

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

ALFRED BROSAN

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Marian Salkin
Date: December 5, 1991

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AB - Alfred Brosan [interviewee]

MS – Marian Salkin [interviewer]

Date: December 5, 1991¹

Tape one, side one:

MS: Mr. Brosan, could you tell me something about your life in Germany before the Nazi era, including your place of birth, your date of birth, your residence, your education, religious affiliation, occupation or that of your family, and the experience with the non-Jewish community?

AB: I was born on July 20, 1923 in a small town near Vienna called Rodaun, R-O-D-A-U-N. At that time my parents lived in Vienna at, in the 7th District, and my birth occurred during their vacation in the summer. My first recollection is that we lived in a house in the suburbs of Vienna called Hainbach, H-A-I-N-B-A-C-H, which is in the western part of Vienna. We lived there until I was approximately 10 years old. And then we lived, moved into the city itself into the 13th District, into an apartment, where we lived for approximately two-and-a-half years. And then we moved closer to my father's place of business into the 7th District. If I remember correctly the name of the street was Halb Strasse, H-A-L-B Strasse, which means half street. I don't know why they call it that. My father was in the leather goods business. He had a factory in Vienna in the 7th District and was fairly prosperous. When in 1938, in March of 1938 Hitler got into Vienna, came into Vienna and occupied the city, my father continued to function in the leather goods business, and as a matter of fact, travelled, still travelled all over Europe and all over Austria to sell his leather goods. However, they established an Aryan supervisor in my father's business, who was the foreman who worked for my father for many years. So the relationship was pretty good between him and my father. However, my father evidently saw what was coming, and decided that we have to get out of Vienna in a hurry. So, we started to go to all the various consulates and try and see if we could get some visas. Of course we didn't succeed. And then my father found out that you could go to Shanghai, China, to the International Settlement, without any visas.

MS: Do you know where he obtained this information?

AB: No.

MS: You don't.

AB: I have no idea.

MS: Okay.

AB: And he convinced one of, his brother, and two of his sisters to come with us. And so a family of about 15 people traveled to Shanghai.

MS: How did you get to Shanghai? What was the route that you took?

AB: Well, I'm getting there.

¹Recorded later as part of the Rickshaw Reunion - a meeting in October 1991 at the Hilton Hotel in Philadelphia of refugees who found refuge in Shanghai during World War II.

MS: Oh, I'm sorry. Okay.

AB: One of the, one sister who did not want to go to Shanghai with us, because they had relatives in the United States and they had an affidavit, moved to Italy and finally wound up in Auschwitz and died. Only their son, who is also named Alfred, survived and now lives in Iowa, in Marion, Iowa. The way we got to Shanghai was my father, my mother and I went by the Trans-Siberian railroad via Berlin, Warsaw, Moscow, then boarded the Trans-Siberian railroad in Moscow and travelled with the Manzhouli Trans-Siberian railroad for three weeks in the middle of the winter, to the Manchurian border at Manzhouli. From there we took a Japanese train to Harbin in Manchuria where we stopped for about five days, where we were received by a Jewish committee.

MS: Do you remember whether it was the HIAS, or whether it was the...

AB: No, I have no idea. It was a local group...

MS: Local group.

AB: Of Russian Jews.

MS: Okay.

AB: Yeah.

MS: All right.

AB: That spoke Yiddish. And they tried to convince us to stay there. However, the rest of the family, of approximately 12 people, including my sister, went by boat from Genoa-- I think the boat was the *Monte Verde*² if I remember correctly-- through the Suez Canal and Indian Ocean to Shanghai. And of course we wanted to meet them in Shanghai. We didn't want to stay in Harbin. From Harbin we traveled to Port Arthur, which was Dalian at that time in Japanese or Chinese. And we boarded a boat from there, which took about three days, to Shanghai. And we arrived in Shanghai on, I think it was November 23, or, no, we left Vienna November 23, about two weeks after the *Kristallnacht*.

MS: Oh. You left very quickly then.

AB: Well, it just so happened it coincided with our plans.

MS: I see.

AB: And then we were also received by a Jewish group. I think it was the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and of course also Russian Jews. And there was a whole group of people.

