s a thief. A partner, a friend.” Anyhow, to make a long story short, he was a smart guy. He found out that my face, he could read my face if something was wrong. I didn’t want to talk about it, I didn’t know what to do, until finally he says, “You must tell me what happened.” I said, “Danny, what are you asking me questions. How much did you pay for the truck?” He says to me, “Wh-Wh-Wh-What do you mean?” I said, “You stole from me 600 pounds. You’re a thief.” “How do you know?” And he ran away. I ran after him. I said, “Don’t run. Come, we’ll work it out, we’ll talk it out and we’ll find a way.” “No.” He came back, he says, “Don’t tell anybody that I did that. If you tell them that I s-s-swinded you -- some of our friends, I am going to report you to the police, that you changed some money on the black market.” Which I did. It was very strict in those days. I changed, you know, I had to live, you know [indecipherable]. He says, “I’ll put you in jail,”

and it was very strict. I says, "You're not going to do that. You can't do that, that's blackmail." He says, "I'll put you in jail, then." I got scared. I closed the office, I ran to an attorney. I said, "What shall I do?" "Well," he says, "you have any papers? You signed any papers with this man, your partner?" I said, "No, we did it by sh-shaking hands, we are good friends." He says, "You're a fool. You don't do such things in -- in Israel. You have to come to a lawyer, then you're covered." He says, "I'll see what I can do." And in about six months after he ne-negotiated with him and we [indecipherable], I closed the office, everything is finished, I'm go -- I go -- I ga -- I went and I got a job in the Israeli customs, I was a customs brok -- customs agen -- not a agent, emp-employee in the office in bookkeeping. Had nothing else to do. And the lawyer is advancing, talking to his lawyer and fi-finishing. Finally, he says we have an offer. Calls me up and he says that, "I can make a deal between you two. He keeps the truck, he gives me 600 pounds." That was -- The trucks was worth 3,000 pounds. He's stealing again. I said, "Finish, I don't want to have anything to do, my headache is -- pay him off, let him pay me, whatever he's do -- finish." He says, "I do it." And he gave me -- he signed six promissory notes, 100 pounds each, to cover it all up. I went to the soo -- this -- this promissory notes went to the bank. I had them discounted because I had to pay to the bank, I borrowed money for the truck. Anyway, it's -- it's an involved story. I'm sorry I'm giving you so many details. I hope it's all right, no?

Q: Oh, it's good.

A: And I'm working on the customs, I -- I -- I left my house, we went on -- to live in another place, a small village next -- not far from Haifa, because friend of mine had there a washing machine. He was washing clothes for other people, he wa -- six machines and they needed somebody to iron the clothes, the pants and the shi --

Q: And wh-what -- what happened to the customs job?

A: I was still working there.

Q: Bookkeeping?

A: Bookkeeping, my --i-in Haifa --

Q: In Haifa?

A: -- my wife is working on the -- on the ironing machine.

Q: In the Laundromat?

A: I-In a -- We had our own place called Magaleah, which means -- these friends of mine were washing and if somebody wanted their clothes to be also ironed, they would come to us and pay for it and my wife would sit down at a [indecipherable] machine and ironing the pants and the shirts and the underpants, whatever. Making a living.

Q: During that time of making a living, when your wife -- was she working full time in Israel?

A: She was working the Magaleah in that -- in that ironing place.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: She was helping me.

Q: And was there a special place for the children to stay?

A: Well, we -- we had in a house, we -- we -- I bought a house in Haifa, in a place na -- in a small village next to Haifa.

Q: So they just stayed at home?

A: They stayed at home and my oldest son was in school and my other kids were still too young, one was very young. Anyway, we were making in disin -- decent living, wa -- kind of a hard.

Q: Working hard.

A: I wa -- I had two jobs. I was working in the customs and in the evening I would go to the post office, checking the packages and I -- I -- I calculated the duty, because a lot of packages were coming from all over the world. And I'm working in the customs and one day, this -- I got the letter from the bank that I discounted six promissory notes.

Q: You what?

A: I discounted the promissory notes I got from my partner. I -- I gave them to the bank and they gave me the money against -- against interest, you know? Against me -- Against the promissory notes. And he was supposed to pay for these, because they were -- they were broken down to one per month. So I got a telephone call from the bank that the first one, which was due on February the first, or whatever it was, it was paid. The other ones not paid. I see and say, "I finished with the guy, he stole all my money." So, I'm sitting and working in my office and he comes in, my partner, who I don't -- I didn't see him for all this time. He comes in with a guard, a guard brings him in because in customs, you had to have a permit to go and see [indecipherable]. He comes in and he says to me, he says, "I paid for

