HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

WALTER SILBERSTEIN

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Josey G. Fisher
Dates: November 9 and 17, 1981

Holocaust Oral History Archive
Gratz College
Melrose Park, PA 19027

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WS - Walter Silberstein [interviewee]
JF - Josey Fisher [interviewer]
Dates: November 9, 1981
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Tape one, side one:

JF: Mr. Silberstein, can you tell me where and when you were born, and a little bit about your childhood?

WS: I was born on November 10th, 1902, in Stargard in Pommern.

JF: Can you spell that please?

WS: Stargard in Pommern. S-T-A-R-G-A-R-D, Pomerania. That's near Stettin. Today it is Polish.

JF: At that time it was Germany?

WS: Yes.

JF: Can you tell me a little bit about your family?

WS: My father was a rabbi in Stargard. Here is a picture of my parents. He was there 'til 1936; then he had to leave because the *kehillah* there came down; was only a few people left so he got a retirement.

JF: What was the nature of his synagogue? Was it a very religious synagogue?

WS: Yes. It was what you call here Conservative.

JF: It was a Conservative synagogue. And, can you tell me a little bit about the nature of the Jewish community then, when your father was the rabbi?

WS: It was a very old community. I don't know how long, old, but maybe at least at that time 150 to 200 years. I mean as a community. A lot of Jewish people were living in Pomerania for maybe a longer time, but they were not organized as a *Gemeinde*, as a congregation. There were many Jews in the countryside who were there for some generations already because they were settled there by mostly Frederick the Great.[1] You know? He gave them privileges, and these were all really well rooted families there.

JF: And the center of the religious life was the synagogue that your father was the rabbi of?

WS: Yes.

JF: Was it the only synagogue in this town, or were there others?

WS: In the town, yes, no, we had only about 400 Jews.

JF: 400 Jews in the town.

WS: In the town.

JF: About how large was the town?

WS: And there was a big district for my father. He had other small towns, two thousand...

[1]Frederick II the Great, ruler of Prussia 1712-1786.

JF: Did he visit...

WS: The towns, small towns were maybe left 10, 20 Jews.

JF: Did he visit those towns...

WS: Yeah.

JF: Or did those people come...

WS: Yeah. Yeah.

JF: He visited them.

WS: Two or three times a year he visits them and he performed all the weddings, funerals, and so.

JF: Did they also come into your town for holidays?

WS: Yeah. Sometimes they came, at least the children. The children, when they grow up they came to town and went to the school there.

JF: There was a Jewish school?

WS: No, only religious.

JF: The religious school.

WS: Yeah.

JF: You're talking about a *cheder* or a different kind of religious school?

WS: We had a cantor, too. He gave also lessons in Jewish religion. You have not to forget the whole situation in Germany was different from here. The schools weren't religious. I mean the general schools, not as here. And so the religious lessons were given in that school, wherever it was, say grammar school.

JF: Mmm.

WS: And Religion performances came under yearly, *wie sagt man, Zeugnis* [report], also; here they get tests, eh? Also in the examination, on the end of the term. This was also state controlled, and my father got paid for that by the state.

JF: So your father was teaching in the German public system.

WS: Not in the public schools. In the public schools, you know, as it happened, were very few. This was different from here, too, because you have to pay fees.

JF: So you're not...

WS: The higher schools were not free.

JF: You're, you're...

WS: And since you didn't have, we had maybe ten children who didn't go in the higher schools, and they were in the public schools, hmm? The other people were well off and they sent, they sent their children to the higher class schools. There's also a difference from here. You cannot understand that. I don't know if that has changed today.

JF: In other words...

WS: Then you would go in the *Gymnasium*. This was for the boys, and the *Lyzeum* was for the girls. Was also completely separate for boys and girls. We didn't go together. And the parents had to pay fees for that.

JF: They did not have to pay fees for the lower schools?

WS: No, the lower schools were free.

JF: And was the religion taught also in the lower schools or not until the *Gymnasium*?

WS: Yeah, but not the Jews. The Jewish religion there were not enough. They came on Sunday to the synagogue and got the lessons there.

JF: Was religion taught at all in the lower schools? Was Christiani-, eh, Christian religion taught?

WS: Yeah, Christian was taught.

JF: And what happened to the Jewish children during those lessons? Did they have to attend?

WS: They had off.

JF: They had off?

WS: Yeah.

JF: They were not to...

WS: We, too, when the class had a Christian religion, we were off.

JF: And, then, once the years of the *Gymnasium* and the *Lyzeum* started, then the Jewish children also had religious instruction?

WS: Yeah, in the same school, but, say, in the afternoon.

JF: I see. So your father was involved in teaching through the synagogue and also in the *Gymnasium* and *Lyzeum*.

WS: Yes.

JF: I see. What was the Jewish community in your town like? Did they live in the same area...

WS: No.

JF: Or were they scattered throughout the town?

WS: Throughout the town.

JF: Living among the non-Jewish population. What kind of experience did you have with the non-Jewish population in the town?

WS: Everybody came along very well with everybody. The whole thing, I mean, of course, there were sometimes, one might say, "Dirty Jew," or something. It happened, but nothing else. You see, I grew up with, this is also very difficult to explain here [unclear] because you don't know this whole kind of people.

JF: Explain to me.

WS: You know, in Pomerania or what we called *Ostelbien*. You heard this word?

JF: Say it again, please.

WS: You know the river Elbe.

JF: Yes.

WS: This was a remarkable boundary, I would say, and in a way it was a kind of *Schimpfwort*, as a kind of curse when I say *Ostelbien.*

JF: *Ost*.

WS: East.

JF: East of the Elbe.

WS: East of the Elbe.

JF: Yes.

WS: That was a word you could read every day in the paper when the commentaries were, the reports about the *Reichstag*. You know the *Reichstag*?

JF: Mmm hmm.

WS: This was the parliament. And the *Oste* the so-called *Ostelbien*, they were the people who ruled in a way. What I would say that really did, Germany, under the *Wilhelmdem Zweiten,* fine, the last emperor[2].

JF: Mmm hmm.

WS: There were the so-called *Junker* [titled landowners in Prussian territories]. Did you hear that word?

JF: Mmm hmm.

WS: That word is not to explain to nobody. Also there is no in German explanation for that. This was the *Adel* [peerage], the nobles, the barons and counts. And there they mostly lived, they had their big estates. Big, big estates. Mostly in Pomerania, in Brandenburg; that is a province, Brandenburg. This was Berlin included, and East Prussia, East and West Prussia. And these kind of people was completely conservative. And in a way, in a way, I say that, they were a little antisemitic. But they didn't hate any Jew. They were friendly with the Jews; they had Jewish friends.

JF: They were antisemitic, but they were friends?

WS: The only thing was, in the politics. But, when you come back to the whole roots, and later they confessed it, it was their fault, going back hundred and hundred-fifty years. And they only said, the Jews, they needed a scapegoat for something when it happened. And they tried to stop the influence of Jewish in politics. That was their reason.

JF: Did you have any contacts with any of the people in the *Junker* group?

WS: Yeah.

JF: What was that contact?

WS: They were in my classes.

JF: The children of these people were in your classes.

WS: Yeah. We grew up, and we have this conscience already when we grow up. You see, and then, also, now, of course, comes something else. The Jew is always, always, in the roots, in his roots, religious roots, with the underdog. So the Jewish, when a Jew came in politics, he was either a Social-Democrat or a Democrat. And that what was what they didn't like. Huh?

JF: They didn't like that?

WS: They didn't like that, and they always said the Jews are, always on the Left Side. But wasn't right. There was a lot of Jews that were Right. Mmm? Like the big bankers

[2]William II 1859-1941.

and so they were on the right side. You have not to forget that the founder of the Conservative Party, eh, about 100 years ago, was a Jew. Stahl[3], huh? You heard the name Stahl. I forgot his first name. He was the founder, with their people. But they used us in politics; that was the only thing. They didn't have anything against the Jews, and I was very, very friendly with them. And there is another thing, but that is notorious. I mean, famous in all the books. They were mixed by marriage with Jews. Mostly the women.

JF: They would marry Jewish women?

WS: They marry Jewish women mostly because they were rich, or they had a connection, or were the daughter of a big banker. And, you know, that is in all the historical books that Bismarck already said a mixture between, how you say it, between a Jewish steed with a, no, I forgot, I cannot, the mixture between, a Prussian *Hengst*. *Hengst* is a, is a, a horse, huh?

JF: A horse.

WS: With a Jewish steed.

JF: A mare?

WS: Yeah.

JF: Uh huh.

WS: That is a good mixture. He said that.

JF: Bismarck said that?

WS: Yeah, Bismarck said that. And so they were never Nazis; this was one of the reasons. Because they were all, as we called it, *verjudet*, hum [full of Jewish blood]. They didn't have real pure Aryan blood. And they knew that.

JF: The *Junker* class.

WS: Yeah, the *Junker* class.

JF: In particular.

WS: And I would say 40% at least were mixed blood. So all these people were never Nazis.

JF: These people were never Nazis.

WS: Never. Of course, there were some, and then was another reason. You know, under the Kaiser, a Jew couldn't become officer in the army. There were countries in Germany, I think in Bavaria or Würtemburg, or so, where the Jews could become Reserve *Leutnant* [second lieutenant]. As a Lieutenant of the Reserve forces. But there was another reason, and there, this also was something what them offended. The Jews shouldn't go in the army, huh? This was only reserved for their class. But, there was another reason that it never came through, also in the *Republik*, under that, after the Revolution of 1918. Jews, in the whole, in the whole army, I didn't even know, there were so much, were eleven Jews in the whole *Reichswehr*, under the *Republik*, were eleven Jews.

JF: Eleven Jews totally?

[3]Friedrich Julius Stahl, 1802-61, born a Jew, but converted to Ev. Church. ed.

WS: Four hundred thousand men; four hundred thousand men. This was in all papers, and one I knew myself. There were only eleven Jews in the army.

JF: You're talking about during the Weimar Republic?

WS: Yeah. And now I come to the reason why. The Jews didn't want that job. The Jews were not going for officers.