MS: This was in Shanghai.

AB: In Shanghai, yeah. And they put us up into an apartment. We were pretty early. We were actually there before the whole mass of people...

MS: And so...

AB: Got in...

MS: And so you...

²*Conte Verde*, a Lloyd Triestino vessel which brought many German refugees to Shanghai.
www.yadvashem.org/articles/academic/flight-to-shanghai-the-larger-setting.html
Accessed December 10, 2024.

AB: We arrived, I would say...

MS: And so you ...

AB: It was about December 23, or thereabouts that we arrived in Shanghai, of 1938.

MS: Can we just backtrack a moment?

AB: Yeah. Sure.

MS: Could you just give me the names of your father, his first name?

AB: Okay.

MS: And your mother's maiden name?

AB: My father was Rudolf Brosan. My mother's name was Anna, née Spielmann, S-P-I-E-L-M-A-N-N. And my father was born in, in Moravia in Czechoslovakia.

MS: Moravia?

AB: Moravia. And my mother was actually born in Vienna. My sister was also born in Vienna, and her name was Gertrude.

MS: I have another question.

AB: Yeah.

MS: I don't know whether I followed you correctly. Was, a group of the family went through Genoa, through Italy...

AB: Yeah.

MS: And another...

AB: With my sister.

MS: With your sister. And another group went overland through...

AB: No, only my mother and my father and myself.

MS: Went overland.

AB: Overland, via Siberia, by Trans-Siberian railroad.

MS: Okay.

AB: Of course we arrived in Shanghai with the \$40 that the Austrian, the German government allowed us to take out. However, my father had money outstanding from various customers in England, France, etc., etc., and he had written to them before we left Vienna to not send their money to Austria, to Germany then, Vienna, but to send it to Shanghai. There was only one British company that sent us money. And I think it was in the vicinity of about three or four thousand pounds.

MS: Which was a con...

AB: ...yeah.

MS: ...siderable amount of money.

AB: And that money enabled us to start a business in Shanghai again.

MS: How...

AB: A leather goods business.

MS: How marvelous.

AB: And we had about 30, 40 Chinese working for us. I have pictures here if you want to see them.

MS: Oh, so...

AB: Yeah.

MS: So then, yes I would like to look at them.

AB: Yeah.

MS: You were fortunate...

AB: Oh yeah.

MS: That the family was able to function economically...

AB: Oh yeah.

MS: On a very sound basis.

AB: My father, and my uncle that came by boat established a business I would say within six months after we arrived in Shanghai. And because of his connections-- and there's also of course a tremendous export trade out of Shanghai-- and with my father and uncle's know-how of European leather goods with the Chinese skill-- because these Chinese people were excellent workers, they had very fine workmanship-- we were able to establish ourselves within a year's time. And they had a thriving business going. Not only did we do leather goods, but then eventually we went in to the, into rain coats and clothing business. And by 1941 when the war broke out, we had enough money, made enough money, to live all through the war without charity.

MS: From that point on...

AB: Yeah.

MS: From '41, yeah.

AB: Yeah. Now, we had a...

MS: Well, excuse me...

AB: Yeah.

MS: From 1941, at this point when the war broke out, how did that affect your business? Did it put an end to it?

AB: Well, no, no.

MS: No.

AB: We continued working. We had a, my father had a place of business in the embankment building. We lived in Hongkew. We had a house in Hongkew.

MS: You still were within the ghetto...

AB: Well, it wasn't a ghetto then yet.

MS: I see.

AB: But that's where we moved into, and we just didn't want to move out of there because all our friends and relatives lived there. But...

MS: You were able to rent an apartment, or a house?

AB: No, we had a house.

MS: A house.

AB: We had a house, yeah, a house. You know, like a townhouse, in a lane, what they call a lane in Shanghai.

MS: And so this was before most of the refugees arrived...

AB: Well...

MS: In Hongkew?

AB: Well, originally when we got there they gave us an apartment to live in. But as we were able to establish ourselves-- and I got a little job and my sister got a little job-- my father, well, you couldn't actually buy a house, but you had to pay like, it's like a condominium. You had to buy it, and then you paid maintenance, etc. So, we were able to get enough money together to buy that. You couldn't buy it on time like you do it in America. You had to put down cash. And we lived in that house until the war was over, until we left, my parents left and I left Shanghai.