the first bill, but I'm not going to pay any more." I say, "What do you mean you don't pay any more? We made a deal, we finished with it -- a lawyer." He says, "If you say one more word, I'll go to your boss and you're working for the government now, and I will tell him that you changed money on the black market and I'll put you in jail." I got so mad, I was -- I -- I told to the guard, "Take him out of here. I don't want to see him any more." And I don't know what am I going to do. In the meantime, already, I am working on a permit, exit permit, because my friend Mr. Ponvi is in Japan in 1951. He heard that I'm having problems in Israel. He send me a letter, he says, "If you want to come and work with me in Tokyo, I'll have you any time. I'll send you a visa." But I had to get an exit permit -- '51, my friend, Mr. Ponvi, who has established a store in Tokyo, he came back from America in 1949, to Japan, to Tokyo, as an American citizen already. He opened a big store on the main street in Tokyo, Ginza. Only a few foreign firms, American, British, French, were allowed to import goods in those days. Japanese were not allowed yet. It was before the peace treaty was signed in 1955, I believe. MacArthur. And so he -- he needed someone to help him there and he -- he s -- he send me a telegram. He says, if you want to come and work for me in Tokyo, you're welcome, I'll send you a visa. Which he did and I -- in '51 -- at the same time, my youngest son, Danny was a very sick child. He had asthma. He was two years old - - no, he was three years old already. And he was a very, very sick boy and I show him to the doctors and the doctors said, "The climate in Israel, the sand, the heat, is very bad for him. If you don't take him away to Switzerland or somewhere to breathe fresh air, he's going to die here." Well my -- my wife, myself, we were very, very upset. And it so

happened my wife had a sister who was married to a Swiss guy and they lived in Switzerland. So I send a telegram, I said, "Look, my wife has to come to Switzerland for about six months while I go to Japan." And they came back and they said come on down and my wife and my daughter -- she took my daughter and Danny, the little guy, to Switzerland. She also wanted to take my -- our oldest son, who was at that time '37, '47, 16 -- fif -- 16 years old, but they wouldn't let him leave, because in a years time he had to go to the army. That was a rule in Israel. So she left to Switzerland with the two children. I went to Japan to work for Mr. Ponvi and Israel stayed behind with my wife's mother, she looked after him until he had to go to the army, which he did. He was in the 56 year war. He became an officer in the Israeli army. I came to Japan and there, working for Mr. Ponvi's store, was Mr. s -- [indecipherable] was Mr. Sukihara. Mr. --

Q: This was a department store?

A: Yes, a very large department store. Only foreigners who could pay in dollars were allowed to buy, the Japanese are not allowed, because that was before the peace treaty was signed.

Q: And what did you do in the store?

A: I was in charge of it -- manager.

Q: Of the entire store?

A: Almost. [indecipherable] boss together. They were importing textiles again and I'm a textile man. And I was w-watching wh-which goods to buy and helping with the Japanese stopit, talking to the American [indecipherable] because most of the customers were GI's --

that was during the Korean war -- who would come on R and R from Korea to Tokyo and before they go to -- report to go home, they would huf -- we also had jewelry department and silks and textiles. And they would come and buy jewelers and textiles and pay in dollars. That was the only way that they were al -- they call is script in those days, do you know what a script is? There were no dollars in those days, the army used to pay them in special papers.

Q: And the name of the -- the department store?

A: Ponvi.

Q: Was Ponvi?

A: Ponvi, Ponvi.

Q: Oh.

A: On Ginza, on the main street in Tokyo, very beautiful store. And we worked there and I met Sukihara over there. And I -- I -- I -- he spoke perfect, perfect Russian and perfect German and perfect English. And [indecipherable] face, a very interesting man. And I tried, I tr -- He was in charge of all Japanese employees, there were about 25 of them. Taxes and you know, relations and all that. Yeah, that's Sukiharason. Yeah, that's him. A few times I came up to him and I said, "Let's go and have lunch and I want you to talk to me about what you did. I understand you did --" He wouldn't talk to me. I pushed and I pressed, I was interested. I was, "Well why, why did he do it?" Til today I don't know why he did it. I don't know.

Q: Why he was aloof?

A: Why he was giving those visas after he was instructed by the foreign office to stop giving the visas. I don't know if you read the book, it's called, "In Search of Sukihara." Try and get it, it's a very interesting story. Dr. Hela Levine made a complete research. He went to Japan and he spoke to his children and he spoke to his widow and -- very interesting story. And only one day, he finally, after I was pushing him -- he was really aloof. He was never friendly with his own Japanese people. This a -- you know, the man was a diplomat. The man spoke so many languages. The man -- I think what was in his mind -- he lost his job.

Q: For what he did?

A: For what he did. Why did he do it? I wanted to find out. He told me once, I will never forget this, he says, "It was the finger of God." I say, "What do you mean?" "Well, I saved those people because I had an inspiration I must save them." I say, "What do you mean?" I says -- "I -- I -- I don't want to talk about it." He never, never, never talked to me about. I hope when they make the exhibition, I can give them some information which it might be of interest, you know? Anyway, '51, I am in Japan, I went to the Japanese -- to the American embassy in Japan, and said, "My file is in Tel Aviv, bring it over here, I'm now in Tel Aviv -- i-in Tokyo." A few months later I'm getting a call, "Your file is here." I went. And that was about three years they were asking me questions. It was during McCarthy times.

Q: Who was asking you?

A: A lady in charge, Miss Pinard was his name. She was in charge of the visa section.

Q: In Japan.

A: In Japan, in Tokyo. American lady and they work in the American embassy.

Q: Okay.

A: "Why -- How come y-yo-you speak Russian?" I said, "I was born there." "Are you a Communist?" I said, "No." "Prove it to me." You know, she was a -- well, she was doing her job. And Miss Pinard was her name, very nice lady, but I understood, it was [indecipherable] her job. "Come again, we'll talk to you again." And again and a -- and I'm not in a hurry. I have a good job -- of course I -- my mind is, my son, my oldest son is in the army in Israel and then if I stay in Japan with the younger children, having a har -- easy time, I'm making good money, a good living. When he's finished with the army, I want him to go to college, I want him to study, and my children also. There's nothing to do in Japan, I have to go to America. Where else would I go to give my children an education?