JF: Why?

WS: You see...

JF: Why?

WS: Now, the Jew isn't mostly–are not militant. And then comes something else. Most Jews, I would say most, not all, go out for money. They want, and they come in life as an officer, they didn't have a chance. The same thing was with the judges. There were very, very few judges. I would say during, during the Monarchy, I don't know the exact number, but I would say no more than twenty Jewish judges.

JF: Was this due to the German law, or was this...

WS: No, no.

JF: Due to German law, or Jewish decision?

WS: They couldn't become law. And the reason is not, or at least not alone, is that they didn't want the Jews. They just didn't want the job. You see, when there was a good lawyer, or a man who had good credits [or good marks] after his examination, he didn't go for a judge. Because when he was good, he settled down as a lawyer. He could make five, four, four, five times more money than as a judge. That was the reason. Also in the, after the Monarchy, very very few. This was not the reason that they were not accepted. But they didn't come for that.

JF: Let me back up for a minute. When you were talking about the intermarriage that took place among the *Junker* class, was there any sense in these homes of Jewish connection? Where the mother was Jewish and the father was German Christian?

WS: Uh, I couldn't tell you that exactly. But mostly it was that they got baptized anyway, huh?

JF: So, that the Jewish mate would convert?

WS: And it may be, or I would say, in cases where I know, that is that the family of that, say the family, the parents or so of that woman or girl were already baptized or left the Jewish religion in some way, huh? I wouldn't know one single case where, I mean, I know, I would actually say I don't know any case where the family of that people still were Jews.

JF: What was your father's feeling about these intermarriages?

WS: Hmm?

JF: What was your father's feeling about the rate of intermarriage?

WS: I would say that no one from the congregation or the circle of my father got that way. They came from other.

JF: So this was outside?

WS: And this was already a generation before, I would say. That happened in the end of the last century when it started.

JF: What about the degree of assimilation in your town among the Jewish people? Was this an issue?

WS: What you mean by assimilation? This is also a word I would say that I hate. Because it is always twisted around. Now what is assimilation? Assimilation is to get, to get assimilated to your environment. You have to do that everywhere. You see we had to do that when we came to China? You have to settle down for the climate, for the food, for everything, hmm? And you have to go used to the custom of the people where you're living.

JF: Mmm hmm.

WS: Where, in this assimilation, in the way it is used mostly by Jews starts, is that you give up your Jewish things for this, or beside of it, that you can stay as a Jew. No? Of course, when people come and say, we have certain cases, we had lawyers, Jewish lawyers, they were partly prominent in the Jewish community. But on the outside, they are negating their Jewish things. For instance, there came up a court session on *Yom Kippur*. And they were afraid to tell the judge. The judge would do it. And they did it. Then you said that day, "I cannot. Can you postpone it on another day? Because it is *Yom Kippur*." They are afraid. They are ashamed. They thought the judge would know they are Jews.

JF: Was that a common example?

WS: Yes. This is what I call assimilation in the worst way.

JF: Was this a common example of what was happening?

WS: It was not a common, but, I would say, I know two or three people who did that. Mostly they came in the synagogue, and they came after or before that in the synagogue, but they wouldn't tell the judge, "Postpone that." We had in the last, last couple of years a one, this was a lawyer, he did that, and he had a son. The son still lives here, and he's much younger than I am. He's a professor here somewhere in America. First of all, I think, it was the only case I remember. He did not have him circumcised. It was the first. And that boy, this was the only boy I remember. He went on with, to school on the holidays. But this was the only case I can remember. And as far as I know, he is, he is still not a Jew. I hear sometimes from other people about him. Maybe he is, he is married, I think, but I don't know, to a Jewish girl or not. But mostly this kind of assimilation we didn't have. And this was very seldom. There also when Jewish men got married to non-Jewish girls. There we had two or three cases in our community in the congregation. They became Jewish, the girls. And I know one case where the wife of this Jewish man was a better Jew than her husband. She was seeing that he went to the synagogue and that he lit the candles on Shabbos. He didn't do it before. He told me this himself. "You see, since I am married that *shikse* (that is also a word I don't like) she sees that I do everything right." And I know that my father had some cases where he was teaching the girls the Jewish religion before they got married. This was not a problem.

JF: Was anybody in your family, you had mentioned before about the Army, was any man in your family in the Army at that point?

WS: In?

JF: The Army. The German Army.

WS: You mean during the war?

JF: During the First World War.

WS: Oh, yeah. My father was away from [unclear]. During the war, I mean, in the Army to serve, the, you did, as had everybody. Jews, they couldn't get up in the ranks. They couldn't, they became corporals and what comes next, but that was that. They couldn't. In the war, yeah, in the war, as soon as the war came, the Jews became officers.

JF: Before that they avoided it.

WS: Not avoided. They couldn't.

JF: Mmm hmm.

WS: They couldn't.

JF: No, they avoided serving. You were talking about them not wanting to be in the army.

WS: Yeah, it was so, I would say, then they were offered this; since they could make it, they would do it. But they were not so, so eager to get it. But they couldn't. I know cases where there were very, very brilliant soldiers. And a major or somebody called them in the end of the year before they got out. They were already, they had the stripes and everything. And he told them, "You can become officer right away, when you get baptized."

JF: When you get baptized.

WS: They told them that!

JF: Now this was bef-, this was not during the First World War.

WS: No, this was before.

JF: Before the First World War. But during the First World War they were able to...

WS: There you got them right away.

JF: Rise in the ranks.

WS: They needed. I knew some dozens. Some dozens. But this was a separate thing during the war.

JF: What are your memories of the time after World War One, during the Republic, as far as the changes in Germany are concerned?

WS: You mean, after the First World War. What do you mean the situation? That is where the whole thing started.

JF: O.K. Can you describe that time to me?

WS: You see, that started already during the war. And I would say 1917, and this was an outlet. The German Army already had the feeling, or I would say better, they knew already they couldn't win the war. And they were looking for something. And they found

out, *oder* [or] they thought they found out, that the Jewish soldiers were not all on the, on the front, on the fighting line, but were sitting in offices and some–and they made a so-called *Juden Zählung* [account of Jews]. That means they counted the Jews. This was official. They counted the Jews who were working or had jobs in the Army, not on the, they say in, in offices, in hospitals and so. And this was the first spark they put in the population. You see the Jew! This was negative. They couldn't find out but they didn't publish that. And you see that is also something with the German, I, I always was thinking what makes the German people so different from all other peoples? I would say only in German-, in Europe, hmm? The German people is especially, I would say, separate in their thinking, in thinking that they always look when something happens that the other, that it's the other's fault. They, and see, that is, I mean, this is a little aside maybe from what you're talking. That is also the different position between Christianity and Judaism. You see, every Jew when was happened always said, "My God, what did I do?" The German will never say that. Or the Christian. They, they are put the fault on somebody else. Whatever happens, the Jew will always say, "Was my fault what happened? I get punished from God." The Ger-, so this is, and the roots, I would say that this is a part of the explanation for the whole thing happened. They're always looking around who did it. And under themselves, under themselves the German always looks for somebody who is to blame for. And that is the whole thing with, I would say, that was the possibility that Hitler had the chance to come to power. He had the whole people, and he knew that. That everybody would, there is a whole thing with the Jews, in my opinion, was not exactly antisemitic. It is clear, and maybe you think it's ridiculous when I say such a thing. He would have a means to get the people down, huh? That's why he didn't come up with the religious side of antisemitism, but with the racist, eh...

JF: The racist?

WS: Yeah. So every, everybody, everybody in Germany was trembling. Maybe I have a Jewish grandmother. Maybe, and maybe, when he had, he tried to hide it, hmm? He tried to hide that, because that was the thing. He got them down on their knees. And everybody was looking for the other. Mr. Miller, maybe he has a Jewish grandmother, and so on. And then they were going, they would have, his shop, hmm? He had a higher job, so they were going denounce him.

JF: Do you recall then in the 20's this kind of scapegoating occurring before Hitler came to power?

WS: Yeah. That is, was, always with the Germans.

JF: This always was happening?

WS: It's, I would say characteristic from the whole German people.

JF: Did they...

WS: Always to seek somebody.

JF: Was this higher after the World War? After the First World War?

WS: Then it was terrible. This was much terrible in the beginning than was the last two years when I went to school.

Tape one, side two:

JF: This, you say, was your last two years of school. You're talking about what years now?

WS: Mmm?

JF: What years are we talking about now?

WS: Now we, I would say we are talking about the period, or about the difference between two periods. You see, during the Monarchy, and this I know all, too, from experience, the Jewish religion and the Jewish community was recognized by the State. This is also very difficult to understand here, because you have here, the separation of church and state. There, synagogue was a stately-by-law-recognized institution. For instance, every rabbi must be confirmed by the government. In the community they could choose him from so many rabbis, but when they have chosen him, before they gave him the office, the government had to give its seal, to seal it. This was only one thing. The Jewish, the lessons, everything, the school, Jewish school, it was supervised the same way as the other schools. And when anything happened, the Jews were represented as from the community, was through the rabbi. For instance, and I remember this so very well; I was a child at that time. I can remember that. The Kaiser, I mean, William II, came to our town for some reason. There was a church, yeah, a big church was really consecrated. This was for some years renovation or so. And the Emperor came. My father was invited. He was in the church. And he got a card, a ticket for my mother. They sit in the first row! In the first row the Kaiser came in. This was only for the dignitaries of the town. And my father was invited to the dinner. There was a state dinner for the Emperor. The Emperor didn't attend in the last minute because he had other things to do, but it was in his honor, and remarkable. With the invitation, he was the only Jew who attended. With the invitation, he got a small notice that says, “We have provided for you a kosher meal!” But this was impossible in the *Republik*. After the Kaiser was gone, nobody cared for the Jews. And there were big scandals. I remember in Brannschweig, where also standing was Hindenburg for a state visit. And the rabbi, who was the so-called *Landesrabbiner* [regional rabbi] was not invited. And there was a church of the Socialists. And now I come to something else. The Socialists were more antisemitic than the *Junkers*.

