HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

FREDY K. SEIDEL

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Gerry Schneeberg
Date: October 17, 1999

Holocaust Oral History Archive
Gratz College
Melrose Park, PA 19027

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FS - Fredy K. Seidel [interviewee]
GS - Gerry Schneeberg [interviewer]
Date: October 17, 1999[1]

Tape one, side one:

GS: This is Gerry Schneeberg interviewing Freddy Seidel on October 17, 1999. Mr. Seidel, will you tell us when and where you were born?

FS: I was born in Shanghai and I was born on May 1, 1941, and my arrival on the scene was full cataclysmic because it precipitated World War II.

GS: We usually begin these interviews asking about your memories of your life before going to Shanghai but you tell us you were born in Shanghai.

FS: I was born in Shanghai, right.

GS: So what we want to know is something about your family situation, your parents, siblings, and then the cataclysmic event.

FS: Okay, my parents came from Breslau which is now Breslau in Poland and at the time it was Germany, and what happened is, I have two brothers and my middle brother-- he's older than me but I mean the middle of the two brothers-- went to school in Breslau. He went to a Jewish school, and on November 8 or November 9 he passed by the huge synagogue and saw it burning. He saw the dome of the synagogue in flames and collapse, and he came running home to my parents and told them what was happening, and my parents took that as a signal to, to leave Germany, that Germany was no longer a safe place for Jews. My mother had a cousin of hers who worked at the, I think it was the Lloyd, I think it was the French line or the Lloyd Triestino. I think it was Lloyd Triestino in Berlin. No, I'm, it was the French Tourist Bureau in Berlin, and she went to see him to find out where she could go to, and he tipped her off that a lot of people were going to Shanghai. That Shanghai did not require really any kind of permits to enter, no money to sponsor yourself or be sponsored. It was really the place to go where nobody really cared. And so my parents left one brother behind, they split the family, they left one brother behind, who they were hoping would make it to America. And he stayed with some other people, with relatives, who were protected in part because they were part of a mix-- they were mixed marriage. That brother never made it. He was finally picked up and taken to Auschwitz and that's the last we know of him. And my father left his parents and his other two brothers behind in Breslau. My grandfather had, was a veteran of World War I, was injured in World War I, and because of that he felt safe, that nobody would do anything to him. That's a story that everybody will tell you that, all Germans, all Jewish veterans, I shouldn't say all, but most Jewish veterans felt because they were a veteran, nobody would ever touch them, and so they stayed behind and my, my two

[1]Recorded at the Rickshaw Reunion - a meeting in October 1999 at the Holiday Inn in Philadelphia of refugees who found refuge in Shanghai during World War II.

uncles-- I think one of them was a little bit of a snob, and said before I go to Shanghai, "The sewer of the world, I'd rather kill myself here," and that's exactly what happened. Not that he killed himself but that he got killed. I don't know why the other one didn't go. I don't know.

GS: But your immediate family, both parents, and brothers went?

FS: Well, one brother went. That's the other brother that is being interviewed separately, who I'm here with, and the other one we never heard of again. He was the oldest. He was 13 years, 13 years old when he was taken away to the concentration camp.

GS: This was after you had left?

FS: Yes, we found out after the war, in China. My father found out what happened. Now one of the, to me I mean, I constantly keep thinking of what it must have felt like for my father and even my brother that's still alive, and I asked my brother here. What it must have felt like after the war to find out that nobody was alive anymore, what a traumatic experience it must have been, and my brother in fact, I think, if I can interpret it, blocked it out. He doesn't remember. He doesn't remember how he found out. He doesn't remember how he felt, so I think he probably blocked it out.

GS: Your other brother remained with some family members?

FS: This one came to Shanghai?

GS: No, but I mean the one that remained?

FS: Yeah, the other one that got killed. Yes, he remained with family members. My mother took her mother with us, with her, and my grandmother was with us in Shanghai all the time, and she survived. My, my…

GS: When was this…

FS: …maternal grandfather died before the war broke out. They left Breslau…

GS: In '38?

FS: …in '39.

GS: Thirty-nine ['39].

FS: *Kristallnacht* was in '38.

GS: Right.

FS: They left in April, I think of '39. And that in itself from what my mother keeps telling me-- my mother is still alive-- from what my mother keeps telling me, that in itself was a very traumatic experience for them.

GS: The trip itself?

FS: Not so much the leaving, but the fear of making the arrangements, the fear of where are we going to? What will be? How? Where? Nobody knew what Shanghai was.

GS: The unknown.

FS: It was an unknown entity, right. So there was the fear of what was awaiting them but also the fear of, will we get out safely? You know, will, what obstacles will they throw in our way to get out, because of the German government I believe at the time, first of all demanded, I think, round trip tickets for everybody. You had to have a roundtrip ticket because I think they wanted to make sure that if…

GS: You didn't [unclear]…

FS: …the country you go to doesn't accept you that they don't have to pay for your deportation back. So they required roundtrip tickets, they-- so that was difficult. My parents were just fairly newlywed I think and…

GS: What was your father's work?

FS: He was a salesman. He, there's a word for it, he used to travel around in Germany selling household goods to the people in the country, and I wanted to, there was something I was going to say.

GS: It may come to you later.

FS: Yeah, I forgot, there was something I was going to say just now.

GS: I'm curious about the brother who remained. Do you know the reason that he didn't go to Shanghai?

FS: Yeah, as I said before they tried to split up the family…

GS: Oh.

FS: …to, you know, because nobody knew what was going to happen. So America was…

GS: They thought there was a possibility…

FS: America was a known entity, you know? You knew that if you get to America, somehow you would survive, you know?

GS: Right.

FS: China, we don't know. But he'll be the one, the other one, he'll be with us and we will…

GS: Right, right.

FS: …you know, take care of him. And so the family got split up, and like I said, one never made it.

GS: Now once they got to Shanghai, do you recall from what your mother has told, parents told you, what their conditions were, what it was like when they arrived?

FS: That I can only tell you from what I, from hearsay, from what I've heard from my mother. It was a culture shock to them, a big culture shock. You know, I don't know if my parents or if my mother had ever seen a truck in her life, forget being carted onto one and being taken to a camp where they had to share the room with I don't know how many people, living in bunk beds and, in fact, I think the parents were separated because they had rooms for women and rooms for men.

GS: Dormitories.

FS: Dormitories, right. And, you know, like from what my mother tells me, you know, just to look out the window and see all this, pool of ants. There were so many Chinese, and life in Shanghai was, was, I don't say this disparagingly when I say a pool of ants, I mean this in an, actually I love the Chinese like, I have the highest respect for them, but you know where everybody is trying to make a living, they're living on sand banks, we were living near the river by the way. The river was filthy dirty. It was a messy river. It was a hustle bustle society. It was chaos, and coming from Germany which was just the very opposite of it, despite the Nazis, you know, it was quite a culture shock for them, not knowing how they will survive, how they will feed themselves. Being fed from a community kitchen, you know, being fed a bowl of soup or whatever. It was pretty tough for them.

GS: Sure. And then did they continue living in the camp when you were born?

FS: I'm not sure at what point-- no, they didn't live in the camp they started out in, but I don't know exactly they moved to Wayside Camp, which a lot of people here at the Reunion have lived in. Wayside Camp was a pretty big camp, and in Wayside Camp, now I can tell you from memory, from my own memory, even though I was a baby, I can tell you a lot of things. Wayside Camp we lived in a big room together with 28 people. That room was probably three times the size of this room, and each family had a little corner, maybe, I'm trying to figure out the feet, maybe six by-- how big would you say this area is? Six by ten, not even that?