Q: Did your family from Switzerland come back?

A: No, no, no. My wife was in Switzerland with the two younger children and then, after six months or so, I brought them to Japan, to stay with me. I was working in Ponvi, she came with the children. We had a very easy life, very good life, very comfortable life. And finally, Miss Pinard, every month or so, a telephone call. "Mr. Hanin, I want to talk to you." "Okay." "Are you a Communist?" "No," I said, I -- then I got a little upset, I said, "Miss Pinard, you know, if I were a Communist and if I want to go to the States, would I tell you that I am a Communist? Let's change places." She says, "What do you mean?" I said, "I am not a Communist. I tell you what I'll do. I'll swear on the Torah," you know what a Torah is -- "that I'm not a Communist. Is that good enough for you?" She says, "Yes." I said,

“Anytime. I have a lot of good friends.” And -- But she says, “Well, come again.” And I’m not in a hurry. I-I’m working, I’m still young. I -- I -- We’re doing all right, making good money, putting it away. Finally, one day, after this interrogation, I came to a lunch -- we used to get together, some of the boys, some business people, friends of mine, in a nice hotel. I came there and who comes in? Maury Sprung. Maury Sprung was a major in the United States Air Force during the war. After the war was over, he was an attorney. And, when the war was over and they had a -- a -- a -- a court case against the Japanese criminals, you know, military, also some of the industrialists were taken to be investigated and Maury was their attorney. And he helped them to get -- get off the case. And he was a good -- n- now -- now he started his own practice. Where did I meet him? I met Maury in the synagogue, he was a Jewish guy. He was a major, [indecipherable] without uniform. And we’re sitting here with lunch and he comes in. “Hello, hello Maury, didn’t see you for a long time.” He says to me, “What’s the matter with you, you are so upset?” I say, “Maury, don’t talk to me.” He say, “Why?” I said, “You Americans, you make me sick.” He said, “How can you talk to me like this? What’s the matter with you, are you crazy?” I said, “Maury.” “Where do you come from?” he says to me. “I just came from the American embassy.” “What were you doing in the American embassy?” I say, “I am applying -- I am working on a b -- am -- on a visa to go to the United States, and this lady over there is asking me so many questions. Am I a Communist and this and that.” He started to laugh. He says, “Leo, don’t worry. I’ll take care of everything. You need a good lawyer.” I say, “I don’t need any lawyers. This is clear.” He says -- Am I repeating myself, I didn’t tell this

story. I say, "Maury, I don't want to talk about it, I'm so upset, she's asking me all these questions every time." I say, "Well, she's doing her job, what can I say?" He says to me, "Wait for me, I'll let you know." Couple of months go by, he calls me up at home -- and he used to come to my house for dinner sometimes, my wife -- we're very good friends. Says, "[indecipherable] will be in this little nightclub over there, American owned nightclub. You come there with your wife, with Rebecca, 10 o'clock at night and leave everything to me." I say, "What are you talking about?" He says, "Just come." I said to my -- "Well, Rebecca, let's go." We came there at 10 o'clock, he's standing outside, in winter, waiting for us, drunk. Takes us around, brings us in, it's dark little bar. And there were people sitting there, nobody's in uniform. And he's doing a lot of legal work for the American occupation, for the military, that's what I understood. "General So and so," he says to a guy sitting there, "I want you to meet my very good friend, Leo and Rebecca Hanin." [indecipherable] They're all sitting there, nobody's eating any food [indecipherable] party, it's a nightclub. And another general, say, "How do you do, General?" And Miss Pinard is there, the lady from the embassy. He says, "Miss Pinard, I want you to meet my very good friend, Leo and Rebecca Hanin." "Hello, Miss Pinard." She says, "Oh, I know him." And he walks away and she comes up to me and she says, "Why didn't you tell me that you're a friend of Mr. Sprung?" I said, "Miss Pinard, you never asked me about my friends, I have many friends. All you were asking me is about -- you know what you were asking me." I said, "By the way, we are at a nightclub, we are at a party, let's go and have a drink and talk about anything else. I know you were doing your job, please don't worry about it." She was upset.

But anyway, we went, we danced, we talked, social. Three days later she calls me. I got the visa. It's -- It's who you know.

Q: Even then. I -- I want to -- Before we --

A: And I got my visa and we came to America. Thank God for that.

Q: Before we leave Japan, I just wanted to ask you, did you ever meet Mrs. Sukihara?

A: In ja -- In -- In Los Angeles, yes. Not in -- in Tokyo.

Q: So that was recently?

A: Yes, just about three years ago.

Q: Okay, so we'll g -- we'll go to that later.

A: I met his son, a young boy that time, in '51, who used to come with his father to the store once in awhile. And I reminded it to him now and we had a big laugh over it. I told him which fruits he used to buy with his father, I used to go with them sometimes. Anyway, so --

Q: Your son was in Israel in the army.

A: He was still in the army and -- and then, well, he was close to be si -- I'm in -- in the States, we came to the States in 1956, I got my visa. My -- My -- My quota visa, everything is okay, I took my wife, my two children on a ship, didn't fly, just wanted to relax a little bit. We came --

Q: Do you remember the name of the ship?

A: President Cleveland.

Q: President Cleveland.

A: Yes.

Q: And who was president during that time?