MS: So the family then was able to live at a very comfortable level.

AB: Oh yeah. Before the war broke out we lived very nicely. And even after the war broke out, it became a little bit more difficult after the, 1943 when we had to move into the ghetto and my father had to move the factory away from where we were.

MS: Do you want to tell us about that? Did your...

AB: Well, there was a decree by the Japanese in 1943. As a matter of fact I just saw the date somewhere. I just got a letter from the Shanghai Organization from Israel. I subscribe to their newspaper. As a matter of fact I have it here somewhere. I just got it today and was reading it. And, I think it was February 1943 that the decree came out, that all the Jewish refugees that arrived in Shanghai be-, prior, after 1938, had to move into a, what they called a "Designated Area," which was in Hongkew, which was on the, in the seed-, not the seedier part, but the ...

MS: Less desirable, would you say?

AB: Less desirable part of Shanghai, and close to a lot of Japanese military installations. It was close to the, to the pier, to the docks where the Japanese warships were. The Japanese headquarters was in that area. That's why later on we got bombed. That's another story. And, we were lucky enough to live within the district, so we didn't have to move. But, the factory that my father had was outside the district, so we had to move the factory into the district. Of course business died then, because we had a lot of Japanese customers then, when we were still in the other factory. And we had some customers from outside of Shanghai, from like Tientsin and Nanking that came and bought. But after 1943, the situation became very volatile-- the bombings of Shanghai, and, so. But we were still able to live very comfortable, with whatever amount of food was available. I mean there wasn't any food available, very little, but whatever was available we were able to buy.

MS: What was your experience with the Japanese up until this time, as refugees? Do you...

AB: Had very little contact with them.

MS: Very little.

AB: I saw them on the streets. I got a pass to get outside of the ghetto. As a matter of fact I was looking for it. I couldn't find it. I still have it somewhere. And I was able to leave, but every month I had to go and get it renewed. And they were polite. And, they asked a couple questions. I mean, it was frightening to go there, 'cause I was about, how old was I then? I was about maybe 20, 21 years old. And, but overall I must tell, must say that the Japanese treated us well.

MS: That's very interesting.

AB: Yeah. As a matter of fact, they protected us from the Germans, really. There was a fairly large German community in Shanghai. A couple of occasions they had the Hitler Youth Organizations. They came with trucks into the ghetto to start trouble, but we got together and we got rid of them. We fought them. And of course they didn't have any weapons. They were just fist fights. So then they didn't come back again. But other than that we didn't have any problems, really, except we were bombed and there was no food.

MS: Let me ask you, your, did you have, you had contact with the Chinese as laborers in your father's factory...

AB: Yeah, and also friends and also customers.

MS: [Unclear], yeah.

AB: Sure. Very cordial. Very nice. They are very nice people. I always liked the Chinese.

MS: Another question that many of the people that...

AB: Very loyal people. The people that worked for us were very loyal. They were very, well, it was a, we helped each other, you know. It was a good relationship.

MS: There were supposed to have been some tragic things happening in Hongkew too with the poor Chinese, or, not in Hongkew, but in the surrounding parts I suppose, where many of them suffered from diseases and malnutrition and...

AB: Oh yeah, sure. That was Shanghai, you know.

MS: That was away from anything that you were exposed to?

AB: Well, you were exposed to it naturally, you know, you walked down the street and you saw a corpse laying in the street. But that was part of Shanghai, I mean, that was there before, and probably goes on today. And, I mean, that kind of thing, if you had for instance during the winter a cold wave-- there's a lot of homeless people there-- and then in the morning they came with these wooden carts that were pushed by men to pick up the corpses.

MS: Pick up the bodies and remove them.

AB: Yeah, and remove them and burn them. There was a field, oh, a few miles away from us, where they did this. I mean it wasn't a pleasant kind of a thing, but, as a 15-year-old, getting to Shanghai, it was an adventure.

MS: I could imagine.