GS: From here to the wall?

FS: Yeah.

GS: I would say about…

FS: Six by ten.

GS: Right.

FS: And each family was separated from their neighbor by a curtain. There were no walls, and we had a bunk bed, and I had a little bed that I was sleeping on. It was sort of like a crib and the, the only trunk that they had was their table, standing vertically upside down, and of course, I think there was a lot of tension in that room…

GS: Had to be.

FS: Had to be, right? And so…

GS: I'm guessing maybe…

FS: No, there, maybe yeah …

GS: Six or seven different families…

FS: Absolutely, absolutely, and there were old people. I remember there were two older sisters, and I was saying yesterday to somebody, I forget who it was, that I was a baby, babies cry all the time.

GS: Sure.

FS: What must the older women who had no children had felt like being annoyed by this crying, day in, day out. I was not their baby and there were other babies

in the room. So when I cried 15 others cried. And it was pretty chaotic and pretty messy. I'm just thinking of what it must have felt like for them. I also remember the war. I remember when bombs fell in, on Shanghai. I remember outside our little cubic, our little corner, there was a wicker basket and across from it there was a big mirror, and I remember sitting with my mother on that wicker basket. I remember seeing the light flares when the bombs-- this must have been close towards the end of the war, 1944, '45 when the Americans started bombing Shanghai and…

GS: So you would have been about four years old?

FS: Something like that, yes, three or four years old. I remember very clearly seeing the flares in the mirror, you know? This is my own memory of course, you know, my mother can tell you. Now, I don't know how many people have told you this. You've heard that there was a Japanese Governor of Shanghai by the name of Ghoya?

GS: Yeah, the "King of the Jews."

FS: Right, and one of the things he tried to do is, you know Shanghai has no water base because it's right on the river. So they tried to build a big vat, like a wine vat or even bigger, and they wanted to use that as a shelter to put into the ground when the bombs came so they had all the children go into this little vat, and put that into the ground to protect us.

GS: You had a recollection of going into that…

FS: Yeah, yeah, yeah, but it didn't last. That thing didn't last.

GS: Didn't last.

FS: Everybody did this for once or twice and then they did no more, and that stopped. But actually, somewhere I think we have a picture where Ghoya came and was photographed with all the children to show how much he loved the Jew-- you know he had this double identity. You know, he tried to show how much he takes care of the Jews on the one hand. On the other hand, he was also kind of a little cruel to them. Of course that cruelty was no comparison to what the Gestapo did to our brethren in the concentration camp. It was mild, you know, compared, comparatively.

GS: You mentioned a picture. Do you have this…

FS: I don't have this, no. I don't have this.

GS: No, but you had seen it.

FS: I don't know where that picture is. I've seen it. I don't know if I have it or if my mother has it, I don't know. It'd be nice to find it.

GS: If it, if it should ever…

FS: This…

GS: …if it should be found, if you ever see it and could make a copy, could be just a zerox copy, it would be a very welcome addition under…

FS: If someday I find…

GS: …your testimony.

FS: You know, some people have put together scrapbooks and it sort of became an inspiration for us. I have to try and do the same thing. I just never have the time for it, but I got to find the time to do it, to put things together.

GS: It's important.

FS: The other part is that a lot of this, a lot of documentation my mother has, and my mother is sort of more emotional about this, and is having a hard time even looking for these things and then giving it to me.

GS: Right.

FS: And by the way, I went back to the synagogue that my parents were married in in Breslau, where they came from last year. I went back for the dedication of it, for the rededication of it.

GS: I guess there are no family members that remain in…

FS: In Breslau, no. We were not a very big family in the first place, but my father's side everybody was wiped out. My mother's side, there weren't too many people who they, my grandfa- my maternal grandfather died before things got bad and my grandmother survived in Shanghai.

GS: So that you were a child up to age five, four or so when the war ended…

FS: Something like that.

GS: Yeah.

FS: I remember the ships coming in. I remember the liberation of Shanghai, too.

GS: American or British?

FS: American, and I remember the fascination we had with Americans. They were God-send. I remember my father going to, I don't know it must have been a Hanukah celebration I think or close to Hanukah, and we went to a, to the Kadoorie school, which you've heard of…

GS: Yes.

FS: …S.J.Y.A. [Shangai Jewish Youth Association]? And apparently some sailors showed up over there, Jewish sailors to celebrate the-- must have heard what happened, and I remember my father bringing them home to us in the camp, and they became good friends for the short time they were staying in Shanghai. And I remember the sailor bringing us chocolate candy bars and some food, and making a little tank for me out of tin cans, he used tin cans, and also making a tele-- you've seen those telephones, you know like from the tin can with the string…

GS: Yes, yes.

FS: Those became my toys, and the-- all the refugees tried very hard to befriend the Americans, not to get anything out of it. I don't think so. It was just like they were our saviors, our liberators, our saviors, and especially the Jewish sailors who were our people, you know, they could identify with us. I don't think anybody did it to get any, any, I don't think anybody had ulterior motives, other than just, hey, these are

Caucasians, you know, and these are people that know what went on in the world. Much of what went on in the world, we only found out from them, and afterwards, you know, about the extent of the Holocaust. I think that it was through the Red Cross that people found out whether their family members were still alive or not.

GS: There was no access to short-wave radio or any means that you were aware of. Of course…

FS: There were.

GS: …you were so young…

FS: There was…

GS: Maybe your father and mother…

FS: No, there were a couple of people that had short-wave radios and they typed up the news on, you know, 8 ½ x 11 paper, and there was a *Shanghai Jewish Chronicle* [published 1939 – 1945] which was published in part German and part English that had news but I think the true extent of it, either, here it didn't hit home until after the war, or they didn't know, didn't get much of the information. I think the real cataclysmic effect of it came a lot after the war when people found out, hey, my family doesn't exist anymore. It's so hard to describe and so hard to imagine what it, what people must have gone, must have felt and I don't think people were sensitive to their, as sensitive to their feelings as they have become now in the nineties where they can describe feelings. There may have been that …

GS: …a little bit overwhelming for people …

FS: Yes, I was probably more shocked than anything.

GS: Do you remember any contact with neighbors or with other people in the camp, any particular impressions, any contact with Chinese people living in Hongkew?

FS: My contact with the Chinese people came a lot afterwards, a lot later. I…

GS: When the war ends…

FS: …I should say we, stayed in China until 1952, way beyond most of the other transports.

GS: Did you go on living in this same camp?

FS: No, and not only did I not go on living, did I not go on living in the same camp, also, I wound up in five different schools in Shanghai in the six years that I went to school there, and many of these schools were no longer in Hongkew, in the ghetto area. They were far outside in the French concession and beyond. And that's when I had my contact with the Chinese.

GS: How did you get to there?

FS: Well at different times, I mean, when the community was still pretty, while it wasn't big anymore, community. I went to five different schools because every time I joined one school-- I started out in Freysinger School which most people here know, and as the com- as the first transports started taking out people, that school closed down. I wound up in Kadoorie School, the S.J.Y.A. and stayed there for about six

months and then again some ships came and took away a few thousand people, and so that school had to close. That's the experience that most people have from Shanghai. Now it gets a little more rare to find people who…

GS: Who remained?

FS: Who went to, who remained and went to Shanghai Jewish School out in French Con- in the French Concession. Now for that you still had so called buses, but they were really trucks, they weren't buses. They were lorries and you had maybe 15 kids, 20 kids going from Hongkew to that school. That school was run by, by well, they all were financed by the Arab Jews and the wealthy English Jews that had founded the…

GS: The old timers.