A: Oh, at that time, president, who was president at that time? Was it --

Q: Eisenhower?

A: No, Truman was gone.

Q: Eisenhower?

A: Eisenhower. Eisenhower. We came by Honolulu, by ship, I wanted to see Honolulu and came to here to Los Angeles.

Q: You landed in Los Angeles?

A: Landed in San Francisco, and then take a -- took a train, came to Los Angeles.

Q: Oh.

A: In San Francisco lived my wife's brother. He was -- came to America many, many, many years ago, so we stayed with him for a couple of days and then we took a [indecipherable] to Los Angeles. Friend of mine from Japan advised me. I meant to go to New York, because, you know, some -- some of my friend were there. He says, "Go to Los Angeles, it's a new area, start a business importing and you know the importing, you have some money." And I listened to him, and thank God I did. Anyway, then my -- my mind is all the time, I have to bring my older son here, because when he becomes 21, that was in -- he was born in '37 -- '47, '57, '58. I'm here, I came here in 1956. In 1958, when he becomes 21, he's no more under my quota, he's under his quota. In those days it was very serious with quotas. And he was born in China. Chinese -- Whites -- What they call it, Aryan quota was very hard to get. I knew if I don't get him earlier, [indecipherable] he's 21, he will fall under Chinese quota

and then who knows. And in the meantime, he's still in the army, he's finishing up. I wrote him a letter, he wrote some -- he got his permits. And, by the way, when I got my visa, I -- Miss Pinards, the lady in -- in Tokyo, I told her my son is still in Japan -- in Israel and I don't know if -- I mean, it was going to be difficult to get a visa. She says, "When -- When the time comes for you to bring him, after he's finished with the army, just let me know. I will take care of everything." And she did.

Q: Huh.

A: She wrote a letter to somebody, I don't know to whom. My son got a visa like this. And he came.

Q: In --

A: We brought him here in 19 -- he was before 21. '37, '47, '58. End of '58 he came here and we as -- advised him to go to UCLA, and he went to UCLA and he started to work there and to study there and he's a -- he's a very, you know, because he's my son, he's a brilliant young boy. He's a Ph.D. now, you know. He met a beautiful, wonderful girl, Lida. They got married. He graduated pharmacology in UCLA and our government send him -- the UCLA send him to Sweden to study -- research on the Alzheimer disease.

Q: And your work for your own self, what did you --

A: I started importing business, because this is the only thing I knew. And I looked around the stores, there were Japanese this and Japanese that. I know Japan, I am starting importing.

Q: And you spoke fluent Japanese.

A: Not fluent, but enough to -- to -- to -- to get along.

Q: To do business.

A: And things were not doing so well, I just didn't know how to do business in America. I -- It was a -- It wa -- It's another world, you know, and about two years later, I had some customers who used buy from me. They had a store on -- on Fifth Street an-and Broadway in those days. I'm talking about 1961 - '62, a long time ago.

Q: In Los Angeles?

A: Los Angeles. I became good friend with them and they had a big store and on the Eighth -- Eighth and Broadway. I went to see them and then I -- I got a -- things were no good. I got a -- a -- a -- a call from a friend of mine in New York. He says, "Leo, I hear you're having problems in business. I don't know if things -- I got a lot of friends." I say, "Yes?" "Would you like to go back to Japan and -- for a year? We have a special job for you." I say, "What kind of a job?" He says, "We have some customers that are here now. They're from South America, from Chile. They are survivors of the Holocaust, Polish Jews. They don't speak any language but Jewish and Spanish. You speak Jewish?" I said, "Yes." "They come, they want to buy goods to export to Chile, they live in Chile, in a place called Arika," which is on the border of Uruguay, I think. "Would you like to go there and work with them?" I said, "How much you going to pay me?" We made a deal. And I told my wife, I said, "Honey, I've go to go, that's the only way we can continue." She says, "Well, if you have to go, go for a year." And I went. And I worked with these guys and -- and wi --

Q: And you lived again in Japan?

A: Together with whom? No, my wife was here, in Los Angeles, I left her here.

Q: No, you lived again, again.

A: Again in '50. I lived in a hotel, that was in 1959 and 1960, two years. And then my mind is working. In '61, I have to become an American citizen. Five years I have to live here. I have to be in -- in America in '61 to get my citizenship, that's what I want. And I made a deal with my friends. I was working for a year in Tokyo with these people who were buying merchandise for Chile, but in '61, I have to go back to get my citizenship. I want to be an American citizen. They said, "Okay." And one of my customers were two guys who had a store on Eighth and Broadway and I was really friendly with them. I had some merchandise left over, I came to see them, I said, "Fellows, I'm going to Japan and I have some merchandise. I'll leave it with you. When you sell it, pay my wife." It was about 17,000 dollars worth of merchandise. They said, "Well, what -- what do you mean you're going to Japan?" I said, "Well, I got a job." "Don't go, we'll open a store here, you'll be -- you'll [indecipherable] our partner." I said, "No, no, no." I already -- I had to go, m-my mind was very -- was under terrible pressure. Anyway, I look around their store, I see Japanese goods, Japanese goods, Japanese goods. In those days it was, you know, radios and tape recorders. I said, "Where do you buy all this?" "Well, we buy this from the guy in San Francisco and this from the guy in New York. This from the guy in Chicago." I said, "Look, I know in Japan where to buy all these things. I will save you a lot of money. I'll buy it for you." And I looked at this guy, Al was his name and he looks at me and I don't think he trusts me. I'm telling him because I know what I'm going to do. He says, "Well --" I said,

“Look, before you say yes or no, only one condition I’ll do it for you.” “What’s the condition?” “You come to Japan.”