AB: And it was very interesting, you know. And with the exception of a few couple of years while we were in that ghetto and were hounded by the bombers, I would say I enjoyed Shanghai. I had nice friends, and living was very pleasant. The Chinese are nice people. I had no problems with anybody. We were able to make a decent living. I had a chance to go back to school, to a commercial school.

MS: Yes, I was going to ask you...

AB: Yeah?

MS: What was your education...

AB: Well, when I left Shanghai, my father groomed me to take over his, I mean, excuse me, when we left Vienna-- before we left Vienna my father groomed me to take over the business, the leather goods business. So I went, I was like an apprentice in the leather goods for one year. In Vienna, with 14 years you can quit school. And then you...

MS: And so you [unclear]...

AB: Yeah, then I become, you become an apprentice in whatever trade you want. But you still go to school, but specifically for that particular trade. I still have my card here from the school, believe it or not. And, he wanted me to take over his business and run the business. I wanted to become a mechanical engineer. He wanted me to become a leather goods worker. You know...

MS: And you became...

AB: I became something completely different.

MS: But you did stay with your father in business in Shanghai?

AB: No.

MS: No? Oh, you did not. Okay.

AB: No, no, no.

MS: I was wrong when I thought...

AB: You were wrong.

MS: Okay.

AB: When we got to Shanghai...

MS: Yes?

AB: I had little various jobs to help my family to get on their feet. And then my father started the business with my uncle, and there wasn't any room for extra people. Whatever he had to do, he had to do, [pause] had to do, so there wasn't really any room for. And so, I went to that school to become...

MS: What school?

AB: To learn the export, I don't remember what the name...

MS: You don't know the name of the school.

AB: No. It was a private school...

MS: I see.

AB: To learn the export business and how to, you know, to help my father later on. And then I worked for a Dutch, Chinese Dutch company until after the war broke out.

And the Dutch gentleman, whose name was Mr. Vanderbin [phonetic], was interned when all the British and French and Allied citizens were put into camps. After that, I really didn't do any work until my father moved into the ghetto with the factory in 1943, and, well, we subsisted then until the war was over and my father and my uncle wanted to, started the business again. They regained their original place, factory, in, outside the ghetto, and started up again. But after a year or so it became clear that the Communists were going to come.

MS: Excuse me, what year did you regain your business?

AB: About 1945, right after the war.

MS: After the war.

AB: Yeah. The factory, rooms really, it was, the business was in the ghetto. We just moved it back. Then it became clear after a while and everybody wanted to get out of Shanghai and emigrate. Most people wanted to come to the United States, but of course that wasn't that easy. My uncle and his children went to Australia, and my father and myself stayed behind with my sister.

MS: And your mother?

AB: And my mother of course, yeah. What happened was that my father had a heart attack. He was very sick, and while my father was sick my uncle liquidated the company and sold everything off, including the premises that we'd got back again, and my sister met an American GI in Shanghai and married him and came to the States. And my mother had a cousin in Bloomfield, New Jersey, who immigrated, whose mother immigrated to the States early 1900's and who had sent us an affidavit to Vienna, but there wasn't enough time to wait, to wait for a visa, for a quota. That's why we went to Shanghai in the first place, because we had to get out. But then, finally with my sister being in the United States already, my parents were able to come on a-- my father was born in Czechoslovakia-- on the Czechoslovakian quota.

MS: When did your sister come to the United States?

AB: My sister got here in 19-, beginning of 1946. Very early 1946. My parents got to the States in late 1946.

MS: Was it through your sister's efforts?

AB: Well, partially, and also because the aunt renewed the affidavit again, the cousin. My mother's cousin. However, I was born in Austria, which was Austrian quota again after the war, which was closed. So I stayed behind in Shanghai all by myself.

MS: Tell us what happened to you at that point.

AB: Well, I got another job again, and worked in an exporting good company. I don't remember the name of the company anymore. Was a, the gentleman who owned the company was a Czechoslovakian, but he wasn't Jewish. And he was married to a Chinese lady. Very nice people. And then one morning I woke up and I heard cannon shots, and went out in the street and we started looking around, and we found out that the Chinese Communists were 40 miles from Shanghai. And, also an aunt stayed behind with

me, because she was all by herself, and she also, she didn't have anybody to go to except another sister of my father's who was in Bolivia, who emigrated from Shang-, from Vienna to Bolivia originally. So...