FS: Yeah, had founded the schools, and there was, in Shanghai Jewish school there was a large Arab Jewish community, population, school population, there was a large Russian contingent. I even had Filipino schoolmates. They were not Jewish, but I had Filipino schoolmates, and there were about 15 or 20 students that came from Hongkew, from the refugees.

GS: So by the time you got to that school, you were how old do you think? Do you remember?

FS: Yeah, probably about eight, seven, eight. Now that school, that by the way, is my fondest memory of any school ever. That experience lasted for about a year and a half to two years, and that was already after the civil war had concluded. The Communists were already in Shanghai, and one of the things that, I met one of my teachers here. I met one of my teachers…

GS: How interesting.

FS: Mr. Grevenchikoff, G-R. I guess it would have been, G-R-E-V-E-N-C-H-I-K-O-F-F or something like that. And one of the things that I remember so fairly well is to protect ourselves against shattering glass from bombing attacks, we had to tape the windows with papers. You know with, you had to tape down the windows, and I remember doing that very much. And that school was administered, you know, the exams were administered by I think Cambridge University in England, so that-- am I saying this right? The exams were administered?

GS: Well, the material I guess was furnished by them.

FS: Yes and the curriculum was sort of set, I guess…

GS: By the British.

FS: …but also very interestingly at Shanghai Jewish School-- now there are some people that went to Shanghai Jewish School, but they went there a lot earlier. They went there even during the war years. I mean World War II years. I lived through the World War II in Shanghai, and through the Communist takeover, the Civil War in Shanghai, and one of my other very fond memories is that most of our teachers were non-Jewish in Shanghai Jewish School, but being that it was called Shanghai Jewish School we had, it had a very Jewish identity and two things that I always find so interesting in

America, because it's so controversial in America is, on Monday mornings the entire school had to assemble in the gym, and the headmaster of the school, Mr. Holland who was non-Jewish-- he was tall, thin, stiff just like he had swallowed a ruler-- would put on a light blue yarmulke and everybody in school had to say the *Modeh Ani Lefanekhah,* the morning prayer and the *Shema* and he said it along with us. And every morning when we came to school, the first class, everybody would get up and say it again, you know, whether you had a yarmulke or not. You put your hand on your head and you said the morning prayer, the *Modeh Ani Lefanekhah* and the *Shema.*

GS: Now not all the children in the school were Jewish.

FS: No and not, and many of the teachers weren't either…

GS: Oh.

FS: …and yet…

GS: But this was a…

FS: …everybody did it…

GS: …uniform practice everyone recites…

FS: That's right. Here in America of course school, school…

GS: The unheard of.

FS: …and prayer is unheard of because it's…

GS: Right.

FS: …a conflict with the separation of church and state, but it wasn't so in China, and it had profound influence on me. It promised a profound effect on me, and Mr. Grevenchikoff who I mentioned earlier, I remember him teaching bible. I remember the first parts that I learned…

GS: Excuse me, Grevenchikoff was or was not Jewish?

FS: No…

GS: Or is?

FS: …no, he was a Russian.

GS: Right.

FS: There were a lot of Russians in China that escaped the Bolshevik Revolution.

GS: Right, they came early.

FS: So like I said before, the school population, many of them were Russian. In fact, they taught us Russian in school. In Shanghai Jewish School we were forbidden to speak German. They taught French, they taught Chinese, and they taught Russian. Now I never got to the level where they taught Chinese**;** it came the higher levels.

GS: Right.

FS: I got through the level where they were, or I was at the level where they taught French, and even Russian. At one point, I was able to read a Russian book, and I remember the Russian teacher that I had. I don't know her name, but I see her right in front of my imaginary eye. And I…

GS: They had a very liberal education.

FS: Yes, it was something else they did in Shanghai. Again, many of the refugees that you have met here, don't have that experience. Now we're talking about 1949 through 1951 at this point. I may wind up going back in time, but right now I'm talking about that period.

GS: You went to the Chinese Jewish School…

FS: Shanghai Jewish School.

GS: …Shanghai Jewish School about '49.

FS: Something like that, one more, one-- when the Kadoorie School dies, closed up. I will have to research and find out when that closed. Some of the people may know it. It's when the transports left.

GS: Yeah, we can find that.

FS: In Shanghai Jewish schools, not only did they teach us, as you said the languages are liberal right?

GS: Right.

FS: They were also preparing us in case we were going to go to Palestine. It was just around the time of the war liberation of Palestine. The War of Independence in Palestine. Either we were to go to Palestine or maybe to America like most Jews did, or Australia, or Canada, or Cuba, or the Dominican Republic, as most did. Very, nobody wanted to go to Germany, for obvious reasons. I don't recall too many people going to Germany. They also taught us some crafts. They had carpentry, welding, electricity and, I think, tailoring, and I picked carpentry. This was like after school. ORT sponsored that program, I think.

GS: Right.

FS: And to this day, I've become a very, very handy person. I'm not a…

GS: [unclear]

FS: That, that little, you know, course, whatever you want to call it, has made me into a very, very handy person. There is nothing that I can't do that if I put my mind to it and have the right part or the right tools, I can not do.

GS: So it sounds like the ORT program was an after school activity?

FS: Yes, yes, yes.

GS: And do you recall any definite Zionist activity, or were you aware of…

FS: Yes, yes there was some of it, yes, yes.

GS: …Zionist organizational activities?

FS: First of all when I still was in the Wayside Camp there was the Betar which many people …

GS: …here have belonged to …

FS: …here have belonged to, and there were a lot of Zionist movements going on in Shanghai at that time, for Poalei Tzion[2], which was an organization for adults. There was the Betar, which was for the younger generations, and in Shanghai Jewish School, we, remember I mentioned an assembly before?

GS: Yes.

[Tape one, side one ended.]

[2]Hebrew -"Workers of Zion" – a movement of Marxist Zionist Jewish workers circles founded in various Russian cities about the turn of the century. (www.zionism-israel.com)

Tape one, side two:

GS: This is tape one, side two of an interview on October 15…

FS: No, 17.

GS: October 17, right with Fredy…

FS: K. Seidel.

GS: Fredy K. Seidel.

FS: You didn't mention the K before.

GS: No.

FS: K stands for cute, just a joke, just a joke. The, at the assembly, not at the assembly, one other thing that gave us a very Jewish identity, and I think was one of the most fantastic ways of motivating students was, they conceptually divided, this is at Shanghai Jewish School, they conceptually divided the school population into three houses, the House of Saul, King Saul, the House of King Solomon, and the House of King David, and every day they would announce and if you did something admirable you would get points, and if you did something that warranted demerits, you got demerit points, and so, it, each house was competing every day for who would make the most points.

GS: And it was a team spirit I gather?

FS: It was a team spirit. [unclear] at the end of the week, and at the end of the month, so if you were doing something that wasn't so, how should I say, wasn't so proper maybe, you know an older schoolmate, not just a classmate, would come over to you and say, "Hey, you want our house to lose points on you? Don't you want us to win?" you know? And vice-versa if there was somewhere where you needed help, they would come and help you. So I think it was a tremendous incentive or a great way of motivating school children, and at assembly every week they had the Jewish flag, but the Jewish flag in those days was not the white flag with the stripes and the Mogen David in between. In those days the flag was divided into two halves, white and blue half and the Mogen David in the middle of it would be reversed colors on the colors. Have you ever seen that?

GS: I don't think I have.

FS: You want me to just, so that whoever transcribes it can sort of get an idea that-- this is the flag half, and the Mogen David was here, and if this was white, this was white up here.