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: This is tape two, side B, Leo Hanin. Continue the story.

A: So he says, “I’m going -- You -- You want me to come to Japan?” I say, “Yeah, you can save so much money, because you don’t have to buy from local importers. I’ll -- I’ll show you where to buy these goods. I know. I know Japan.” He says, “Well.” I said, “Don’t say well, just come to Japan and leave everything to me.” And he came. And we started a wonderful relationship which eventually wound up that I came back from Japan to America, to get my citizenship, which I got and they offered me a job to work with them, these two friends of mine here, Allen and Abe, which eventually developed to become a very large company, Lloyd’s Electronics. I was one of the directors. For 25 years I worked for them. My main job was developing -- I used to go to Japan, to Korea, to Taiwan, to Hong Kong, cause I knew how to deal with these people. And also, I used to go to South America to develop South American markets. Panama, South Africa, Venezuela, Chile and this was my job fo-for 25 years.

Q: When -- Would you like to take a break?

A: No, I’m fine. I’m finishing. Unless you have any questions.

Q: Oh, I do.

A: Go ahead.

Q: Yes.

A: Now, ask me direct questions.

Q: All I wanted to ask you, when you came to America, were you aware of any anti-Semitism?

A: No, I don't think so, no. I -- I wasn't exposed to it and I wasn't ever -- oh, I was -- I'm -- I -- I'm a great reader, I read a lot of books and -- an-and television, watch television and newspapers and I knew what was going on, but I personally did not experience any anti-Semitism.

Q: And after the war, as you look back on -- on your relationships as a Jew with Japanese and Japan, did you know when Japanese American were being held in camps in the United States?

A: I -- I read about it when I came here, yes.

Q: And how did that make you feel? What did you think?

A: I -- I -- I didn't think it was right to put American citizens -- they were American citizens, that's what bothered me, to be put into special camps, because they were not a Japanese, even though they were suspected of being spies and all whatever. But I felt legally, they were not -- they had no right to do that to them.

Q: Mm-hm. Did you know that there was talk that Japanese were sympathetic to Nazism, did you ever hear that?

A: When? Which -- In which period of time? Well, they were --

Q: In any period.

A: -- they were allies. The Japanese signed a -- a three [indecipherable] Japan, Italy and -- and Germany, they signed that -- what they called an axis arrangement, it was in 19 -- when was it, I think in 1938 - '39. That was a military alliance signed by Japan and Germany.

Q: Oh, but that didn't make you -- that didn't bother you or you didn't worry about their --

A: At that time, my thought was that this -- all this political and military arrangements were against Russia. See Japan was always -- considered herself an enemy of Russian communism. It was no idea it would become a Pearl Harbor situation. No, no, not -- not -- never enter -- came into my mind. I -- I know they admired the Americans, they liked the Americans. They -- They -- They -- They emulated them and all that, but whatever they were doing political, I think it was all against Russia. That was my opinion.

Q: Did you see Max Becker, once you got into the United States, again?

A: Yes, I saw him in -- in Venezuela many years later, when I was traveling on my business, I went to see him in Caracas, Venezuela. He was there, married, with children. I don't know if I told you about this story.

Q: Yes, that -- that story was told.

A: That's the time I saw --

Q: That's a beautiful story. [indecipherable]

A: Beautiful story. He died. He recently died. But, that was a very interesting, very emotional story.

Q: And when did you wife pass away?

A: 10 years ago, in 1988.

Q: How?

A: Here, in Los Angeles.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: She passed away of cancer. For three years she was suffering with having chemotherapy and it was a difficult time. But -- Was a very difficult time. Still is.

Q: What?

A: Still is, for me a difficult time to be with her -- without her.

Q: You didn't -- You did not remarry?

A: No, no. I don't think I'll ever, ever will.

Q: And -- And when she passed away, did you move from your --

A: I sa -- We [indecipherable] in -- We lived in -- in Encino, in a -- in a -- in a condominium which we bought. Last place, rather and I stayed there for myself, by -- by myself for awhile, to --

Q: Mendacino?

A: Encino.

Q: Oh, Encino.

A: For about four or five years, until my children started to tell me that it's no good any more to stay alone, cooking and washing and doing, in a big house. And besides, it has to do also with finances. I didn't -- I wasn't a rich man, but if I sell this condominium, I would have some money to be able to make my own decisions what to do next. And I listened to

them and I'm glad I did. We moved here, in Woodland Hills. I am living in a retirement hotel. Not an old age home, a retirement hotel.

Q: Yeah, just [indecipherable]

A: Has about over a hundred people. Not a very interesting life, but at least I'm about five minutes away from my daughter and her husband and they're so good to me. My daughter calls me every day. "Hello Dad, how are you?" And the-they're good people, good people.

Q: And your grandchildren?

A: My grandchildren of my daughter's side -- there -- there is a doctor, as I told you, and Eddie is on the computers, they live in Connecticut. My -- My grandson graduated Yale. His wife also graduated [indecipherable] Yale, she's also a doctor. They live in Connecticut, Westport, Connecticut, that's where they are.