MS: Did she also have problems with getting a visa to...

AB: Yeah, yeah. She was waiting for her visa from Bolivia, because my aunt...

MS: For Bolivia.

AB: Yeah. My aunt in Bolivia sent her a visa to come. But, I didn't want to wait, and so I, then again Austria was an independent country. So I went to the Austrian Consulate and got my passport which I have here, I'll show you. And with the Austrian passport I went to the French Consulate, got myself a transit visa with the idea of going through France to Ge-, to Vienna. With that visa I went to the Canadian Consulate, got myself a transit visa. With that visa I went to the American Consulate, got a transit visa for America, and left Shanghai on the last ship.

MS: Do you remember...

AB: *The General Meigs.*

MS: *The General...*

AB: *General Meigs, M-E-I-G-G-S.*

MS: The last...

AB: Yeah, *S.S. General Meigs.*

MS: And this was the last ship to leave Shang-...

AB: Was the last ship to leave Shanghai.

MS: Before the Communists...

AB: Before the Communists took over.

MS: Was your aunt with you?

AB: No, she stayed behind, because I couldn't take her with me. However, when I went to San Francisco, I went to the Bolivian government consulate, and they had her visa sitting there. They just didn't forward it to Shanghai.

MS: Oh my.

AB: So I was instrumental of getting the visa to Shanghai, and she eventually got out.

MS: She did. Good.

AB: And she went to Cochabamba, Bolivia, where she eventually died after a few years. Anyhow, so with the, my passport and all these visas, I came to the States.

MS: You could have travelled the world.

AB: Yeah. And my parents of course were here already, so I joined them in Philadelphia and then we hired a lawyer and I was able to stay here. And then I married an American girl, went to Canada, came back with a immigrant's visa, and I've been here ever since. And with my exporting experience I started working for a company by the name of Quaker Export Packaging Company, Quaker Storage. I worked for them for 17 years, and then in 1969 I started my own business, which...

MS: In the export field?

AB: No, in the ex-, in the packaging, export packaging business. That's what Quaker was doing, really. And I've been very successful, very, moderately successful.

MS: Well, that's really...

AB: I had three children, three girls, all of them graduates of colleges. My oldest daughter is a speech therapist with a master's degree. She went to Temple and then got her master's degree from Adelphi. My second daughter has a degree from Temple, who is a teacher. My third daughter has a degree from Temple in history, history teacher. But the last two daughters are running my business now, which I gave to them last year.

MS: That's marvelous.

AB: So, hopefully that's it.

MS: Let me ask you something...

AB: Yeah.

MS: Did you have, did the family maintain any religious affiliations in Shanghai?

AB: Oh always. We always belonged to a synagogue.

MS: Can you tell...

AB: Well, we are not very religious.

MS: No, but what was the feeling towards, you know...

AB: Judaism?

MS: Staying with Judaism...

AB: Oh, absolutely.

MS: Under the...

AB: Sure. Certainly. I'm a member of a synagogue now, always have been all my life. Sure. And my children, my oldest daughter went to Gratz, graduated from Gratz. My other two daughters went to Beth Jacob, graduated from Beth Jacob, before they went to Temple. So they all had religious training. They, my oldest daughter is married and has two children. My middle daughter is married, and has two children. My third daughter is still single. So, we're all doing well, hopefully.

MS: Mr. Brosan, I wanted to ask you about any relationships that you may have had with refugees from other backgrounds, or with the Russ-, the Shanghai Russian Jewish community, or with the Shanghai Sephardic community.

AB: Yes. I had some friends that belonged, that were Russian Jewish immigrants. The school that I attended, the private school had a number of Russian Jewish women, girls, and I went out with them, and that interacted. And I also had a German Jewish girlfriend that came to Shanghai in 1933 and was established there, who grew up and had a lot of Sephardic Jewish friends. And we went to parties together with them, and so I had very good relationships with those communities.

MS: It sounds as though you had a really-

[Tape one, side one ended. Tape runs silently for a few seconds.]