GS: The top portion, right.

FS: So the top portion of the flag was white, the top portion of the Mogen David was blue, and this is the blue set, the bottom half of the flag is blue, the bottom half of the Mogen David was white. Later on, they changed that flag…

GS: Yes.

FS: …but you very rarely see this flag anymore, but that was held up at our assembly, and…

GS: Was there any pronounced emphasis on preparing to go and live in Palestine, well now it's Israel already.

FS: I don't think it was focused on Palestine. I think there was always a pronounced focus on leaving Shanghai. I think the biggest focus was America. Now also remember, at that point, Israel is not yet quite in existence, coming into existence. It's sort of like, it's not quite yet there, so-- yeah, there were a lot of transports that left for Palestine, and also the reports that came back from Palestine were miserable, I mean terrible. My aunt and my uncle went to Israel and the reports that came back were that conditions were almost worse than Shanghai, so that brings us to the next portion. How come my family stayed so long in Is- in Shanghai? My father was Polish quota, which was a very poor quota. The options were to leave to Palestine, America, Germany and some other assorted countries like Australia, Canada, Dominican Republic, South America. Our hope was to come to America. My fath- my parents were a little leery of going to Palestine because my father would definitely have been drafted, and I was getting to the age where I would have been drafted very soon after our, well not very soon but within a few years. That was a risk my parents did not want to take, especially having lost one son already.

GS: And…

FS: And having lost the rest of the family. So they held out hoping that this whole Communist takeover would subside, that eventually things, eventually the Americans would have a presence again in Shanghai and they could process their papers to come to America. That turned out to be a myth, and what happens eventually when we were kicked out in a very polite way, we couldn't come to America and as I said Palestine was not a viable option, Germany started to offer repatriations to its ex-citizens, not necessarily monetarily, but it said it'd welcome back its old citizens and offer to make amends, and so my parents went back to Germany hoping that they could get from Germany, could use Germany as a springboard to the United States.

GS: This was in '52?

FS: That's right.

GS: And you went with them?

FS: Of course. I was not at a point to make decisions on my own, but then when Shanghai, just to backtrack, Shanghai Jewish School closed down, again because their community kept shrinking, and we were then transferred to Shanghai British School. Shanghai British School was an Anglican School, and we didn't last very long in Shanghai British School, and I'm not sure why they kicked us out. I don't know whether the tuition that was being paid to them by, I think it was the American Jewish Committee paid tuition for us, whether it was a question of tuition, whether they didn't want the

Jewish contingent, although I don't believe that because there were some Arab Jews that, the Sassoon family, you've heard of the Sassoons?

GS: Yeah, yeah…

FS: I remember their, the Sassoons…

GS: …their children.

FS: …remaining, yeah, there was a big Sassoon conting- soon, Sassoon, Kadoorie, the Abrahams, sort of supported the whole ghetto, the whole Jewish community, and the Sassoons, I remember the Sassoons remaining in Shanghai Jew-, British School.

GS: But the refugee Jewish children had to leave?

FS: Had to leave and but there was one, one Iraqi Jewish kid that came with me to the other school, so it was not just the refugees. I don't know. I don't know why. And then a teacher from Shanghai British School formed a little private school. I don't remember her name, and we went, wound up about 20 or 30 children in that private school. The things that I remember for instance about Shanghai Jewish School is at that point the Jew-- the community started to shrink to the point where we had three different classes, each class having maybe three students, being taught by one teacher, in one classroom. I don't know if you can visualize that.

GS: The old one room schoolhouse.

FS: Yeah, right, okay.

GS: …that used to exist…

FS: So they had several grades, you know, and in Shanghai British School that was not the case. Shanghai British School there were pretty large classes but then in the private school there was again the same old school house tradition that we were talking about. And how did I come to answer all this? You asked me about my contact with the Chinese.

GS: Yes.

FS: At one point when we were going to Shanghai Jewish School, I mentioned that we were going in trucks, in lorries but then again the community started shrinking, so then we wound up just taking the trolleys, and that's where my contact came with a really, where I really came into contact with the Chinese, and one of the things, I was a little pudgy kid in those days, still am pudgy but not little anymore. And they were fascinated by the fact that I was pudgy and that I was white, Caucasian and they used to come and touch me to try and, they were amazed at my arms, at the size of my arms, at the size of my wrists, at my hands. There was something amazing about that.

GS: Because you were different.

FS: I was different.

GS: Yeah.

FS: It was nothing, no, no sexual thing, none of that kind of that connotation, okay? And they were very friendly towards us. And of course the trolleys were crowded

too, worse than the New York subways. So my mother had to take me every day on an hour, by a-- my mother wouldn't leave me alone, let me go to the French Concession alone. She would take me on the trolley to the school. She would go back home, six hours later she would come and pick me up, and take me home again to the camp. At that point we were living in another camp already. We had-- I lived in, what was it, five locations, four locations? I don't know if I mentioned earlier, I lived, I started out in Wayside Camp and when that was dissolved-- I don't like the word liquidated-- when that was dissolved or closed down, we wound up in a lane called Kwenming Road which was the extension of Tong Shan Road Lane. Everybody knows Tong Shan Road Lane, 818 Tong Shan Road. You have to look up the spelling. I don't know how it's spelled and then we moved from Kwenming Road to the other side, which was Tong Shan Road Lane things got a little better, we got a little bigger quarters.

GS: Did you have your own…

FS: No, no.

GS: …private space. You were still sharing…

FS: There were four people in the room. There were four of us in the room, my grandmother, my parents…

GS: But you were no longer…

FS: and…

GS: …sharing a space with other families?

FS: The bathrooms.

GS: And this was on Tong Shan…

FS: Tong Shan Road, 818 Tong Shan Road Lane, and a-- now I have another, remember I mentioned a middle brother. Those two brothers were from my father's first marriage, and my parents, my father and his first wife had a very amicable divorce, and in fact my mother rescued my, this current brother, become sort of involved, how do I make this easy? The gentleman that my father's first wife married wound up in Buchenwald before the war, and in order to get him out she had to buy a round trip ticket before, she had to bring proof to the concentration camp authorities that she had a one wa- that she had a round trip ticket out of Germany for her husband. She couldn't muster enough money and it had to be done fast to get him out. So she and her husband left to get to Shanghai. My mother took the other brother to Shanghai with her later on, and so in Shanghai my brother wound up with his mother, and we were all very friendly. It was very amicable as I said, and because my brother was born in what was Germany, he could get out easily. So my father and his first wife agreed it would be best for them to leave to go to America because he could find sponsorship, and he could get out easily, and again to save the family, to save whatever is possible and not knowing where the future would lead us. They left in '48, I think, my brother and his mother and I stayed behind with my father and my mother and…

GS: And this brother who's here at the reunion with you…

FS: The interesting thing is, we could never find sponsors. After my brother came to America, he joined the army. When he finished his army duty, his mother and her husband, in other words, my father's first wife and her husband, my brother and his wife sponsored us eventually to come to America. So that's what I mean with the amicable relationship. You don't find that too often and we've been, my parents, my mother has been friends with my father's first wife, because it was a, I think their first marriage was a marriage of convenience and so they…

GS: It was arranged?

FS: No, not arranged but they, this was sort of like things were pretty bad in Germany economically at one point and they were young, and my father especially had a father that came back from the war shot up, two brothers and a sister. He was taking care of everybody, so the first thing he looks is to escape and whoever, you know when he finds somebody that looks reasonably qualified to be his wife, or falls in love, gets married. They have two children and they realized they're not mature enough to take care of children, and so they reach an agreement: let's both divorce and find somebody else and remain friends. It's very enlightened if you think about it.