JF: Why?

WS: You know, the Socialists were more or less atheists. They were against the Church, but they said, eh, this is very difficult to explain, and this is also, I would say, I have talked to many people about that. I only read here recently a book from a Socialist. He tried to blame his own party. He was a big man. He was in Bavaria, Minister-president, and he was in the Reichstag before the Nazis. Is a very interesting book. He doesn't come to that point. But he says, where the Socialist Party did, eh, not function. And he is right. But he doesn't come to all of it. This was one point where the Socialists were thinking, not,

"The Jews? O.K. They're more dangerous than the other one, huh?" They can't even understand it. I have to give you a whole lecture about this, because I have talked to so many Socialists in my life. And I tried to get down to it, to the deeps of their soul. They were thinking of the Christians. This was a, I think that's, this, yeah, they couldn't do anything about, but they were feeling the Jews as a spiritual sect. You know what I mean? It's very difficult to understand this.

JF: They were seeing the Jews as a spiritual?

WS: Yeah. The Jewish religion. Huh?

JF: Mmm hmm. Yeah.

WS: They thought the Christian, O.K. They cannot help. But on the other hand, they are a minority that we, and then they made, of course, the big mistake. Their followers were not atheists.

JF: Their followers were not...

WS: No...

JF: Not atheists.

WS: No, they always went to church. Not only, maybe not so much, O.K., but as their, they had their weddings, huh? When the daughters were married they went to church. They didn't talk about, huh, I think, the Party shouldn't know that, huh? Or they had them baptized, huh?

JF: Do you mean...

WS: The Party said you shouldn't do it.

JF: They saw the Jewish religion as more spiritual than the Christians?

WS: In a spiritual way, dangerous for the Socialist thinking.

JF: Why? Why?

WS: Yeah, in a way they are right.

JF: Why?

WS: They are, then I have to go back to [laughs] to the word "Jewish-religious thinking."

JF: No.

WS: They were not quite wrong. They were not really wrong. This is, you see, the, there is as much, I mean for the thinking. You always have this when a very real intellectual Jew comes to thinking, and has conflicts in his thinking. He has all the choice. Especially I know a lot of children, both, male and female, from rabbis, very Orthodox rabbis, who got Communist all of a sudden, because they're fanatics. Their fathers were real Orthodox. So when they couldn't do that, because their thinking wouldn't go with that, they became Communists, in the contrary. They went to the other side.

JF: But it was still with a great deal of fanaticism. Is what you are saying?

WS: Yeah.

JF: But what I'm not clear on what you're saying about the Socialists, why did they see the Jews as more dangerous than the Christians?

WS: I tell you, it is more or less a feeling I have. I cannot prove that. You know what I mean? That's why I'm a little cautious about it.

JF: O.K.

WS: But I can only tell you because I have talked to many, many, I would say, leading at that time. Socialists. And they didn't speak up right away, but I saw them hiding something. And on the roots of the deep of their thinking there was that.

JF: Mmm hmm.

WS: They were feeling, the religious Jew, not exactly Orthodox, they were keeping away other thinking people from their party. But they were not so afraid from their, about their, the teaching of the Christian counterpart. You can see something of what I mean. It is very difficult in a few words to explain. And there were other reasons. There were other reasons. They had Jews in the party, very few, but I would say five or six, and this, this is maybe also very remarkable, because nobody in my recollection has brought that point up. These Jews were atheists.

JF: These Jews were atheists.

WS: Completely atheists, eh? Intellectual Jews. Completely atheists. And that Jews were not, of course as every Jews who get renegade. It's always tense not to show that he was a Jew before, and he is not really against the Jews, but he is not for them. And I will tell you a practical example.

JF: O.K.

WS: There, there, I mean really, you know, the State and the Church were not separated. And they got always, but only the Christians, under the Monarchy, state subsidiaries from the tax money. By a kind of a *key* they got so much and so much. Not the Jews. The Jews didn't get anything. They had only to live by their own taxing, but this taxing was collected by the state. This was collected by the state. Was the also the money. This was the same thing under that Socialists, under the Weimar Republic. But as the Jews came and said, "Now, we, the Jews, are fighting for that for some decades, now we will also have our money." They didn't give them it. There was no equality. They, the same status was left over from the Monarchy. They didn't give the Jews something from the State, with some exceptions that came later. And this was, there never came a law, was never made of the law. But from year to year, they decided sometimes to give them something like a handout, so they could say, "We gave the Jews, say, half a million *Marks*."

JF: So essentially the Socialists did not change...

WS: No.

JF: That pattern...

WS: No.

JF: In any way.

WS: And I know a lot of, or at least I heard of them, Socialists who were antisemitic before. So really, and that is the point, you can read in all the books. Did you read some books about the Hitler period?

JF: Mmm hmm.

WS: Did you read about the, the justice, the laws they made, and that I have read?

JF: All right, before we get to this, let me just back up for a minute, O.K.? You had finished, I just want to focus in on your own experience for a minute. You had finished the *Gymnasium*. You, after the *Gymnasium* you went on...

WS: I studied first engineering.

JF: At what kind of school?

WS: A technical high school, or a technical university. But then I gave it up, and I went to economics.

JF: You went into economics?

WS: Yeah.

JF: Was this in a high school? Or...

WS: In a university.

JF: In a university. Where was that?

WS: Berlin and Leipzig.

JF: And what years were you in Berlin and Leipzig?

WS: Mmm?

JF: What years was that?

WS: This was from '20, 1928 to 1932.

JF: What was the atmosphere as you were studying...

WS: Oh the atmosphere...

JF: During that time?

WS: I must say anyhow about that. I was, I had chosen the universities by that. You see, Berlin was at that time very broad in an intellectual sense. The Nazis, or the Nazi influence was very, very little there. And in Leipzig I would say it was real nothing.

JF: Did you have any trouble getting into these universities?

WS: No. I [unclear] nobody. This is not as it here is, that they close it because of the sh-, [unclear] they have seats or so. This was not known in Germany. And first of all they had all enough seats in every seminaries, laboratories, and other, so. And it wasn't...

JF: There was no difficulty because you were Jewish...

WS: No.

JF: Attending these schools.

WS: Never trouble.

JF: So you were...

WS: They even didn't ask you.

JF: They didn't ask you if you were Jewish?

WS: No. This was eliminated after the Revolution. Also on the schools. Religion was voluntary.

JF: Voluntarily...

WS: Yeah.

JF: Told.

WS: This was not before.

JF: I see.

WS: But after the Monarchy, this was all thrown out.

JF: So...

WS: The old forms you had to fill in were no more the question after for religion.

JF: So in these years, between '28 and '32, Naziism and Hitler's influence in these big cities was not...

WS: Nah, I would say not, but mostly in the big cities. There were big cities, there were a little bit more. Like Hanover, for instance, and Magdeburg. This was mostly because there were some local incidents. And they were a little antisemitic undercurrent, but not anywhere else.

JF: And then in 1932, did you finish your education?

WS: Yeah. 1931 I made my degree for the, I don't know how you call it here, a certified economist. They called it *Diplomvolkswirtschaftler* in Germany [unclear]. And then I was working for my doctor, and I was about ready when Hitler came, and my non-Jewish professors were thrown out.

JF: The non-Jewish...

WS: Yeah.

JF: Professors were thrown out of...

WS: Yeah, because they were Democrats.

JF: What school was this?

WS: In Leipzig.

JF: In Leipzig.

WS: In the University.

JF: Mmm hmm. And what happened to you? Were you able to continue to study?

WS: I went, I will tell you, I emigrated three times in my life. First I emigrated to Prague, Prague, Czechoslovakia.

JF: When was that?

WS: '33. Right at the beginning.

JF: This is after your professors were...

WS: Yeah.

JF: Fired? And you were in the middle of your doctoral studies.

WS: I was really about finished.

JF: Almost finished. So you emigrated to Prague.

WS: Mmm.

JF: What was your thinking at that point in emigrating? What did you think was going to happen in Germany?

WS: I knew everything that was happening, but nobody would believe me.

JF: What did you think was going to happen?

WS: I thought that they would, eh, exterminate the Jews completely when they don't go out, but nobody would believe me. My father was not aware.

JF: You thought that the Jews would be exterminated in 1933?

WS: No, not right away. Not right away, but step by step. I saw that. And the other people, not only the Jews, the Germans, too, they say that this is, one guy said to me, he was on my side. I met him in Prague. He said they think of this like a rain. They open an umbrella and wait 'til it stops, and then they close it. This will not happen. And I told them that.

JF: What made you think that the plan was definitely...

WS: Because I, I, I...

JF: For extermination?

WS: I knew what they were doing, and I knew that nobody could stop them. Because when they had the power, they would not give up the power.

JF: Your father did not believe this?

WS: No. My father didn't believe it up to the end.

JF: Did you try to convince him to leave Germany at that point?

WS: Yeah. Sure. Sure.

JF: There was no chance.

WS: My father said, "I never did somebody, something wrong, so who should do me something wrong?"

JF: I see.

WS: I said, "That is not the point here. You will see what happens." And he didn't believe it later when during the war my parents, that when I came to Shanghai. That was the only good thing that I got to Shanghai, I could take them out, during the war. They came over Siberia. And you know what my father said when he left the ship and with my mother? He said, "I bring you here your mother." So as when he would go back into that ship he, he still didn't believe it. He said, "If it wasn't for your mother, I wouldn't have left Germany."

JF: Did he go back?

WS: No, no.

JF: He stayed.

WS: How could he get back?

JF: He stayed.

WS: First of all, I wouldn't have let him because it was during the war. But he was already one year and during the war in Germany, and he still didn't believe it.

JF: Did you feel then that Prague was a safe place to be?

WS: No.

JF: Why did you pick Prague?

WS: Yeah, Prague was, there were some reasons. The first, it was about the nearest.

JF: The nearest.

WS: The second, I have a cousin on my mother's side. She was from Germany, but she was married to a Czech Jewish man. And the third and maybe most important reason was, it was the only place I could take some money out. Some money out, that I lost there. But when I was there one year...