Q: And --

A: And the other grandchildren, my son's grandchildren, Adam is working for a Compaq computer company in Houston, Texas. His wife is a chemist. She's now involved in working for a manufacturer who makes medicine against that's terrible sickness --

Q: AIDS?

A: AIDS. She travels to South America, to South Africa; among people there, there's a lot of AIDS.

Q: Did your children marry Jewish?

A: My children, yes, but one of my grandsons, Eddie, who is with the computer, he married a Catholic girl. She didn't convert, he didn't convert. Good, nice people.

Q: Mm-hm. So you have no strong feelings about that, one way or the other?

A: I -- I -- I'm not very excitably happy about it. I would rather him married a Jewish girl, but life is life.

Q: Tell me, why -- why do you think that's important?

A: Why do I think that's important?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Let me read you something.

Q: All right.

A: It's on my 85th birthday in -- in a magazine printed in Tel Aviv, in Israel. "Leo is a devoted family man. Proud, justly so, of his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Throughout his life, Leo had been a committed Jew, a leader in the Jewish community, a devoted friend of Israel, a generous person, a faithful friend. In a way, always ready to respond to the needs of others." I mean, i-it's not a matter of -- I was not -- I told my -- my Eddie, my grandson that married a Catholic girl, a very nice girl, Michelle. And I told my children, if it's going to be a wedding in a -- in a -- in a church, if he's going to convert, this grandpa is not coming. "Why? Eddie will be bra -- ba -- heartbroken." I said, "Look, I cannot, just --" So they arranged, they had an interdenominational wedding and she is a lovely girl and they live well together and that's it. This is America, I understand. I am not that old-fashioned to -- to -- to -- to be so, how shall I say, crazily -- I understand. My mind is open.

Q: I wonder if your children understood what was happening in the Holocaust, since you were not directly there. Did you tell them, or --

A: I -- You know, the first tape that I made in -- in the museum --

Q: 1990.

A: I played it to the children and to the grandchildren. There is another tape, which was made by the Wiesenthal Holocaust Museum, here. I played that also. And the children know. Th-They read, especially the grandchildren I'm talking about. They were brought up in -- in -- not in a very Orthodox Jewish way, but you know, th-they know -- th-they know. I don't know if they're as -- as committed as I would have liked them to be, but this is America.

Q: And when you -- when you say, this is America, do you mean it's a mixed bag, there's all sorts of religions?

A: We -- We -- No, I say -- That's right, we have to be open minded, we have to understand that America, and I'm not saying this because I'm [indecipherable]. To me, America, there's no other place in the world like America. And I think I understand many things that are happening here good and bad. I'm not going to talk about what's going to happen, what's happening today, it's -- it's -- has nothing to do with my life. But I understand all that and sometimes it hurts. But sometimes I -- I have to say to myself, "Well, this is America. Thank God the Jewish people in America have a good life." There is some anti-Semitism here, I know. Farrakhan is here and other things are happening, but no country in the world

has been so good, so open and so understanding, with all the other problems that America has been and for this I am grateful.

Q: I wonder if you are a member of any Jewish organizations?

A: No.

Q: You're very -- You're considered a friend of Israel and --

Q: Well, yes, we have an organization here, a small organization called American Far Eastern Society of Southern California. All ex-residents of China, la -- an-and already their children got together here. There is an organization here, San Francisco, New York, Brazil, Hong Kong, Japan. And the main purpose is to get together and to make some drives and collect some money to help our older people who are destitute out in Israel. We send it to them and New York sends it to them and -- and there is about 200 people in Israel, ex-residents of China, Jewish people, who are completely out. They're in old age homes and they are supported by us. We have to help them.

Q: A question I'm asking everyone is, do you think that the founding of Israel has a particular, special meaning for Holocaust survivors?

A: Yes, I think so. I think that -- of course, I didn't speak to many Holocaust survivors. I didn't speak to them, but I read a lot about it, all these stories, "Schindler's List" and all the other movies, etcetera, etcetera. And I think that many Jews, survivors of Holocaust had nowhere to go, only to Israel. No other country -- America accepted some, Australia accepted some, but mostly they came to Israel. And where -- where would they have gone if it wasn't for the -- for -- for Israel? That's the way I look at it.

Q: I have a list of events that I'm also asking people that we interview in America. If you will just mi -- look at it and I think that the thing that I heard you talk about the most was the era of Joseph McCarthy.

A: Yes.

Q: And how it affected you, but I'm wondering if your experience as a Jew during this time, was as strongly -- also, did you -- were you able to relate it to any of these events that happened, mainly in America?

A: Japanese concentra -- Japanese -- Do we want me to go through all of them?

Q: Oh, just whatever you relate to, not -- not -- not all of them.

A: Well, we spoke about Japanese concentration camps, right?

Q: Yes.

A: The Cold War. The Cold War is -- was strictly war -- Cold War between American democracy and Communism, which had to be resolved, there was always the danger of -- of -- of war, only the na -- Russians were accumulating all these nuclears weapon -- nuclear weapons, with which they -- America was for them an enemy. That was -- That's the way I looked at it. And when Soviet Russia became no more, I think -- I think it's a good thing that happened.