GS: Yes, yes.

FS: You don't find that too often and going back 60 or 70 years ago, I think it's incredibly enlightening, enlightened, and but anyhow to get back to the line of chro-chronology, so my brother left to America. We stayed behind, why am I telling you this?

GS: Well, I'm curious about this brother who's with you here.

FS: Yes.

GS: He was the brother of your mother and father?

FS: Of my father.

GS: So he's, he was your half-brother, and did he live with you, or he lef…

FS: At one point yes but then later on, you know, he started to live with his…

GS: He lived with his mother.

FS: …when she arrived in Shanghai, or something like that, when she arrived in Shanghai, he lived with her, but for a while he lived with me and, all right, I guess I don't want to go too far astray.

GS: Do you remember any relationships with other children, particular friends you had, any social activities that you could engage in other than school?

FS: I had only, I only had two friends in Shanghai. One was this Arab boy that I, not Arab boy, Iraqi Jewish boy, Benjamin Levy.

GS: That you had met at school?

FS: Yes, he was my best friend, my buddy and a certain-- he was a German Jewish boy, Robert Goldman. I don't know what happened to either one of them. We were together from beginning to end in Shanghai Jewish School.

GS: And were you able to see each other outside of the school setting?

FS: With Robert Goldman, we'd go home on the train every day.

GS: He lived in Hongkew?

FS: He lived in Hongkew. Benjamin Levy lived in French town. Benjamin Levy had a brother, and I think nine sisters, one more pretty than the other. He was the youngest.

GS: Were you able, ever able to visit with him at his home, or did he ever come to Hongkew?

FS: Once, once.

GS: It was really a different world wasn't it?

FS: And by the way, I learned a lot of Judaism**,** or a lot about Jewish traditions from the, from Benny Levy. I remember about, you know, I had never heard of this until I met Benny Levy, that for Passover they had separate dishes.

GS: Your parents were from a liberal tradition?

FS: No, my mother actually came from a more traditional but not Orthodox but traditional tradition, where they, my grandfather on her side, my parents were fairly, pretty, pretty traditional, not Orthodox but traditional. My father, my parents went to shul every week in Germany. They met in shul. They met at that synagogue that I told you about, Breslau.

GS: Yes. Now was this a reform temple, do you…?

FS: No.

GS: No.

FS: It was a traditional.

GS: It was a traditional shul. But your family just didn't happen to change their dishes.

FS: Well, Shanghai forget it. In Shanghai we didn't have anything.

GS: They didn't have one full set of dishes…

FS: That's right.

GS: …let alone two.

FS: Shanghai you were lucky if you had a soup dish, you know, but they did celebrate everything in Shanghai, and I remember going to synagogue as long as I can remember, going to synagogue every week with my father and my mother and having Shabbos at home. I even remember, in fact I remember, you know we were talking about my brother that perished in the Holocaust. We use to say, we used the *bench, bench* after meal every Shabbos**,** we had Shabbos meals you know, and I remember in the, in the prayer, in the *Birkas ha-Mazon*[3] there is a, somewhere a section about family members, the *Rachamon* you know, and I remember at that point somehow mentioning my brother Rudy, that's the one that perished, and having an anxiety attack and breaking out into tears like you have no idea, even though I had never met this guy. I was, I sort of felt attached or bonded or whatever you want to call it…

GS: Part of your family life…

[3]Prayer after a meal on Shabbat.

FS: Part of my family, right.

GS: …is cut off…

FS: My family never hid from me, you know, what happened. I mean I was very much consciously aware of what happened. I broke out terribly, you know, they had to really calm me down for a few minutes there. Just sort of as an aside, but I also wanted to mention it. We were very consciously Jewish and very, and practicing Jews. We're not just Jews that were born Jewish, which there were many in Shanghai, I'm sure. In Shanghai by the way, they had quite a very cohesive Jewish community with a Jewish identity, there were a lot of synagogues, a lot of *Chazanim*, a lot of cantors.

GS: It was a Jewish Community Center, wasn't there, a recreation center?

FS: That's came a little, yes, yes. They…

GS: That wasn't something that you…

FS: I was not part of it. I was too young for that. My brother was part of that…

GS: Right.

FS: …my brother Harry, formerly Horace Seidel, now Harry Seidel. What was I going to say?

GS: Many synagogues and cantors.

FS: There was a very, yes and there were many synagogues, small synagogues and there was a tremendous Jewish awareness, and a tremendous Jewish life, not Orthodox but definitely traditional.

GS: At Purim was there a celebration? Do you remember…

FS: Yes, yes, yes.

GS: …with children, if possible…

FS: You know, I remember…

GS: …wear some kind of costume?

FS: I remember, there weren't too many costumes because people didn't have that much…

GS: Right.

FS: … I remember my father trying to make a mask for me somehow, and what they did is they took burnt matches, and took the, took the burnt match and made eyelids for me and a mustache with a burnt match and…

GS: They improvised.

FS: They improvised, right, and they did a lot of improvising, and it was a very great comradery among the Jews of Shanghai, a very different, a very unique sense of comradery, and I think everybody was together in the same boat. I think that's what it was.

GS: Was your father able to work during this period?

FS: My father did many, many different things in Shanghai trying to make a living. During the war years Shanghai was sort of sub-tropical. It was very, very hot in

Shanghai, and many refugees didn't want to stand in line to pick up their food from the community kitchen. So my father made money by trying to deliver their food to them, stand in line and pick up for 10, 20 people the food every day and bring it to them. That's how he made a living. And another time you know he, in Germany, before he left Germany, he tried to prepare for a career as a shoemaker, again, in preparation of going to Shanghai. It was one of these quick courses, you know, and so some of the things that he did or that many, he didn't invent this, but how do you make the living as a shoemaker? There is no leather or it's so expensive, that you can't, that people couldn't afford it, so he would take old shoes, take off the soles and cut the sole in half so that he would get away from the hole, you know, cut around the hole and then piece two different soles together to make one sole. I don't know if that was clear?

GS: Well, I'm thinking, medically when they do a transplant, a skin transplant, I'm thinking of, they take a patch of skin from one area and bring it over…

FS: Exact- right, right.

GS: …to another area.

FS: That's what they did. My father also sold used razor blades. He started to go out vending to the Chinese on a bicycle. He would sell used needles and used razor blades that the refugees had. Now what he would take is, he would take a glass and rub the razor blades inside the glass to resharpen them, and that's what he would sel- he demonstrated to the Chinese, they don't have many beards, Chinese don't have beards. Somebody convinced them that they had beards, and that they needed to have razor blades.

GS: Like selling ice to Eskimos.

FS: Selling ice to Eskimos, right, used needles. And another time I, well, one of the major things he did, one of the big things he did is, he started a so-called transportation business which means he packed for all the refugees that were leaving Shanghai, and he transported their luggage to the ships. That became a major business of his at one point. Of course it lasted a couple of years only, because you know, the community kept shrinking. So actually a lot of people knew my father because of that transportation. There weren't too many people that did that. It was Orient Express, I'll never forget. I still have the picture at home.

GS: That was the name of the…

FS: Yeah, he had a cap made, Orient Express, and he hired coolies that he could trust, that worked with him. They did the labor. He did the organizing of it, right? And he did pack. My father was a very good packer, and my mother helped along with that. My mother was on top of the trucks organizing the luggage, and organizing the coolies, and doing all kinds of things which eventually costs her very dearly, because she became very, very deathly ill later on as a result of that. Another thing my father did is, maybe I don't need to talk about that because I'm sure my brother will talk about that experience.