JF: What did you do when you were in Prague? Did you work, or...

WS: No, I...

JF: Were you able to study again?

WS: I couldn't work. I had tried some businesses very [laughs] black side of my emigration. I lost my money there.

JF: Were you able to study again, or was that not a goal?

WS: I tried; maybe when I would have stayed longer but I made so bad business, and I went back to Germany because after the Röhm...

JF: After the...

WS: Röhm affair.

JF: Yes.

WS: After the Röhm affair I didn't believe anything. But everybody said, "You can go back. The whole thing is over, and it will somehow even out." I didn't believe that. You see, when I came back, I came for the Gestapo, you know the Gestapo. This was routine. I was maybe two weeks back. They called me for the Gestapo, and they interviewed me, for four hours.

JF: What was that like?

WS: Hmm?

JF: What was that interview like? What was that interview like?

WS: In, in, in...

JF: With the Gestapo.

WS: *Na, ja*, they interviewed everybody who came back, who was emigrated. And came back from foreign countries. They interviewed them.

JF: Why? What did they...

WS: No, mostly...

JF: Want to know?

WS: They want know what they think about the Nazis there. And who is there, and everything. I was very, very cautious, but I answered them their questions. I didn't avoid them, you know, because then I would come in hot water. But that guy, that's why I tell them. When he was finished, he shook my hand, and he said that it's very important that what I have told them, and that goes directly to Göring. And he shook my hand and said, "Forget about the whole thing. Everything is over. And we have a good times, and

don't go out again. You will see that everything is good. This was only in the beginning and now it's over."

JF: This was...

WS: This, this, this...

JF: This was in 1934?

WS: And I, you know what I was thinking? The guy is stupid. I don't believe one word.

JF: This was 1934?

WS: 1934, yeah, in October or so.

JF: If you didn't believe that Germany was safe, why did you go back?

WS: Yeah. First of all, I had no means there to live. This was one thing. I couldn't work. I didn't get permission to. And then my parents, they said I should come back, and I said, "O.K." I could see that the next couple of years were about safe. I knew that. I have spoken to many people, and this was the real bad thing of the whole period, that the people didn't realize that. You wouldn't believe it what the Jewish people made money in that years.

JF: I'm sorry. Could you repeat that?

WS: How well off they were in that three years. They made so much money!

JF: Between what years? 19-

WS: '34 to '37. Four years I would say.

JF: The Jews made a lot of money in those years?

WS: Oh. There was a lot of money and they had, they had, from the state, from the government, from the military. They gave them orders. They were working for them, and they made so much money, you know, that the whole army was built up in two years, huh? They deliver everything.

JF: Even with the Nuremberg laws?

WS: Yeah!

JF: The Jews were still making the...

WS: There was nothing in the Nuremberg laws that forbids that. The Nuremberg law was only they couldn't vote and they couldn't marry a non-Jewish, eh, between Jewish and non-Jewish. This was the, mostly all that they couldn’t have positions in the state or so, but nothing else was there.

JF: What happened when the Aryanization of business laws came in?

WS: Mmm?

JF: When the businesses were Aryanized?

WS: No, that came in '38.

JF: Yes.

WS: '38.

JF: That was the end of the Jewish...

WS: Yeah.

JF: Money making.

WS: That was a special reason why they did that. And I saw that, but people didn't realize it. They couldn't do that right away, because they didn't have somebody to take the place. They had at first to bring up their people for all this kind of business. And then they were ready, then they threw the Jews out. You see, there was one thing where they never threw out one Jew. You know what it was?

JF: Hmm?

WS: The pharmacies. They didn't have enough pharmacists. And the Jews had about fifteen perc- to twenty percent of the pharmacies in Germany. Until the last day they didn't bother them. On the contrary, I know two cases where the people wanted to emigrate, and the government came and said, "Stay, stay, stay! We don't have enough pharmacists here."

JF: What did you do when you came back in 1934?

WS: Yeah, I, I had many things. I was teaching. I was free-lancing. And...

JF: Freelance writing?

WS: No. In business. I would make accounting services and so. I couldn't make much. I was looking for that time only as a temporary in between. I hoped to find a better way to get out.

JF: Where were you living at that time?

WS: In Berlin.

JF: In Berlin. By yourself?

WS: No. My parents. I told you my father was retired. Family lived in Berlin.

JF: In 1936 you said.

WS: Yeah. 1936.

JF: The *Gemeinde* was ended?

WS: Not quitely. It still existed, but maybe 20 families, 15, and there were later, the last one was deported to, I don't know exactly, not Auschwitz. It was another camp. Mostly they died there.

JF: Your parents were able to leave in 1936 to go to Berlin?

WS: Yeah.

JF: At that time. What happened then? You were looking for another place...

WS: To go, yeah.

JF: To go.

WS: And then I had the affidavit. I got an affidavit here from a cousin of mine, a first cousin, in New York. And when I was ready to go, at that time they made this, by and by, not so easy, you know, to emigrate there. You have to wait sometimes, firstly they took the passes away, huh? Or when the pass ex-, eh, the date on the, no, um, the pass was overdue, they didn't give you a new one, huh? Or you had to wait, yeah, and then they came. They gave you a pass only for emigration. Otherwise you didn't get one. So then the

quota, you know, they had the quota system, and my quota was, maybe I had to wait seven, eight, ten months. And then came the *Kristall* Night, hmm, and all this.

JF: You were in Berlin during *Kristallnacht*?

WS: Yeah.

JF: Can you describe it to me as you observed it?

WS: [sighs]. The whole thing started, you know, on the tenth of November, this is tomorrow. It is my birthday. That's why I never can forget my birthday. And it started in the night from the ninth to the tenth. I had the feeling that something was happening because I am a very good observer. I am not a prophet. A prophet is only a man who can observe. When I was, so I knew it was something coming. You know, there was this thing with this guy in Paris, huh? This was staged. The whole thing was, also when that would not happened, they would have done it. They would con-, find some excuse.

JF: You feel that the shooting was staged, or that they were using that as an excuse?

WS: That's also difficult to say. If it was staged or not staged. There, they used it as a...

JF: An excuse?

WS: An excuse. They would have found something else. There no question. But the whole thing started in the night. I heard a terrible crash of glass across the street from my house. This was a corner house, and there was a station, and a shop, Jewish store. And first of all, I heard the crash. I didn't go out. But after two minutes I heard another crash a street down. And there was another. And there was a grocery store, a Jewish grocery. Then I went out from that and looked out. And the p-, all the people were loo-...

Tape two, side one:

JF: You said that the people were looking out of their windows.

WS: Yes. And then I saw what happened, and I saw the crying, there something. And the next morning I knew then, the next morning, that all the synagogues were burning, but not all. Some they left. This was all done by a fixed plan. Synagogues that were under historical protection, they didn't burn. They didn't burn the oldest synagogue in Berlin in the *Heidereutergasse*–they didn't burn it, and they didn't another one, and one they were, they were, I don't know how that happened. This were in the [unclear]. They started the fire and by some mistake the fire brigade was right there. And they were afraid and ran away. So that synagogue also was untouched. And then somebody called us from our friends, and said, "We are going to go out. The Gestapo is rounding up all the men." But my father and I, we said, "No, where we should go?" And they [unclear]. And they didn't get us. And the reason was, first they got only the rich people. The rich. We were not rich. And this was all by a special purpose. When the people, they put them in the concentration camp, but in these camps, where they rounded up on that day the people, they were not so harsh and rough with the people they had taken before. Because they wanted something from them. Mostly they put some papers before them and said, "Sign here." The paper said they'd give them their house, or their business, and so on. And I would say on average was nobody longer there as a week or so. In some ways they got out because they had to pay. They had to pay, how they say, through the nose. Some people lost everything. And this was the reason. That was the whole reason. And, but also it's not so very well known here is that the most and biggest money they got from the insurance. You know that? The, all the insurance companies had to pay. You know that the insurance companies in that week were nearly for the bankrupt. I forgot how many they have to pay. These were I forgot– Especially today because the figures are so different from 40 years ago, or 50. I think 40 or 60 million dollars. The insurance company had to pay on the state, to the state. They were forbidden to pay it to the Jew. But they had to pay it to the government. And that was the thing they wanted. They were at that time really at the end, on the end of all their wits.

JF: They were on the end?

WS: Of their wits.

JF: Of their wits. Mmm hmm.

WS: They didn't have any money, because they had all put the money in, so they needed all the money. That was the reason. And that is also in connection with that, with that optimistic people. You know, I knew a lot of non-Jews before, higher ranking people in the government and so, and when I sometimes met them, we were talking. They always says, "Wait, wait, wait. I know exactly, three more months and that's over. They are finished." And they were talking and talking, then I met some after four months. I said, "I, I, I, yah, it isn't exactly." "But wait, wait, wait. You will see. They are over and they are finished. Nobody gives them money." And you know, the *Mark* went down? Huh? When

the people lost their money, the Jews, that has really not to do with the Hitler laws. Because the money was so down. The *Mark* was down to six. Six percent. So when somebody transferred the money, they give them a permit to transfer say 100,000 *Marks*. But he got only six here. Because the *Mark* was so down.

JF: During the time before the *Kristallnacht*, did you feel hemmed in by the Nuremberg laws as they were up to that point?

WS: I couldn't understand the first word.

JF: Before *Kristallnacht*...

WS: Yeah.

JF: From '35.

WS: Yeah.

JF: Did you feel hemmed in? Did you feel controlled by the laws?

WS: Controlled? Yeah. In some way, but this was before already.

JF: Yes.

WS: Before the Nuremberg laws. You couldn't have any gasoline, official gasoline, like in the community, in your synagogue or so. The service [unclear] they didn't control. In the big cities, in the big synagogues, they had always somebody who was observing there, they got. But when you have, let's say, a lecture was given from *B'nai Brith* or so, you have to put it on the list and give it to the Gestapo, and that day and that time and that place is a meeting, and they sent somebody. And he was sitting in the back. This was always. Not only with the Jews. The other had that, too.

JF: You mean...

WS: Everybody.

JF: Everybody had something like that.