Q: In a -- In a -- I guess what I'm talking about is -- it -- were you -- were you directly affected by any of these? If not, then --

A: No, no, no, no, no, no, no --

Q: That's really the --

A: The era of Joseph McCarthy and the Red scare. Well, the only thing I can -- I was never told that it was because of Joseph McCarthy's situation that my visa was delayed for so long, but it was part of life, an ex-Russian, speaking Russian, must be a Communist. You know, it was -- I think it was implanted in the -- in the heads of the -- of the United States embassy employees, that -- to -- to -- to cross -- to check it out, because Rosenberg's -- at that time the spies, the Jewish spies that were co -- there were two who were executed. It was a -- it's a difficult situation, whether this should have been or not, I cannot make my opinion, because I am not -- first of all, I was not at that time an American citizen to really understand what was going on.

Q: And as far as the Civil Rights movement, did you have any particular identity with --

A: When I was here?

Q: The way Blacks were treated in America?

A: Well, in -- in -- in Los Angeles and where we lived here, we didn't see that much anti-Black, what do you call it, attitudes. We saw it on television. We saw it -- what happening the southern states and the marches that organized by Martin Luther King and the dogs that were put on them and the people that couldn't work, people -- Black people couldn't drink water and go to the bathroom and all that kind of thing. It -- It -- It -- It bothered me, but I didn't -- I don't know the Black people too well, to really understand what's -- what's going on. Cause I think the Blacks that are in the south are different than what they are here. They're here, they are more integrated, don't you think so? It's -- It's a difficult problem. You see, I'd like to say to myself that after all my experiences and all my life, that I am an

American, but I am not, really. I co -- I couldn't. I wasn't born here, I didn't grow up here, and I sometimes listen to my children, to my grandchildren, the way they talk. I see they are Americans. I am still -- who am I? I don't know. Russian, Jewish, Japanese, Chinese, I don't know. My head is mixed up.

Q: How many languages do you -- did you once and do you now speak?

A: Five. I start with Russian, Yiddish, English, Hebrew, some Japanese and -- not fluent, some Chinese, not fluent. And I picked up some German in school and when I was dealing with the Polish refugees, I picked up some Polish.

Q: This is way back to something that you -- you said, which I'm very -- I think would be a -- a curious -- an interesting thing to know. At the time, you couldn't talk about the Black Market, about the kind of activities --

A: Wh-Wh-Wh-Where, where?

Q: When your partner threatened you.

A: Yes, in Israel.

Q: It was in Israel.

A: Yes.

Q: Could you tell me, was that a typical kind of under the table business that was going on?

A: A -- A lot of people that came from abroad in those days, knew -- knew immigrants that had dollars.

Q: American dollars?

A: Yes, American dollars, in -- in -- not in their pockets, cash, but in accounts. I'm talking about Jews from China. They all -- We all had accounts in America, in New York, in the States Bank, or National City Bank, whatever branches they had in China. And in those days, if you changed the dollars at the official rate of Israeli exchange, you had to pay -- when we came, two dollars and 80 cents for one Israeli pound. Because Israeli pound at that time, was equivalent to the British pound. Two dollars and 80 cents. Within six months, it became a dollar for a dollar for a pound. In other words, if I change a thousand dollars, I used to get -- at 280, let's say, three -- 300 pounds, but then, if two months or three months later, if I change a thousand dollars, I get a thousand pounds, which is a big difference. It was a very, very difficult situation.

Q: And so how did you -- How was it considered Black Market, what you were --

A: Th-This is what we call Black Market. I mean, you had some people who had a lot of local money, cha -- Israeli money and they wanted to transfer them into American money, but they couldn't do it officially, to go to the bank and buy dollars, it wasn't allowed. Today, you can. So, there was -- and we needed -- I needed pounds to -- to -- to -- to -- Israeli pounds to live on. So, if I would go and change a hundred dollars and get Israeli pounds, I would give my check on -- on -- on -- on the -- on the bank, wherever I had my account and he would give me the Israeli pounds, that was it.

Q: So --

A: I -- I -- I -- You want me to look through this?

Q: Yes, the -- the presidencies in particular, the different presidents --

A: The presidents? The presidents, Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Nixon, fo -- ooh. Yes, what is the question?

Q: Let's talk about Truman.

A: Truman? Yeah, that's what I'm talking about. We knew that Truman recognized, one of the first ones. He was the second one. The first recognition was given to Israel by the Russians. Then Truman recognized the state of Israel and promised to help. I mean, the president of -- the first president of -- of Israel, Dr. Weissman, came here and do you know - - did you ever see the picture he brought in the Torah, as a picture? Did you see that? No? It was an interesting picture, I mean we appreciated that. Truman accepted it with thanks and congratulated him. And you know what Weissman told him? He says President Truman -- that President Truman told him, "Congratulation Mr. President." So President Weissman says to him, "You see, there is a big difference Mr. President Truman." "What's the difference?" He says, "You are a president of 200 and what -- how many million Americans? 60 -- hundred million Americans. I am the president of a -- a million presidents." Everybody in Israel thinks he's a president. That was Truman's story.

Q: So Truman, you feel was -- was very supportive of the Jewish people?

A: Y-Y-You know that -- whether it was support the Jewish people, whether it was oil interest, we don't know.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Whether it's against Russia, I don't know, it's hard to say. American politics, sometimes th-they -- they come connected -- interconnected to something else. I'm trying to learn all

this now, especially with -- through the Clinton story, to understand what's going on. It's -- It's politics, it's oil, it's business. American business is business.

Q: And before we leave, I also wanted you to tell me about the documentary that you're going to be a part of.