GS: It's a different interview, go ahead and tell it…

FS: When the Army arrived, when the Navy arrived in Shanghai, they were interested in buying souvenirs, and so my father bought up Chinese kimonos, and he, and he sent my brother who was older, to the ships to try and sell to the sailors the souven- the kimonos. And they didn't want to pay money for it. They wanted to pay in goods. Now remember Shanghai is sub-tropical, heat. You live in a camp. There is no such a thing as refrigeration. They bartered the kimonos for meat, meat carcasses, and the deal was come at night to the back of the ship and pick up your meat. But my father, and nobody understood at the time, was that this was frozen meat, frozen carcasses that they stole, that the sailors actually stole from the Quarterma- or bribed somebody. They let them down at the back of the ship. My father hired sampans to load up the meat, my father was not a butcher. He didn't know the first thing about beef. All of the sudden, he shows up with all this frozen meat in Wayside *Heime* Camp, Wayside *Heime, Heime* means camp, in Wayside Camp. He's in the middle of the summer. He's there with all these frozen carcasses. The butchers tell him, "What are you going to do with this? You can't sell this to anybody. This stuff will rot, it's gonna rot," and it started to rot. Half of this stuff started to rot. So my brother and my mother went back to these sailors and asked them, "Please don't-- give us back some of the kimonos. This stuff is useless for us," and explained the story. Some of them had compassion and relented, some of them didn't, but there was a loss for my father. It was not a money making proposition. The people, I mean, this is my father's story, other people tried all kinds of other ways to make a living. Some people came to China**,** to China with money, but my, especially my mother, was very, my mother was a real *Yekke*[4] in a negative sense in that she's real, if the law says don't do that, she believes it, that's it. So the rule was, the law that the Nazis promulgated was that you cannot take more than 10 *marks* with you, or whatever, and my mother would abide by that. Now a lot of people said, "To hell with them", you know and tried to find a way of getting money out, and they did, and those people built some small little stores or businesses in Shanghai, and tried to live off the community. My parents were not that smart. In fact, I always hold it against my mother that she married my father, she should have married a rich man but…

GS: But your father was very ingenious…

FS: Yes, resourceful, right. And one thing that I must say about all these people, that they were pretty honorable people actually. They're all pretty good decent people. You see it even here. If I say they didn't abide by the laws that the Nazis promulgated, I don't know if I would abide by that either.

GS: Well maybe that was a survival technique.

FS: Yeah, yeah, you know there were some people that said *Ey***,** survival of the fittest down here, you know. Anyhow…

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[4]Jew of German-speaking origin, known for attention to detail and punctuality.

GS: You mentioned your mother's health was affected later by this hard labor she did. Were there other, any other medical problems, illnesses, were there any experiences with doctors or hospitals?

FS: Yeah, yeah, not so much experiences with doctors and hospitals, but my father got very sick in Shanghai to the point where the doctors felt he was deathly ill, and strangely enough, they suggested to my mother that he needed to eat ham, a lot of ham and bacon, because they, it was the only time in my life, in his life that he ever ate ham and bacon, and that brought him back…

GS: That was the only meat available I assume.

FS: Yeah, apparently, I don't know if it was only available. I think it was probably because of the fat content.

GS: Why's that?

FS: I think it was a nutritional problem or something, but what happened was he lost a tremendous amount of weight. He became very, very, very thin, but he had typhoid fever and diptheria and various other things. I had worms and a touch of TB. My mother didn't have anything in Shanghai. My grandmother had, my grandmother was operated on, but I don't remember what. My mother had it later on. My mother paid later on, a very heavy price for Shanghai, and that brings us to the, I guess in part to the next part of the odyssey that as the community kept shrinking, and as the Communists started to get a stronger foothold in China. Actually they had already won the war, they wanted us out, the Communists. And a couple of times my mother was arrested and it was like a trumped up charge, but she was arrested nevertheless and spent a couple of nights in prison, and one of the things that they did is, everybody had to have an ID card. We didn't have passports. The Germans took our passports away, or at least we were stateless. I shouldn't say we didn't have passports.

GS: Right.

FS: Sorry, we did. Everybody kept their passports.

[Tape one, side two ended.]

Tape two, side one:

GS: …Schneeberg interviewing Freddy Seidel, October 17, 1999. This is tape two, side one. Now, you were a…

FS: [unclear]

GS: …stateless person without a passport…

FS: Everybody just kept their passports as a memento. Legally they had no value. They were, everybody was stateless. The Germans took away ours, took away my parents nationality. Being born in Shanghai, I was nothing. I didn't have any protection of any kind. And so the, have to have an ID card to live in Shanghai and if they took that away and if they found you without an ID card, they had cause to actually arrest you or whatever, and they would come periodically to the camp and take away our ID cards and then three days later they would call you down to the police station. Where is your ID card? Where is your ID card? You have it? We have it? No. Yes, you have it. Don't say we have it. We don't have it, and you know you shouldn't live in Shanghai without ID card. So that's how they were trying to give us the message that we were unwanted. So at that point, eventually my parents got the message. We were last, one of the last 30 or 40 people left in Shanghai at that point…

GS: At this…

FS: I'm skipping in time now.

GS: At this time was your father able to work under the Chinese administration?

FS: Yes, he, at that point he no longer had his own transportation system. He became the agent that interceded between the Communist official transportation agency and whoever needed to move out of Shanghai. There weren't too many people left at that point. He was also a watchman in the camp. Again there weren't that many people left in the camp, and he had become the cantor of the community. And again there weren't that many people left, so it was a community of 30 to 50 people at the most. At the services they sort of conscripted every Jew whether they were willing to come to synagogue or not just to make a *minyan*. There were a lot of Jews that were so assimilated that they didn't really want to, but being that they were supported by the Joint, or the Jewish Committee, I think it was Committee, they were conscripted. If you don't come to shul, you're not getting anything. Take your pick, so they showed up in shul. It was quite strange, you know. And that's how my father survived more or less. It was a very meager living and then I think we got a little bit of money from the Committee, American Jewish Committee, but when it became clear that we were unwanted, then my parents opted to go back to Germany, which had at that point, I think I made reference to that earlier, had offered to repatriate its ex-citizens and to give them their citizenship back, and wanted to make amends, and so we wound up back in Berlin.

GS: Was there any compensation, monetary compensation?

FS: Hardly. It didn't come because my parents came from Breslau. Breslau is now part of Poland, so they didn't qualify. So our time in Berlin was very, very difficult again, and we were processed within about seven months after we arrived in Berlin to come to the United States, and that's when my mother got deathly ill and paid the price that I said earlier. She wound up with phlebitis and thrombosis and pneumonia and everything that you can imagine and she was six months in the hospital, and six months in a wheelchair after that. Since then she's always had difficulty and it was largely attributed to her, her rough life in Shanghai.

GS: When you came to the United States, this is in '52?

FS: No, we came to Germany in '52.

GS: Oh you were in Germany now, and you remained for how long?

FS: Seven years.

GS: Seven years, I didn't realize that. And all this time, what kind of employment did your father find now?

FS: Where?

GS: In Germany.

FS: He became a cantor, and that was it.

GS: Now you went to school in Germany?

FS: Yes, I went to several-- one of the problems that I had in Germany was I came to Germany not knowing very much German, remember? I said earlier you were not permitted to speak German in the Shanghai Jewish School. So I was 11 years old and they stuck me with kids six, seven years old in Berlin in School just so that I would learn…

GS: The language?