WS: Sometimes they came. It always depended on the loyalty of the officer who came. Somebody came and said, "Good-bye, and how are you?" and he went away, huh? And somebody was sitting the whole session, and somebody was take down in steno, everything. And sometimes they interrupted, and sometimes they put them in jail like Niemöller. You know this story?

JF: Niemöller. Yeah.

WS: Niemöller. He had this church in our district, and I remember there was a big fuss about it. And I think they, out of the church they took him. Out of the church.

JF: Did the laws for the Jews affect you greatly?

WS: The law of...

JF: The Nuremberg laws. Did they affect you very much?

WS: Me, I got in a way. I couldn't get a job. I could get a job only with a Jewish company. And this was very, very difficult, because the Jews by and by closed down, and there were so many Jews hunting for jobs. It was very difficult to get a job, of course. And I had not in mind to marry a Christian girl, so that didn't affect me. But the whole thing, I

would say, started to get worse, I wouldn't say worse, I would say worst, all in one step after the annexation of Austria. That changed overnight. From that day on.

JF: How did it change? In respect for you?

WS: Yeah. It changed in that way. That all these rough things happened. Beating up of Jews, and you know what it was? It is also not really proven, but I thought at that time they brought over the Nazis from Austria. These rough people, hmm? And they came in and, then this started with the Jews. They put, they put guards on Jewish stores. And they were beating up Christian people who went in, and all this kind of stuff. And then the Jews had to put on a sign, "I'm Jew." On their windows, hmm?

JF: They brought in Austrian guards?

WS: Yeah, because the native wouldn't have done it.

JF: The native Germans would not have done it?

WS: Yeah, that's my opinion.

JF: Mmm hmm.

WS: Because I had seen a thing like that in my hometown when in the beginning, in the beginning when they started the first action against Jews. They brought Nazis from Stettin. And I knew a Nazi from Stargard, from my town, told me, "We refuse to do it." So they brought Nazis from Stettin to Stargard to beat up some people. This was in the beginning. Then the whole thing was stopped. They always did it in this way. They brought all these people from one town to the other one to do that, because they shouldn't know the people. Because on the other hand, they could meet friends, former friends, and they were afraid they wouldn't do that.

JF: What was happening to you then during this time?

WS: During which time?

JF: You said as things got worse after the *Anschluss*.

WS: Yeah, I saw that coming. If the first thing was, you could see it overnight that things got rough. That was, it was ugly overnight. And then they came out that people, everybody, they printed that, and then got it in the mail, or you have to pick it up. It was announced Jews have to pick up this somewhere in an office, papers, and fill out their whole belongings, including your watch you had. And then, I think, that the people that have a reason, why they want to know it, they want to have it, huh? And by that list they went in November, when the *Kristallnacht* came, they went from the top, from the richest down, huh? So in our house I asked that only one man. And he was a sick man. They released him the same day in the evening, and they didn't put him in the concentration camp. But the other people they took by their, by their riches, I would say. Sometimes they made mistakes. They took out somebody else and they found out they couldn't get anything from them, they let them go. The only thing was they were out for the money when everything happened. And then came the thing, you have to give up all your gold and silver. Up to that time you could take it, you see. And then that came, this was about the last action

that I, I really witnessed before I left Germany. This was the second emigration, when I decided I go to Shanghai to wait for my quota number.

JF: How did you decide to go to Shanghai?

WS: This was the only reason where I could, was where, was the only place I could go without the visa.

JF: How did you hear about this?

WS: There was a lot of people already there before. There were, was a very small community, and I knew some people by name who went there right in '33, right 1933. And this people made very well off in Shanghai. These were mostly, I would say all, doctors, physicians. They made very well off there. They wrote them letters to their friends, "Come, come, come!"

JF: Why did not more people go?

WS: Yeah. You see, I know in my own family people that during the war they had a chance to come, like my parents, and I tried to get them in. It was a cousin of my mother, with her husband. And they said, "No, not to Shanghai. Everywhere but not to Shanghai." They were thinking of Shanghai as a very, very low place and they didn't come.

JF: It was a low place.

WS: It wasn't that low.

JF: No, this is how people saw Shanghai.

WS: Yeah. It was in a way, of course. It was. It was a very, especially in view of health, was a very dangerous climate.

JF: People were afraid of the climate.

WS: Yes, and...

JF: Because of their health.

WS: And I can tell you things. I knew exactly that about 3,000 people died there. And I would say nearly every one was, died of any kind of diseases they got.

JF: They died from diseases that they contracted in Shanghai.

WS: Yeah. Typhoid and yellow fever, cholera...

JF: But in Germany...

WS: But I will tell you...

JF: Yes.

WS: Hmm?

JF: In Germany, when you were in the process of deciding to go to Shanghai, people elected not to go to Shanghai even if there was no other place...

WS: Yeah.

JF: To go.

WS: Yeah. They left a lot of people. You see when I came to Shanghai, I came first before the war started. I came on July 15. Six weeks later was the war. I knew the war was coming. I knew that.

JF: Did you have trouble making arrangements to go to Shanghai?

WS: No.

JF: How did you make arrangements? What...

WS: I had made already the arrangements. I, since I had many ways running and so I had wanted go to Peru. I had a cousin of mine who lived in Peru, and I got a visa through a travel agent she had paid for, and somebody else from Holland paid in Paris for that. And when I was ready to go they found out the visa was for vacation. You know...

JF: You were trying to get to Peru initially?

WS: Yes, the South American countries, the consul was sitting in the café house in Berlin and writing visas for a special price. Hmm?

JF: Mmm hmm. And these were not legitimate visas.

WS: No. They found them out. The consul was thrown out. They were selling permits up to $5,000 a piece.

JF: So you...

WS: Somebody, the first one said, "Maybe they got made." But when they found out after eight or ten days, the guy was thrown out and the visa was not worth anything.

JF: So you had...

WS: That happened to me.

JF: You had one of these worthless visas.

WS: Yeah. Somebody paid for me in Paris. Paris. And I got to, had to send a pass over cause there was a risk in itself to send the pass by mail. And I got it back. It had a visa in it.

JF: Why did somebody in Paris have to pay?

WS: That was what the guy who made the business.

JF: The Peruvian consulate.

WS: Yeah. He was an officer there. He had the stamps and everything and the first people who got it they went. I know. And I was to go with the next shipment. And eight days before, and now I have to risk. The Gestapo knew I had a passport for emigration. So I have to leave. They called me and said you have to leave within three months.

JF: You had sent your passport to France?

WS: Yeah. No, for the visa.

JF: But you had it back by that time?

WS: I got it back. I sent it through the travel agency.

JF: So the people in Paris then were keeping the money for this...

WS: Mmm hmm. I got it back.

JF: Peruvian consulate. This is how he, he did not have his money then in Germany. He had it taken care of...

WS: I couldn’t pay it from Germany because it was restricted.

JF: Yes.

WS: I couldn't send it. So a relative of my mother who lived in Holland already, he was emigrated, he paid for me.

JF: I see.

WS: And he got the money back.

JF: He got the money back.

WS: Back when I was in Shanghai, he sent me the money to Shanghai.

JF: I see.

WS: It was very fortunate.

JF: So you had your, you did get your passport back and your...

WS: Yeah.

JF: Visa which was invalid.

WS: Yeah, but when I got it it was valid, and I had the booking for the ship. Everything was ready. On the week before I should sail, the agency called me: "You cannot do it. Your visas are canceled."

JF: Were your parents also trying to get out?

WS: No. I told you. My fa-...

JF: They still refused?

WS: My mother, yes. My father said, my father thought I was out for adventures. "You would see the world," he said.

JF: Mmm hmm.

WS: My family didn't believe it. Also after the *Kristall* Night he didn't believe that. He only thought these were out-of-the-way happenings and so on. I don't know. And when I then saw I have no other chance and I have the passport...

JF: And the Nazis said you had to leave within three months.

WS: Yes. So I went and got a, this was also very difficult, because it was all sold out. You couldn't get a reservation on the ship.

JF: Wait. What was difficult? To get to Shanghai?

WS: Shanghai.

JF: You went by ship.

WS: Yeah.

JF: And you could not get a reservation on the ship.

WS: No.

JF: Where did the ship leave from?

WS: Yeah. Now I tell you that is also ridiculous, maybe. There were Italian and there French and every ship, uh, probably. So, and they were all sold out, and the people were lining up on the street. You could see. And I passed–you don't believe, no, you don't believe me now–I don't know if it's still there, on a, near the *Brandenburger Tor* there was the Hotel Adlou. Did you hear about it?

JF: Yeah.

WS: This was the most fashionable hotel. Not only in Berlin, but at that time in Europe. This was about the Waldorf Astoria in New York. I never was at that hotel, and in that hotel was the *Norddeutsche Lloyd* the shipping company. *Norddeutsche Lloyd*. This was the biggest German shipper. And I passed, and I was looking in that thing. The only shipping agency, see the, nobody's staying here! On, in, *Unterden Linden*, there were all the shipping agencies–American Express, Cook's, and everybody. And everywhere people were lining up by the hundreds, and not *Norddeutsche Lloyd.* I think I will go in. What can happen?

JF: No one was going to the German shipping.

WS: Yeah. Nobody was going. And I was going in, and there was a *Herr*, a man, he was a noble *Herr* you– "Please, take a seat." I said, I was really afraid to speak. I say, "I've come to ask you if you maybe have a reservation for Shanghai." And he said, "Of course, we have. But not right away. And under one condition. I have to ask you a question. Have you a passport?" I say, "Yes." "You ready to go?" I say, "Yes!" I really couldn't speak. I was so astonished. He says, "We don't have right away, but I can assure you in two weeks I will call you. Leave your telephone number." Then he was showing me a list, and he had about fifteen, sixteen names on. "I put you on this list. And we always get cancellations at the last minute. But I tell you one thing. You cannot leave from Germany. You have to leave from Italy. Because our ships go around from Bremen to Genoa. And in Genoa mostly there we get empty, empty places, empty beds. So I'll call you." So I went home and was thinking, "Hmmm." In three days I got a call. "Take a taxi. Come down, and we make this whole thing." I got a ticket in three days, and could leave in another ten days.