Tape one, side two:

AB: Well, with the exception of the first few months in Shanghai, the uncertainty of arriving, and not knowing what's gonna be, and I would say the last year in Shang-, the last three or four years in Shanghai, when my parents left and I stayed alone behind, with a lot of uncertainty what's gonna be, were about the toughest years. When I was all by myself in Shanghai just with my aunt I had a very nice time, because I was by myself. I made a nice living, had some money left over that my father left behind for me, and I didn't have any financial worries. I was a young man by myself in a wide open city. I had a good time.

MS: At the time that you felt that you had to leave...

AB: Yeah.

MS: Because the Communists were coming in...

AB: Yeah.

MS: This was true of the entire Jewish community, or the entire international community.

AB: Right, yeah.

MS: Yes.

AB: Yeah, absolutely.

MS: Everyone was leaving.

AB: Yeah, absolutely. Well, some of my friends stayed behind until the Communists had left, later on. And from what I understand from them-- I spoke to them or wrote to them and heard from them later on-- that they didn't have any problems under the Communists and that the Joint Distribution Committee was still there and took care of them and got them out of Shanghai. Of course there was a panic before the Communists came, like, you know, and, but, as I said, I got out. I did what I had to do. So...

MS: Were there any other unusual incidents that you recall that might have happened to you while you were living in Shanghai that you would like to discuss?

AB: Well, not really, with the exception of the first bombing of Shanghai.

MS: Yes, tell us a little about that.

AB: Yeah, well, the place we lived is called a lane, which is a compound of houses similar to what we have here, with a closed gate. And there's a Chinese concierge or watchman who closes the gates in the evening at sundown and opens it up again in the morning. And when you come late, you have to call him and he opens up. Anyhow, we were sitting with him, and there was also a Sikh, Indian policeman that lived in our lane. And we were sitting out there and talking. And it was a cloudy day and all of a sudden we hear the airplanes coming. We didn't see them, we just heard them, because there was a low cloud cover. And we didn't think anything of it, because there were many times that airplanes overflew Shanghai. But, this particular day in the afternoon, all of a sudden, whooom, one bomb after the other. We were very close to a Japanese headquarters, naval

headquarters, and also a Japanese warehouse. And evidently Japanese military warehouse, and...

MS: Which was obviously a target?

AB: Which was the target. And actually, our lane was not hit. But, there were fires all around us, and the bombs came flowing down, and it was really on a, the only thing that happened to us, the house we lived in had like an atrium, and a glass roof. And a few of the shrapnels of the Japanese anti-aircraft guns came down and broke some of the glass. That was about the damage that we sustained. And from then on in, almost every day...

MS: There were more bombings?

AB: Every day. During the day it was the British. During the night it was the American planes. But, thank God we survived and we weren't hit.

MS: You didn't have any damage...

AB: No.

MS: Direct damage to your home...

AB: No.

MS: As a result?

AB: The only thing is we had the glass broken a couple times.

MS: And the fright.

AB: And the fright. The surprise. The first time around. And after that, you know, we knew it already what was gonna come. So we took...

MS: There were no shelters?

AB: No. Because Shanghai is a, there are no basements in Shanghai because it's built on swamplands, so it's all built on slabs. So they told us how, you know, get a mattress and get it over your, you build yourself an inside shelter with mattresses on top.

MS: Did you do that?

AB: Oh, of course. Yeah. You had to black out, blank out your windows and dim your lights, darken your lights.

MS: How long did the bombing continue for? Do you remember?

AB: I would say it started sometime in the beginning of 1944 and ended just before the war was over, which was what, 1945. Yeah. Sometime it was 1945 if I recall. And of course, I remember Pearl Harbor day in Shanghai, which was all Huangpu River day in Shanghai. We had an American patrol boat anchored at, in Shanghai at the Bund. And there was also a couple of British...

MS: What was the Bund?

AB: The Bund was the main street in front of Shanghai, which was the river...

MS: Paralleled it.

AB: Parallel, running parallel to the river. And all the big, big banking establishments were on the Bund.

MS: Right.