FS: …to speak German. And the kids found that-- the German kids it's part of the national character can be very cruel-- and so they used to tease me because I was so much older than them, because of my experiences which I had, because of the way I dressed. They all dressed in *Leder, Lederhosen* and shorts, and I was used from Shanghai Jewish School to wear long pants. Shanghai Jewish School you wore a school uniform, gray pants, blue jacket with the Shanghai Jewish School emblem, white shirt, and I think we wore a black tie, I think, I don't remember. I think we did, so I was very formal, very English, and I had a lot of problems in Germany at the time. It was also a question of trust.

GS: Did your parents or you have any examples of antisemitism that you recall that was directed to, against them?

FS: Generally, no. Generally it was quite the opposite. A couple of times, a couple of kids in school made some remarks, and I remember breaking one kid's nose for that. I was pretty strong, I also learned some judo in China, and I used it quite effectively, and I was sort of the bully in the class in Germany, and I, one kid I remember

very clearly breaking his nose because of the remark he made. But for the most part, and I have to emphasize that, for the most part, I was treated very well and no signs of antisemitism, rather inquisitiveness. Who are the Jews? What are the Jews? Why are you Jewish? What do you believe in? And I have learned more about my religion from those questions I think than from school.

GS: You were I guess among a small minority of Jewish children [unclear].

FS: As far as I know, as far as I know, I was the first boy who was Bar Mitzvah'ed in Berlin for, after the war, where both parents were Jewish. Most of the people that had survived in Berlin at the time, had survived because they were…

GS: Mixed family.

FS: …mixed, they were in mixed marriages. So as far as I know, I'm the first fully Jewish boy to be Bar Mitzvah'ed in Berlin after the war. I may be wrong on that but that's as far as I know.

GS: What do you recall about your Bar Mitzvah?

FS: We wound up in a senior citizen home which was sort of like, almost the same like, DP camp at the time. I was the only child in the whole, one of two children who were in the whole camp. It was like a camp with a 158 people living in that camp, all elderly people, all survivors of Theresienstadt, of the other concentration camps. So being the only Jewish boy around-- there was another family with a girl, there were two families with girls. I was the only Jewish boy, so I was revered by them, and treated with tremendous love and warmth and affection. And for my Bar Mitzvah, they made a *Kiddush* in the camp, and somebody put up a collection for me, and they bought me a set of prayer books for the High Holy Days, which I have to this day, which were very unique at that time. It's very hard to get the *Vasocks Sidurim,* and the Old Gothic German and Hebrew, and because I, they used to see me in shul *davening* every *Shabbas* and for the High Holy Days, you know? So they thought that that would be a fitting present for me, and it was, and the rabbis came from Switzerland and England, some rabbis came to attend my Bar Mitzvah, but they were a little bit disappointed because the night before my Bar Mitzvah I canceled. And the reason I canceled was my mother was in the hospital, and my father put the question to me, put it kind of late to me really, do you want your mother present at your Bar Mitzvah, or would you rather have it without her? And I opted for her to be present. So we waited six months and then we had it again in September. When I said they got together and donated all this, it was kept for later on.

GS: So the visiting rabbis, they had to go back home…

FS: Right.

GS: …and they didn't come again…

FS: Right.

GS: …six months later

FS: Right, they hadn't, in Germany at the time they had a Jewish children's summer camp somewhere, where some of these rabbis met me, and having grown up in China very Jewishly, and my father being a *Chazan* and my parents being religious…

GS: Right.

FS: I knew every prayer at that camp. Nobody knew the prayers. Nobody knew any Hebrew, nobody knew the *brachas.* I was the only one…

GS: You were the *yeshiva bucher*.

FS: …so they, I stood out. I stood out, yeah, I stood out…

GS: Good.

FS: …and they admired that. That's why they were so eager to come and be present at my Bar Mitzvah.

GS: Can you tell us what effect the Chinese political situation had on your life and that of your family?

FS: Yeah, I don't know if I can answer that question directly, but first of all I, I remember the dissertations of the Kuomintang[5]. I remember the Japanese occupants in China which I'm sure you've heard about it before, so I don't want to go into that, but there's a part of, of the political history, I guess, of Shanghai that is very rarely heard, and it has, and you know it goes back to why did the Chinese want us out? Why did the Communists want us out of China? We saw things that were never reported in the West, I think, or I don't know that they were really that consciously reported, and to me, to this day, probably the most dramatic, not traumatic, but dramatic memories of China were a.) The Nationalist Chinese Army falling apart in Shanghai, the poverty of the soldiers, you know soldiers selling their weapons and their uniforms for a bowl of rice. I remember the shootings going on in the streets of Shanghai during the Communist takeover, but the part that nobody ever talks about, apparently very few people know about, is the three years from 1949 to 1952 that we lived in Shanghai. We lived near the jail. There was a jail that everybody will tell you was on Ward Road. It was a big huge jail. b.) At one time on Queming Road we lived in the back of the jail, but the Seward Road Camp was about five or six blocks away or half a mile away from that jail, and one of the things that the Communists did shortly after they took over, they needed administrative government staff, so they put out a, they put out the word that they were looking for people that had worked for the Kuomintang government before and that nothing would happen to them and that these people should register, and apparently they did, and shortly thereafter, maybe within six months, the Communists started rounding up all these former Kuomintang employees. Kuomintang is the Nationalist Chinese.

GS: Right.

FS: They put them into that Ward Road jail. Anybody that had any political contact or thought of to have political contact with Caucasians, with Westerners was imprisoned. I don't know what different people-- I don't know what kinds of charges

[5]Chinese Nationalist Party, major political party based in Taipei.

different people were imprisoned for, but we lived on Seward Road, at the Seward Camp and starting in, in the middle of 1951, 1950-'51, end of 1950 to the middle of 1951, they started emptying out the jail, and they had transports, long caravans of transports, several of them during the day with prisoners loaded on the trucks interspersed by mounted jeeps that they took out to the race court-- there was a place called the race court in Shanghai, a major, big race court, a big public place, and they held trials over there, public trials. At one point, they also started taking people on smaller trucks, individuals with kneeling, crouching on their knees, with their hands tied behind their backs in front of their necks, you know? How do I say this? Like, if they were to move too far, they would probably hurt themselves or, or kill themselves. Again, interspersed with mounted machine guns, jeeps. They took them out to the race court and they held public trials there, and either they shot people right there on the spot-- these trials were held by young punks, you know 20-year-old, 18-year-old, 20-year-old punks that tried them for political treason, whatever, and if people weren't shot, they were sent out, at that time the Communists had a very tight relationship with the Russians. Every, everybody in Shanghai was learning Russian. In the trains you could see them be standing there with a book learning Russian, they started, everybody started to wear uniforms, everybody became a member of the Communist Party, and if you weren't shot right there and then on the race court-- they were very quick trials, nothing with, defend the public defender, nothing with appeals, you know, the kangaroo courts. If you weren't shot, you were sent to Poland, to Silesia, to the mines. They have big coal mines in Silesia. Or you were sent out to the rice fields. When we left Shanghai, we left Shanghai by train for three days. The trains, the windows were shut, they put, pulled down the shades, and they warned us not to open the shades. There were guards between every train.

GS: This was '51 or…

FS: Fifty-two ['52].

GS: Fifty-two ['52]?

FS: Middle of '52. There were guards between the different trains, and if you tried to sneak a look behind the shades, you saw all these rice fields with people working in the rice fields, with these towers, guard towers, interspersed all over the map. So they were forced into labor there, or they were forced into labor into the coal mines in Silesia.