JF: So you had that period of time to get to Italy.

WS: Yeah.

JF: To get on the boat.

WS: No, no. Italy was only twelve hours by train.

JF: And that was not difficult to get to that point. To Genoa.

WS: No. No. It was no. Italy, I didn't need a visa.

JF: Why did not more people try this?

WS: Yeah.

WS: I went back, I went back to the *Hilfsverein*. You heard about *Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden*? They were the only, the Jewish organization who were handling all this emigration. And I went back to them. And I told them, "Why you don't send the people to the *Norddeutsche Lloyd*? I got a ticket right over the counter," and they didn't know that. They said, "We didn't realize, and we wouldn't send people to the Germans. And the people wouldn't go this way." Now you know.

JF: Hmm.

WS: And then I had to go first class, and when they told me, "What d'you pay there?" And first of all, they were very expensive, that I must concede. This was the most expensive. I paid at that time 105 pounds. This was $550.

JF: And that was much more than the other lines?

WS: This was about, the first class, this was about $200 more than on the other ships; this was luxury. This was the best look-, high class ships at that time. They're brand new ships. And you see, ya, most people cannot pay this. And so he said, "You paid for first class. I will tell you, you pay second class, and we'll pay the difference." So the Hilfs...

JF: Who said this?

WS: The *Hilfsverein*. So they paid me the difference between the first class and the second class.

JF: Why did they do that?

WS: Yeah. Because they were happy to...

JF: That you...

WS: Get the people out.

JF: Because you got the...

WS: They had so much money by the way. They had the money.

JF: They were happy that you had given them the information?

WS: The information, and then they send more people even. And I would say on that ship we had 100, 150, people in this first class, and 250 in the second.

JF: Were a great many of these people Jewish?

WS: Yeah. I come to that. About half the people. And I found out that the people, most of the people didn't come through the *Hilfsverein*. They came from others, from other cities. Mostly from Hamburg, from Breslau and Frankfurt. From Berlin was very few, and they have made without the *Hilfsverein*, especially the people who went first class. And on the ship it was, I would say, it was a kind of experience of my life. It was a beautiful trip.

JF: Can you tell me what date this was?

WS: I, I tell you, I came to Shanghai on July the 15th, and I left Genoa maybe the 23rd or so, I forgot the date.

JF: You left on June 20?

WS: June 23rd.

JF: And this was what year?

WS: Hmm?

JF: This was 19- what?

WS: 1939.

JF: 1939. Mmm hmm. Now tell me about the ship. You said it was one of the experiences of your life.

WS: The ship was excellent. We had nothing against us.

JF: Do you remember the name of the ship?

WS: Yeah. *Gneisenau*.

JF: How do you spell that?

WS: *Gneisenau*.[4] G-M-E-I-S-E-M-A-U. *Gneisenau*. It was a big German general, you know what I mean? These were brand new. The ship was only one year old. We had about 400 passengers, and two, about 250 in the second class and we didn't have third class, and 150 in the first class. The only thing what they did, this was as it was on all German ships at that time, they had an officer of the Nazi Party on there. He was some steward. He was the head of the Party, head of the Party, from, Ship "*Gneisenau*" was his title. And he, the only thing what he made, the first officer told me that, he, in the swimming pool were different times for the Jews, different times.

JF: This was because of this Nazi officer? He...

WS: This Nazi guy. And he wanted many other things and the captain had told him when he doesn't keep shut his mouth, he will bring him for a trial, because he is the commander of the ship, and he has not to take orders from an underling. The first officer told me.

JF: So the only thing that was accomplished were the different swimming times.

WS: Yeah because there were just 50-50. Fifty percent were Jews, fifty. So we had some people. We had the admiral on the ship, was a German admiral from the German Navy. He was a rear admiral or something. And he mingled always with the Jews. And that guy came always, to shout his disgust, to swim with the Jews.

JF: The German admiral.

WS: Yeah. He always came exactly at that time, and the Jews, and the man who was in charge of the swimming pool, he was a Communist. He told me. And he told me, this was so. The Jews had the first time, and then came the Aryani. And he told me, "You think I let out the water after the Jews; I can't bathe in that water!" [laughs] But we didn't have anything. There was only one guy under the passengers, but he didn't mingle with anybody. This was a Nazi taking orders. He was from Sudetendeutschland. And he won this trip from Hitler. He was a big member, and you know the Sudetendeutschland what it is, what it means, Sudetan Deutschland, in Czechoslovakia. He was a kind of a leader and he won this. He was a very low class guy. This was the only one. Nobody cared about him. He didn't even sit on the captain's table. Some people told me he was very angry about it that they didn't put him on the table. And the only thing what I regretted on that ship was that it made it so fast. This was the fastest ship at that time. We made it in 23 days. We had very few stops. We stopped only in, the first stop was in, now what, eh, Port Said, and we were only the night. We didn't go down. This was a...

[4]Gneisenau, August, (1760-1831, Prussian General). This is how WS spells it, but he pronounces the name correctly as *Gneisenau*.

Tape two, side two:

JF: You were telling me where the ship stopped.

WS: Yeah. After Port Said we sailed to non-stop to Ceylon.

JF: So...

WS: No, we didn't even stop in India. After Ceylon, then we stopped, Singapore...

JF: You went...

WS: No, first we stopped in, yeah, Singapore, and then in Manila and Hong Kong. And the only thing what happened on the way was we could always go from the ship. But when we came to Hong Kong, they didn't let us go, and I heard this already, overheard it in the night; it was so hot. And we came in the night, in the middle of the night we came to Hong Kong, by the way, one of the most beautiful places in the world. And I was going on, I was the only one, I went up on the deck and was sleeping there, on a deck chair, and I saw the sunrise. It was out of the world. When you haven't seen it, you haven't seen nothing, and that's where, the sun comes out over Hong Kong.

JF: Why didn't they let you get off in Hong Kong?

WS: Yeah, and then when the sun was out, I heard when the British came and brought the British commission, and they were talking to the first officer. I stood up on the deck, and they were talking down. And I heard something, which I knew already, and he told them the story, and that a family had left the ship illegally in Manila. And he told him that.

JF: Ano-, from another ship?

WS: From mine.

JF: Oh, from your ship.

WS: From our ship. I knew the people. And when we sailed off Manila they were missing. These were four people. Two couples of a, they were related. One was the brother from the other lady or so some. And they had their nephew there. And he said he can stay here with me. And they stayed, but they found out, and they were illegal. And they came one day after we came, they were already back in Shanghai. But the company has to pay for that. It's the rule. That's the rule of the sea. When people like that skip the ship, the company has to pay for their transportation because they are responsible. So when they *Norddeutsche Lloyd* had to pay their transportation.

JF: So that's why the company wouldn't let you disembark in Hong Kong.

WS: Yeah. So they told the British officer what happened. So they decided that everybody with a "J", you know we had the "J" in the passport, cannot leave the ship. So, but we didn't stay so long and this wouldn't be worthwhile to leave the ship because we were in a rush. You see, we sailed during monsoon time. You know monsoon time? There is a straight wind that comes from Africa across the Pacific, and that makes the ships going about two days quicker than normal. And they had to keep up their schedule. We were

only, na, ja, also, we came in the night. We came about twelve hours. We were twelve hours there, but during the day we wouldn't really have much time to go out from the ship. So they didn't let us go. This was the only thing what happened. But when we then came to Shanghai, you see, I'm, maybe I am exceptional, I don't know. And most people was already on the ship moaning, "Ohhh, it was terrible, now it's over and we come to Shanghai." And I say, "The, what, what what is it? What can happen? Let's see." And the change from the looks of the liner to Shanghai, that is an experience, no?

JF: Tell me about it.

WS: Yeah. I will. It was very difficult to explain this to somebody who didn't see. You see, I came from the ship. I had already a cousin there. That was, by the way, one of the reasons why I went. He went about six weeks before me, and he wrote back and said, "It is not so bad, and people say come here." So I went. And he, he came with all his family to the ship to greet me. And we went down. And you see as it is when you're three weeks on a ship, we were three weeks on a ship, I, I like it. I would like three months on a ship. But you will go a little bit, hmm? You will exercise your legs. So we went. And as always, in all cities of the world, wherever it is, the part, the district on the harbor is always a dirty district. You know that. So it was very dirty there, and the people were begging. But after about five or ten minutes, I stumbled about something. This was wrapped in straw. And my cousin said, "Eh, don't look at that." I, I knew already what it was. It was a dead body.

JF: Wrapped in straw?

WS: Mmm. Was a dead body. I, but I didn't get afraid because I, I was awaiting something like that. You, but after all I had read about Shanghai and the Far East. So, I would say I came in the home, huh? In a refugee camp. First we, all, everybody came there, so I said, "Form a school." And now you have also to keep in mind that that was [phone rings], you have to keep in mind, that that was just two years, or not quite two years after the Japanese invasion. You remember that after the incident on the Marco Polo Bridge and everything? And they had occupied Hong Kew [also spelled Hong Kyu or Hung-K'ou], this part of Shanghai. And there was much, much destroyed. I would say one third of all the houses were burned down. This was a terrible situation when you're coming right from the first class of this luxury liner. And on the way from the ship, this was maybe to walk twenty, twenty-five minutes, I stumbled at least over five, six, kind of bodies. And the, the Chinese are so, they are real poor, the Chinese. They cannot bury their dead.

JF: So they wrap...

WS: So they wrap them up and put them on the street. They wrap...

JF: They are wrapped in straw.

WS: Yeah.

JF: And they just lie on the street.

WS: Street. And they pick them up, like, they have special cars for that, a special department, sanitary, where they come and pick them up. And as far as I know, they also make for every, mostly they put also name on when they know who it is, from the family,

they put on a label with a name. But everybody they find will be a, will have an autopsy. They make out of the cannot be a crime, hmm? So they make that. So we were walking. And my cousin was so afraid. He was always looking at me. I say, "You can't look at me like that. I am not afraid. I will tell you something. I'm convinced that half of them died already of cholera." It was the worst months in Shanghai, July. This was the worst month with cholera. There were about...