A: Well, the Israeli -- a group of Israeli, I think they're very religious people -- seems most of the refugees that brought -- were brought from Japan, about 3,000 Jews, of them about a thousand were rabbis and -- and -- and -- and Yeshiva -- you know what Yeshiva is? Ha -- You know, rabbinical schools -- were over a thousand of them.

Q: In Japan?

A: Yeah, among those 3,000 Jews that we saved. And I was involved very much with -- with their problems, they had so many different problems, so many unworthy, I mean to discuss it, but they had to be solved. I don't know if I ever told the story about Passover, no? Huh? You heard -- You heard this story. Til today I remember it, so --

Q: It's a wonderful story.

A: They are making now, the Israeli company, religious Jews are making a documentary about this.

Q: Who is?

A: Some group of people who are owning -- owning a documentary film. And they -- they send a group of people to Japan and to China, and before they went there, they talked to me about it, because they knew that I was involved in the Jewish community. And they're going to make a documentary and I told them a few stories about this Passover and about

this thing. And, I don't know if I ever told -- if I ever told this before, but anyway, a few years ago, the Sony -- do you got a Sony here? No.

Q: This?

A: The other -- The other NHK, the Japanese film company called me up from Japan, was about five years ago. And they said that they were making a documentary on Mr. Sukihara, in Japan and they want to come to talk to me, would I talk to him? I say, "Yes," I'll be glad to talk to him. And they came with a young lady from Brooklyn, who spoke perfect Japanese, was very interesting girl. And I told them I speak Japanese, but I would rather -- "You might ask me some question," I said, "which I will not be able to explain myself so well, because my language is a little narrow." So they ask me a lot of questions, this, that and the other. Finally, "Why do you think Mr. Sukihara did what he did, gave visas?" I said, "You know something, I'm not a -- I'm a Jew, but I'm not a very Orthodox, very deeply religious Jews. At -- "First of all," I said, "I want you to get it off the camera, I don't want to tell you to be on the camera, what I'm going to tell you." "All right." I said, "You know why he did it? He did it because God directed him to do it." "Wh-Wh-What do you mean?" I said, "You see, he saved over a thousand rabbis and -- and rabbinical students and by doing that, the -- the Jewish story, the -- the -- the teaching of Torah, Jewish religion, Jewish Orthodox religion, has not been lost. It's beings taught all over the world because of these people that remained alive. That's why God did it." "Ah, so." Then they asked me a few question, "What's a Torah?" They didn't know. So I have a five books of Moses in English, I gave it to them for a few days, they read it. Came back, asked me some questions. And I

still believe that's what happened. H-His -- Just recently I had a meeting with his son and a lady. They -- They wrote a book, it's called, "Visas for Life," did you hear about that visa?

Q: Called what?

A: They're going to make a be -- a documentary about Sukihara. There's a book that was written by Sukihara's son and another lady, I forgot her name, Japanese lady, which is called, "Visas for Life." Very interesting book. And they invited me a couple of times through some of the exhibitions they made in temples and other places, I would go. They would introduce me and this and that, because I met their father when he was 11. Oh, the questions they asked me, I was -- I was -- inside of me, I was laughing. You know, th-they - - they're -- they're making money, they're making a living out of him, God bl -- help them, I mean, I don't care, it's none of my business. "Do you think," he asked me, Sukihara, "my father was pro-American or pro-German?" You know, Sukihara was a spy and there is no ca -- there is no -- there is no secret about it. He -- Well, you read this book, get this book. It's called, "In Search of Sukihara."

Q: What did your -- What did you answer [indecipherable] to his son?

A: I said, "I don't think he was pro-German and I don't think he was pro-American." "What do you mean?" I said, "He was pro-Japanese. He was doing what the ji -- he want -- he thought a good Japanese should do?" "Why?" "If your father was alive today, and I would ask him this question and he would give me an answer, I'm sorry to tell you, I still wouldn't have believed him. There's so many thing that are behind it, I cannot figure it out." Why? The Japanese people who were so -- in those days, who were so departmental. Orders are

orders, you know. There was no such a thing as argue against your bosses. His was the foreign minister, what's his name there -- forgot his name, the one who signed the -- the treaty with -- with Hitler. Japanese foreign minister, anyway, his boss.

Q: Sukihara's boss?

A: Sukihara's boss told him not to issue any visas. I mean, they off -- the -- the -- the -- the telegram came -- I'd like to -- how long you going to be here?

Q: Til Monday.

A: I'd like you to read this book, I'm [indecipherable] lend it to you. Can I deliver it somewhere? I think where [interruption] -- that's all right.

Q: I'd just like to know before we finish, if there anything else about those years of your experience that you'd like to say?

A: I like to say this, that my -- my participation, whatever I did, was minuscule, it wasn't very -- that very important. I-I-I-It played a certain part, but not in a very large scale. I say to this, I was in the right place at the right time and I did to my opinion, was the right thing what I did. I didn't know at that time that the Holocaust was coming. You know, '40 - '41, we -- we didn't know there was a Holocaust. We knew there was anti-Jewish situation in Germany, but you didn't know that there would be such a terrible thing like a Holocaust, six million Jews killed in such a systematic way. It was un -- it [indecipherable] found out this after the war, it was mindboggling. So if I did something to help to save these few thousand Jews, thank God for that. That's all I can say. The right place, the right time.

Q: Thank you.

A: You're welcome. Thank you for asking all these questions.

End of Tape Two, Side B

Conclusion of Interview