GS: Were you or anyone you know present at any of these kangaroo…

FS: I saw, I saw some of them at the public, at the race court, yes. Okay, because to me-- I did not, you know there were a lot of conditions in Shanghai that were a culture shock for the people from the European community that came to Shanghai. I grew up not knowing any different until I came to Germany, where I had a lot of problems with this, a lot of psychological problems with being used to a lot of things that were shocking to Western, to a Westerner.

GS: You never knew them.

FS: Certain morals, certain moral standards, certain behavioral standards that--you know like it was nothing to see people either defecate in the streets in Shanghai, to fornicate in the streets in Shanghai, mothers to breastfeed their children in Shanghai. It was nothing. It was commonplace to see dead babies all over the map. To go to a, it wasn't a garbage can, but there were garbage like dumpsters attached to buildings, and to come there to dump your garbage and to find some babies rolled up in the newspapers. To me, that was not a big deal. It became something of an issue to me later on in life, when I learned a double standard, and I always said that, you know, I had several worlds incorporated within me, psychologically, the Orient and the Western world, which are two very opposite lifestyles, opposite worlds, opposite ways of thinking, the Jewish and the Christian, being very Jewish growing up in a very Christian country in Germany. The old world versus the new world, you know being, having grown up in Europe to a large extent and the *ancien* regime as they would call it in the old days, and then the modern world. Very, very conflicting traditions, and I had a very hard time over the years dealing with them. I had a very hard time dealing with that. It took me years of therapy to come to grips with many of these things. I also had phobias and the phobia was that in China a lot of people did not survive because they couldn't make the adjustment. You don't hear too much about that, because everybody reminisces about the good times, but one third of the, well I'm not sure if it's one third, but a large, large part of the community died of diseases or just not being able to make the psychological adjustment, the culture shock. You know people came from very wealthy backgrounds to Shanghai living with 24 people in a room, not having anything to eat, having lice, you know?

GS: Is that an experience that you were recalling?

FS: That, that definitely affected my life…

GS: Everybody had lice back then.

FS: Definitely, yeah, but not the lice. The fact that I wanted to take a career which I never was able to take, that would provide for me no matter what Holocaust I'm going through again in life, or no matter what ever happens to me in life that I would be able to survive, and that was a big issue for me for many, many years and the one, excuse me, the one issue also was these transports of people being taken to the race court and being killed.

GS: You said…

FS: Something that you never hear about. You hear about…

GS: Are you saying [unclear]…

FS: …the Cultural Revolution, but you never hear about that.

GS: And you said you saw some of these…

FS: Yes.

GS: …public trials and they…

FS: It was…

GS: …and they shot them…

FS: Some of the people were shot…

GS: …on the spot.

FS: Not only that, not only that, they would publicize it in the paper. It was posted everywhere, the Shanghai news or whatever they called it. By the way, not only was it posted in English, it was a propaganda thing, with Uncle Sam being the Satan and all that kind of stuff, right? And then there's all sorts of, well the Communists are very good at propaganda with these huge murals all over the place. You know, Uncle Sam being Satan, and the Korean War was going on at the same time, so another thing was that they had volunteers that volunteered, Chinese volunteers that want to go, that volunteered to fight in Korea.

GS: In Korea.

FS: So they were marched through Shanghai with all kinds of parades, you know? Another thing was, the political climate was that people that had any wealth of any kind, were considered capitalists, which was the arch enemy of Communism. People that couldn't get out of Shanghai before the takeover, their ex-employees if they had anything, if it were ever hurt by their bosses-- you know in China it was nothing to get slapped by your boss for not doing a job well, for not doing a good job. I remember seeing that very often. A carpenter had an apprentice or an employee, and he screwed up a certain cut of wood or whatever, the master would slap him in the face, bing, bang, bing, bang, whatever, you know? And if anybody had ever had that happen to them he would go out to the police and report him, and that guy was finished. The boss was finished and that was it. So you would walk down Bubbling Well, Bubbling Well they had these huge office buildings near the Bund, you must of heard that, or you'd walk on Nanking Road, or near the race court, people jumping out of the window like crazy…

GS: Committing suicide?

FS: …committing suicide. You were, in a sense, you were afraid to walk the streets, because you never knew what happened. You always walking through the streets looking up, either there were planes coming dropping their bombs, or it was people jumping-- I'm serious about this.

GS: So you grew up with this…

FS: I'm exaggerating this a little bit. Maybe I'm too…

GS: …sense of fear or apprehension?

FS: Yes, yes.

GS: …about what was going to happen next.

FS: I wasn't afraid, no. I wasn't afraid. It was apprehension, you know? It may be a little exaggerated to make the point, you know? But it was a very common experience in Shanghai. Our refugees had not experienced that. There were very few of us left at that time, who experienced that. That's why I said I think you will find my story very different from the rest of the community.

GS: Well this…

FS: Then of course afterwards, growing up in Germany that was a trauma by itself.

GS: Of course you had one on top of the other. The last question that we usually ask people who have been in Shanghai, which I think you've answered and that is what impact has that experience had on the rest of your life?

FS: I think the biggest impact it had is what I just mentioned a few minutes ago, the phobia that I grew up with, that if I ever wind up in a situation like that again, I don't want to be in a situation where I'm lost. I want to be able to survive in the desert, and I spent years of my life and wasting, wasting my life away, trying to find some kind of a career which would cover that, which there isn't, and trying to overcome that phobia. I always call it my Holocaust phobia. It's not really Holocaust, but it's, it also, I guess in a sense it's also Holocaust phobia, because also heard the same stories when I came to Berlin, of the people that survived in the concentration camps. The people that survived in the concentration camps were, either that they were resourceful, or they were artisans rather than intellectuals. That was a big issue and I, I wanted to be more intellectual, I guess, than artisan. I didn't want to get my hands dirty being a mechanic. I wanted to, I actually wanted to become a surgeon, but that's beside the point, but that, those stories and having experienced much of it, and having lived through much of the time and having seen a lot, yes, it had that impact on me.

GS: And your family, were they affected in a similar way?

FS: Family?

GS: Your mother, of course, has her severe physical problems. Was there a mental aspect to her illness?

FS: I think my mother lives in a constant state of fear and is stifled by fear, afraid to stick out her neck on anything, but I don't know if that's a Shanghai leftover or, I think that's more of an individual thing. I would say on the surface, no. Yes, they of course mourned the death of the family members, and yes, they live with bad memories, but I don't know if-- by impact I think you mean something that affects you in your future behavior…

GS: Right, how you live your life.

FS: If you mean it that way, yeah, I don't think so. I don't think so. My life definitely, I don't think theirs, so much.

GS: Are you married?

FS: Yes.

GS: And you have children?

FS: No.

GS: No. Have you been back to Shanghai?

FS: By the way, another, this is sort of like almost, this is really revealing. I got married very late in life, again, because of, of having delayed very much, having not been able to find myself, and delayed very long my, my goals in life, to fulfill my life,

and therefore not feeling equal to anybody else, or feeling that I want to put my story or my, my emotional package, unload that on a partner. So for that reason, I got married very late in life. I don't have any children for that reason either probably. You were gonna ask something else?

GS: Have you gone back to Shanghai?

FS: No, I want to go back, but I want to go back together with my brother or somebody who can relate to the places that mean something to me. I don't want to just go back with a tour of …

GS: Right.

FS: Yeah, I want to go back with people that know the area, and that can relate, and especially can relate to my own personal experiences.

GS: Well your history certainly is a fascinating one, and if not unique, rare among those that had the Shanghai…

FS: I thank you for giving me the opportunity to voice it.

GS: Well thank you very much for sharing it with us.

[Tape two, side one ended; interview ended.]