JF: Cholera.

WS: Yeah. There were about, in that month were about, Shanghai alone, two to three thousand cases of cholera. When you imagine that here in America somebody says, "There is in San Francisco a case of cholera," everybody would tremble here, hmm? And there, I got used to that in five minutes. And there were people who never, never, never who could overcome this, never. I, I knew a lot of people, I would say maybe five percent of the immigrants, who never left their district. The nearest [unclear] they never left. They were so afraid in all the years.

JF: The cholera was in this, primarily in Hong Kew, in this section?

WS: Yeah. These kind of things happened mostly in the poorer regions of the city, but on the other hand, they had very, very fine districts there. Shanghai you have, when you read that book, you will mostly I think I can always. I give you that book. You can have it, hmm? You can have it as long as you want. Here you find about these things, the most important things.

JF: You're referring to the book by David Kranzler on *Japanese, Nazis and Jews*. [Yeshiva Univ. Press, 1976]

WS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. There are many things not quite so as they were. Misleading, and something is wrong, I would say. He writes for instance about my father, that he was fighting against the Zionists. This is not right. My father was not a Zionist, but he was not fighting against them. And also my father was not Reform. The only thing what he did, was, what he connected him with the Reform was that the rabbi in Berlin from the Reform synagogue was a friend of his, from his studying years. And he invited him once to speak in the synagogue, on a Sunday. So he says my father want change the *Shabbos* on the Sunday. So far as my father not didn't go so far in his reform or liberal opinions. He cites my name I think also sometimes as a reference. But then, of course I had to start a new life.

JF: You were living in this refugee, uh, building that was a school?

WS: Oh, I lived there about three weeks.

JF: What was it like there?

WS: It was like a barracks in the military or so. It was a school, a former school, which was a, a, you see a lot of people left Shanghai, Chinese people, when the Japanese came in, and so it was empty. So the city of Shanghai gave it to the Jewish refugees. I don't know if they paid for or not. You see the American Joint gave a lot of money at that time, the Shanghai Jews, every organization, *B'nai B'rith*, and from all this was this renting.

JF: Who was in charge of organizing this kind of refugee [unclear]?

WS: The most important figure it was Sir Sassoon, Sir Victor Sassoon.

JF: Victor Sassoon.

WS: You heard his name? He was a Sir, and he was at least, if he was the richest, or at least one of the richest men in Shanghai. You heard about him?

JF: Was he there before this all started or he...

WS: Oh you know this is a old, old, this is Arabic Jews. They came from where the name says.[5] And the other one was Sir Kadoori. I forgot his name. His son, who is also already over 70, was who came to that meeting. And...

JF: That name, could you re-...

WS: Kadoo-, em, na, I say it is, no, I forget it. [unclear]. [Tape goes off then on] I don't know if a K or a C. I think it's a K. K-A-D-O-O-R-I or so. Kad-, you never heard the name?

JF: Kadoorie.

WS: Kadoorie.

JF: And these were early settlers, Sephardic.

WS: Oh, I would say two, three generations already or maybe longer. Sassoon, people say one-third or one-quarter of India belonged to him. And Kadoorie had his most also possessions in Hong Kong. The whole harbor on these ships and everything, the cotton and, everything was on that, his possessions.

JF: So they organized the Jewish refugees...

WS: Yeah, organized. They gave a lot of money.

JF: Buildings? They gave money.

WS: Yeah.

JF: And organized.

WS: But then of course the Jewish people alone had the organization or administration, huh. This was mostly German, Austrian, Czechoslovakian people.

JF: You're talking about the refugees themselves organized the caretaking.

WS: Yeah.

JF: Was there much contact with the Jewish community that had lived there before the refugees came?

WS: There was, and there was not. There was, I would say, only in the religious way, because they had a chief rabbi there, and he was extreme Orthodox, and he was, eh, Ashkenazi[6] was his name. And he was very, very afraid that the Jews from Europe, from Middle Europe, would bring in like a liberal, uh...

JF: Ideas?

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[5]Originally emigrated to India from Iraq and later on spread out in the Far East.

[6]According to David Kranzler, Rabbi Meier Ashkenazi, appointed by Russian-Jewish community in Shanghai in 1920's, had previously served eight years in Vladivostok, recognized as a spiritual leader by Orthodox among Sephardim and Polish refugees, a scholar, member of Lubavitch Hassidic group, was in forefront of humanitarian communal activities in Shanghai.

WS: Ideas, and they had a big, big lot of trouble with him. I knew that from my father. I went many times to his synagogue, all the rabbis there, they interpreted to him. And they had to make a concessions, especially for divorces. He would always have the last word in a divorce.

JF: And he was the chief rabbi of the whole town.

WS: Yeah, but he was not a rabbi in our sense. He was in a, he had a real big knowledge of Jewish things of course, was a Talmudist all right, but he was not by profession originally a rabbi. He was a trader in Manchuria. And the Jews from the Far East they didn't have somebody else. They made him the chief rabbi.

JF: So he never went through the usual training for a European rabbi.

WS: No, he went, no, no, not European. He went maybe in some yeshivas. There he was. He was a Russian originally. And then, of course, was the English rabbi. His name was Brown. He was a, and he was officially also Orthodox, but he wasn't that Orthodox. He was more what we call Conservative. He was for the English, they had, let me think, they had about four big synagogues.

JF: For English Jews?

WS: For the inborn. For the old [unclear].

JF: For the natives.

WS: Yeah. These were there Ashkenazi, and their Brown, and the other ones I cannot remember them all. There was one synagogue in Hong Kew. This was a exclusively Jewish, em, Russian, with all the old Russian rites and so. This was more or less Hassidic– but the connection was, of course, mostly in religious ways. First of all in the cemeteries. The immigrants had to use the cemeteries. And just in the beginning there were many, many dead. I would say every day on average four to five people died.

JF: From what causes?

WS: Yeah, mostly because they couldn't stand the climate.

JF: The climate.

WS: Here is, for instance, a boy, I say boy, he is 52 years old already. But at that time when he came to Shanghai, he was about 10, 11 years old. And he is of my home province. And my father knew his family very well. He is professor in Montreal. I saw him last year again in Washington. We met here, too. And I remember when this was a, at that time I was already one year in Shanghai. And I was waiting every day for my parents. But this was also in the summer, so it was very hot. And he came with his parents, and he was about ten years and his younger brother was eight years, and the mother was maybe 32, very young, beautiful woman. And she died in the first week.

JF: Mmm.

WS: She got some kind of a typhus and they couldn't...

JF: A typhus?

WS: Yeah. Had some kind of typhus. It was so strong she couldn't make it. She was dead in one week and the father was there with these two boys.

JF: How did the resident community of Jews look upon the refugees? How did they see...

WS: Oh they were very nice. You mean the Chinese?

JF: Yes.

WS: Oh yeah.

JF: But, no, the natives, the Jews who had been there for some time.

WS: Oh the Jews?

JF: Yes.

WS: This was very different. You see, in a way he, he isn't bringing well out here in that book really as it was.

JF: Kranzler doesn't mention this.

WS: He is maybe afraid to say it. There were, first they were neutral. But then, when they found out that a whole lot of Jews made business there, they were afraid of the competition. And that is what brought up that they closed official the harbor. They went behind the whole thing. It is a shame but I have to tell you that. The Jews were that. The native Jews.

JF: What did they do?

WS: They went to the Japanese. The Japanese were in power at that time, in the city of Shanghai. And they said, "What should happen when there are more and more and more Jews come in? And there were already over 20,000." You see, there were Jews from Germany and Austria and there we were. They opened pharmacies. And there were a lot of Jewish pharmacies, so they were afraid. And then they, the complete domineer–do-, I would say as a important was the fur, fur, in the city furriers, the Russian furriers, who made the pelts, furriers, furs, furs.

JF: Fur, oh, furs.

WS: Yes.

JF: Yes. Furs.

WS: And there were a lot of Jews in the, in the same thing. And they were afraid, and then they some jewelers, and so, in every kind of business, that they were afraid. They were not afraid for their own, for the poor people...

JF: They were afraid of the wealthy Jews and the professional Jews.

WS: Professional Jews, and the doctors, and so on.

JF: Mmm hmm. The big competition.

WS: They went to the heads of the, you know there were four, Shanghai had four parts. That's why we came in. Shanghai was the settlement, the international settlement. This was made up from English, American, Scandinavian, and German. Germany was also in. And the Japanese. They were the ruling people from the settlement. Then all the French settlement. This was ruled by the French and Italians. But completely different. And then was the real Chinese thing. The real Chinese, which belonged to Shan-, to the Chinese land, to the Chinese country itself, to the China...

JF: That was not under the Japanese control.

WS: No, no, this was comple-, to that I come. And this part of the city was separated. You heard about the Berlin wall? But this is not the first time that happened. Shanghai was divided...

JF: Was also divided.

WS: Not the wall, it was a gate.

JF: The-, all of these sections were divided by a gate?

WS: No, no, only the Chinese.

JF: The Chinese section was divided.

WS: The real old Chinese city was th-, you couldn't go in. And nobody could go out.

JF: Were there also Chinese in the other sections? Or just in...

WS: Ya, ya. Between most of them. They were all Chinese. Shanghai was, I think, Shanghai had at that time eight million people.

JF: But from the old Chinese section, no refugees...

WS: No, no, Chi-...

JF: Or Europeans.

WS: Chinese also couldn't go.

JF: Why was that section kept separate?

WS: This was separate. This was all these in the run of the wars they had, the fightings and the revolutions there. This was close, by the way, I have seen it. The gate you could look through, but I never, never, never, was behind that.

JF: But that remained under Chinese control, the Chinese section?

WS: No. When, you mean, then we come to the end of the Second World War, then there, they changed this. Then, of course, they changed this. But not during the war.

JF: During the war it was under whose control?

WS: No, this was before already, I don't know how long. So, in the first part, this was the inofficial part. And this was the Japanese occupied, Japanese occupied, part of the settlement. This was only one or two years before I came after this, after the Japanese invaded Shanghai.