AB: And the hotels, the big hotels and as a matter of fact, the company that I worked for after the war was in the Shanghai, Hong Kong-Shanghai Building, which was on the Bund. So anyhow, and all of a sudden also, all of a sudden the airplanes came flying. This time it was Japanese planes. And they started bombing these American and British patrol boats. I think there was also a French patrol boat there, because Shanghai was an international settlement. And they surrendered, and that was the beginning of Pearl Harbor, which was December the 8 in Shanghai.

MS: Seventh, yeah, of course, yes.

AB: Yeah. So that was one of the lower points of life in Shanghai. And, of course the Japanese took over the Settlement right away.

MS: The International Settlement?

AB: The International, and the French Concession. It was also the French Concession, which was run by the French government.

MS: And those people had to intern themselves to some degree, didn't they?

AB: No, they were left free, believe it or not, for about a year or so, and then they were put into camps-- women, children, everybody. I mean, there was no exception. And we as Jews and German refugees were actually treated fairly nicely. They could have put us into concentration camps right off the bat, but they didn't do it. I don't, I have a book here. It's called the *Fu-Go*, anyhow it tells about why the Japanese didn't do it. They thought because Jewish influence in America was so strong that they didn't want to offend the Jewish communities in the United States. That's one of the reasons. But evidently it didn't do them much good. But it saved our lives. After the war I found out that the Germans wanted to put all the refugees on boats and take them out into the ocean and sink them. But the Japanese wouldn't allow it.

MS: Was that factual, do you think?

AB: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Now, the funny part is, that when we travelled from, through Russia, there were two German girls on the train with us, who were daughters of the German Consul. Was it the Consul in Shanghai, or one of the staff members, and they were pretty frightened. And they were on the, and they clung to us, really. They looked for protection. And the funny part was that they were, had a compartment, and there were four bunks in the compartment and there were only two girls. They put a young KGB man in with them.

MS: Interesting.

AB: Yeah. And this guy travelled with them from Moscow to Manzhouli, till the end of, till the end of the Trans-Siberian railroad. And it was a very interesting trip. There were a lot of Jewish soldiers in the Russian army.

MS: Did you have any experiences that you remember with them?

AB: Yeah, when they found out that we were refugees, they came...

MS: What was their, what was their feelings?

AB: Very good reaction.

MS: Very good?

AB: Very good reaction.

MS: Oh yeah?

AB: With candy, and flowers. In the middle of the winter we were there, in November-- November-December. And I tell you, this whole thing was a laugh, as far as I was concerned. I was young, adventurous, I had a good time wherever I went.

MS: I'm sure when after the war you realized how fortunate you really were.

AB: Oh, of course.

MS: Oh, a question. When you were living in Shanghai...

AB: Yeah?

MS: Was there any news that you heard...

AB: Oh yeah, we had, sure.

MS: Coming through about what was happening?

AB: We had, oh yeah, we had radios and we listened to the, of course they had German stations. We listened in German and there was a French Vichy station in Shanghai. Of course we got distorted news, but we also got short-wave transmissions and we, you know, we heard the news. Now, of course you also have to understand that while the few months that we were in Vienna after Hitler came in, before we left, including *Kristallnacht*, was very traumatic. You know? I mean, the Hitler Youths and Jews not allowed here, and, so, when I got out of Germany, when we finally crossed the Polish border, you know...

MS: Going east.

AB: Going east, to, towards Moscow, I mean, the relief, you know?

MS: It must have been enormous.

AB: Yeah, and then of course everything else after that was fun, you know?

MS: Mr. Brosan...

AB: Yeah?

MS: Were there family members that were left in Vienna that didn't make it out...

AB: Well, we had a...

MS: That you, [unclear] was lost?

AB: We had a fairly large extended family. I had a grandmother that didn't want to come with us, because she said she was in her 70s and she didn't want to come. And then we finally, when we got to Shanghai and got established, my mother insisted that she come. And she was getting ready to come and she was going to somewhere, and she got on a trolley and she wasn't half on the trolley and the trolley started moving, and she fell, and she got killed.

MS: Oh my!

AB: Yeah. In a way it was a blessing, because, for her. Because she was in her middle 70s, and a trip like that all by herself, to Shanghai...

MS: Could have been detrimental, too.

AB: Could have been a disaster for her. Also, from my mother's side, she was

an only child, but she had a great number of cousins. From what I know, most of them got out. All of them got out. Most of them wound up in Australia. One cousin wound up in Switzerland, and then moved to Australia later on. So actually, the only people that we lost was the aunt and uncle that refused to come with us to Shanghai, and wound up, I have a picture of them here if you are interested.

MS: Yes.

AB: I, so that's about the only people. I want to tell you another story, a little vignette that was interesting.

MS: Fine. I'd love to hear it.

AB: Now, we, of course my father made all these plans to go to Shanghai, secretly. Nobody in the business knew that this was gonna come. He went to the business every day, and then, we were supposed to leave for Berlin, and then on to Warsaw. I think it was a Saturday evening, and my father took me, and we went into the business. And just to see how everything was. There wasn't anybody working. And on the way out-- he had a key in his hand-- he walked over to a sewer, took the key and threw it into the sewer and said, "That's the end of this. Now I'm free now. Now we are ready to go."

MS: What was your reaction?

AB: What the hell did I know? I was a young kid. I was 15 years old, not quite 15. And, I knew what, why he was doing it, because we were, I knew we were leaving. And he left that business there completely intact, and I don't know what happened to it. I guess they kept on running it, [unclear], that Aryan administrator probably kept on running it as long as he could. And then after the war, he refused to go back.

MS: Your father.

AB: Completely, I mean, he was sick already, you know. He re-, completely refused to go back.

MS: Were there any reparations?

AB: Austria did not give any reparations.

MS: Did not give any, that's right. That's right.

AB: The only thing my mother got, my father died, unfortunately, in Philadelphia, in 19-, '53 I would say. Let's see, my, he was born, he was, he died five days after my first child was born. It's like he was waiting for her to be born. And he was 65 years old. Let's see that was, now he was born in 1888, 65, let's see, 12, yeah, '53. All right. And, no, we never got anything back. The only thing my mother got was a pension from the Austrian government, but not because she is a refugee, but because she was entitled, because my father paid the taxes all these years that he was in business. And I get a small pension from Austria. Not because I'm a refugee or anything, or reparations...

MS: You were a citizen.

AB: Because I, I worked for a few months, for a year as an apprentice. Therefore I was entitled to get a few dollars, nothing to speak of. But, *chazerai* [Yiddish – junk, trash], if you know what that means.

MS: Mmm hmm.

AB: So, that was another vignette of interest. Of course, coming to the United States with my father being sick, and we started a small business here, a retail business. I shipped over a lot of artifacts from Shanghai, a great number of them, since I was in the export business, and I had some money over there. And so, this stuff that you see, these *fu dogs* [traditional Chinese dog sculptures] and the stuff I have in there, was like the cream of the crop that I kept for myself. And with that we started a business. That, so I sent over like 50 cases of stuff-- porcelain and ivory and all kinds of things. So, we started, and then we started selling leather goods, handbags. And we had a store, first we had a store in Wyoming, Wyoming Avenue, 420 East Wyoming Avenue, D, D and Wyoming, yeah, on the corner.

MS: In the Boulevard section.

AB: Yeah. And we did well. We sold a lot of the Chinese artifacts, the point where we started buying them from a Chinese friend that we knew from New York, an importer, and of course leather goods. But then my father had a stroke in the middle of selling a lady a cro-, an alligator bag. He got so excited, he had a stroke. And that was the end of the business. Then I started a business, no before that even, before that happened, we, I started my own business on Rising Sun Avenue in Lansdale. And we did pretty well. I also did hand goods, repairing, etcetera, you know, fixing bags, etcetera. But I never liked the leather goods business, that's the funny part of it.

MS: So then you got out of that and got into the...

AB: Yeah. I got into the packaging business. And was also a chance encounter with the owner of Quaker Export Packaging, and he said to me, "Come and see me." He says, "With your export background, I could use you." So I got a job. I think I started with \$55 a week.

MS: That was not bad.

AB: No, it wasn't bad. No.

MS: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Brosan...

AB: Yeah.

MS: For your testimony and for your interview, and I'm sure we're going to find this quite interesting.

AB: Well...

MS: Thank you again.

AB: That's it.

[Tape one, side two ended. Interview ended.]