JF: This was Hong Kew?

WS: This was Hong Kew.

JF: Yes.

WS: I don't, yeah, little more than Hong Kew. And this was divided from the other cities through their so-called Soochow Creek. [also Su Chou] And there was the big, big bridge over, the so-called Garden Bridge. And we could go. Everybody could go except the Chinese. The Chinese had to have a passport.

JF: But, let me just clarify one thing. The Chinese, the old Chinese section of the town that was separated from the rest, this was still during the years that you were there, this was under Chinese control?

WS: Yeah. At that time it was, of course, how should I explain that, it's very difficult to explain. This was under the Chinese government, but the Chinese government was in the control of Japanese, of the Japanese government. You know? The, *de nomine*, I would say, in the name of the law, they were Chinese.

JF: O.K.

WS: But they had nothing to say.

JF: I understand.

WS: It was really, this was the same thing the Japanese didn't tell you, hmm?

JF: If they were...

WS: Yes, at that time, you remember, there were two Chinas, North China and South China. North China was under Wang Ching-Wai [Japanese "puppet" in Nanking]. And South China was under I forgot the name.

JF: O.K.

WS: [unclear].

JF: Were most of the refugees who came at this time in Hong Kew?

WS: They came all through Hong Kew.

JF: All through Hong Kew.

WS: Yeah. There was the harbor. The harbor from the whole place was Hong Kew.

JF: But did they also settle in the other sections?

WS: Yeah. And that what I did also. There were who, any, in any way could manage that went out from Hong Kew.

JF: Hong Kew was the poorest.

WS: The poorest, and the sanitary conditions were so...

JF: And this is where the diseases were.

WS: Yeah. The diseases were other where too, but the danger was here ten times worse.

JF: I see.

WS: So as soon as I got my money from that friend back from Paris, it was about three weeks, I went over, and also was awaiting a friend I would make up some business with him, and he should come later, but this is a story in itself. I went in the French sector and that, a woman in the boarding house. And I stayed there as long as my money was holding out, [laughs] say six, seven months and then I had to quit there, and to go back to...

JF: Hong Kew.

WS: Hong Kew. And that was the way, I would say, eighty percent of all the immigrants did. There came for everybody a time when they ran out of money, with some exceptions. People who came really with money to Shanghai, I mean real money, and I don't mean as riches, but, say, some thousand dollars. Two thousand American dollars was a fortune in Shanghai. And who had ability, and the fortune, to make some good business.

JF: Could you, did you try to start a business while you were living in the French sector?

WS: I started, yeah. There were, I cannot tell you that, because that has not really to do with that. He had some, he worked with the Finnish company in Berlin, and they gave him his representation, for then it came to war, so he couldn't take it. He started working and the war came.

JF: Mmm.

WS: So he ended very poor later. I lost his tracks. I think he went later to Israel. Yeah, and then I always had in mind, of course, to go from Shanghai to America.

JF: Now you were living for what period of time in the French quarter? The French section?

WS: The French section, eh, six, seven months.

JF: And you then moved back to Hong Kew.

WS: Yeah.

JF: Again to these barracks that you had described? Or what kind of living situation?

WS: No, no, I had also a room...

JF: A room.

WS: In a, with a Jewish family. They rented out, you know. They, I told you, when we came in, there were all the ruins from the destroyed houses burnt up. They fixed this. They got some money or they had some–very cheap, say for $100, you could build out this house and you had it for nothing, because there were nobody that said you can't take it. So maybe they paid a little tax in a year, that was all. And they built up the houses, the family. And they had five, six rooms, and the rest they rented.

JF: Was there any kind of community life that you can describe to me?

WS: Yeah.

JF: Cultural life among the Jews?

WS: It was beautiful. I say sometimes I miss it.

JF: Can you describe it?

WS: I really miss it. No, I cannot describe it in this way because, you know, that was like we had it in Germany or in Austria. You had your coffee houses, huh?

JF: This was there.

WS: Yeah.

JF: In Hong Kew?

WS: Yeah.

JF: And all over.

WS: This was all over.

JF: All over.

WS: They made it, but especially, of course, later in Hong Kew because most of them lived there. Or they came exactly from the French over to meet friends and sit in the coffee house, play cards, and so. And we had theaters and cabarets...

JF: You had theater.

WS: Yeah.

JF: What kind of theater?

WS: Hmm?

JF: What kind of theater?

Tape three, side one

JF: The plays that you saw, what language were they given in?

WS: Mostly German.

JF: German?

WS: Mmm.

JF: And the actors were people who...

WS: No, they did have professional actors there. They had also the emigrés.

JF: People who had emigrated, who formed the company.

WS: Yeah. Yeah.

JF: And what kinds of plays? Were these classical plays, or were they plays with Jewish content?

WS: Mmm, any kind of play. Mostly it was on the lighter side, I would say. Plays, cabarets, and music. They had an orchestra. Was not really an orchestra, but they played together in orchestras. And the musicians also had a good time. Musicians were the most, most asked profession. You see, in every harbors place, with the sailors coming in, with the bars, in Hong Kew every third shop was a bar. And they want music. And music and musicians were in the very, very great...

JF: Demand?

WS: Demand. And they made always a good living, but it was very dangerous living.

JF: Dangerous?

WS: Yes.

JF: Because of the area that they were living in?

WS: No. To work in that place. You see, at that time in Hong Kew one-third of the bars was catering to the Japanese. To the big Japanese. You must know the Japanese, at least at that time when they were the victors. And they cannot stand alcohol when they sniff it.

JF: They can't stand...

WS: Alcohol.

JF: Alcohol. Uh huh.

WS: When they sniff it.

JF: They don't know how to handle their alcohol.

WS: No, they cannot sniff it. When they sniff it, they are already drunk.

JF: Mmm hmm.

WS: And they drank, and they drank, you know every Japanese officer goes with a Samurai *Schwert* [sword], no?

JF: The Samurai sword.

WS: Ya. And I know. We lived with lot of musicians. I think there's only one left in the moment. They told me all the stories about that. When they get drunk they always, always *shver* so, ahh ehn hnn ehn [phonetic, possibly Japanese curse words]!

JF: They would threaten them with their sword.

WS: Yeah. And many things happened then. They are past. A lot of people made their money with, but this is a very weak spot in the book. He only stress it with three lines in the book.

JF: What was a big spot?

WS: The prostitution.

JF: The prostitution? Can you tell me about it?

WS: I hate to do it, because this is a very black spot on this China immigration. I told you, I spent the best years of my life there. And was no possibility to find a girl for marriage. First of all, as in all colonization countries, there are always more males than females. So the females are in very big demand. And, of course, because of the urgent need for money, they went into the bars. They made a lot of money there. And that was a very weak point. I have seen girls I knew from Berlin, really good families, how they came down in that bar.

JF: Were these women there alone without their families? Or had they, were the families...

WS: I would say very few, in the moment I would, and then of course...

JF: Wait. Very few were with their families?

WS: Very few were alone.

JF: Very few were alone.

WS: Very few. I, I would say in a moment I didn't know any.

JF: They all had their families there with them.

WS: Yeah. And the divorce rate...

JF: And what, how did the families handle this?

WS: Hmm?

JF: How did the families handle this? It must have been very difficult for them.

WS: You mean with the daughters? The women, the, the, men let go a spouse to...

JF: The men would let their spouses, if they were hungry enough and poor enough.

WS: I tell you, I wouldn't, I only will stress it. He stresses only with, he stress it only in the way that he talks about the girls who went with this walking the streets. He gives a figure on that. I don't know if the figure is right or not. This was a special kind of people, but I knew a lot of people where this really was a tragedy. Because I have known that there was a young man. He lived with me in that apartment, eh, apartment house. I say in the body. Now, and he, a very nice man from Berlin. I had some

connection with him. We were talking, and he said it was so. He was there before, and his wife, with a child, a very little child, maybe two years old, the boy, and she was a beautiful woman. They were married about two or three years. She came later. And she got wild. She got real wild and went in a bar, and one day he came home. He told me this it was still. He came home, and I mean this room, you must think it was all very, very primitive as we lived there. I would say 80% of the houses you didn't even have a WC [water closet, bathroom], mmm?

JF: Mmm hmm.

WS: There were no canalization.

JF: There was no indoor plumbing.

WS: No baths. Well he came home, and there's someone; he finds his wife with a sailor there, with a Swedish sailor. Not only that, the Swedish sailor beat him up! So what he could do. He knew already what the *Frau*, his wife, was doing, so he threw her out. And then she came down, down, down. And he, he resorted only to suicide.

JF: He resorted to suicide.

WS: It was terrible. And that kind of cases were so [unclear]. Na, I will forget, but you cannot forget it. Because when you have seen it, and the divorce rate was so high.

JF: The divorce rate among the Jewish people was high?

WS: Yeah. I know that from my father. My father had at least every week one.

JF: This is after your parents came. Now, at what point did your parents arrive? What year was it that your parents...

WS: In 1940.

JF: They came in 1940. So that when, by the time you moved back to Hong Kew they came?

WS: They came later, yeah. I was already in Hong Kew.

JF: And your father was functioning as a rabbi?

WS: Yeah, he was a [unclear]. He was in the middle of his seventies when he came, but he was working as a rabbi, I would say, nearly up to his death. His pay was very, very little, of course. I am [unclear] the worst thing was we had inflation. I mean real inflation. You don't know what this is, not inflation.

JF: Now was he working for one of the synagogues?

WS: Yeah.

JF: Or was this...

WS: Later they were all together in the so-called Jewish community.

JF: So...

WS: Then you had four rabbis.

JF: And they were all under the auspices of the Jewish community council? The rab-, the synagogues? You said they all came together.

WS: Yeah. The immigrant synagogues. Not with the other communities. All, only the immigrant synagogues.

JF: Oh, the synagogues of the immigrants...

WS: Yeah.

JF: Came under the...

WS: And it was so, they had really only one synagogue. This was in the Kadoorie *Shul*, school. The Kadoories, they built a school, a beautiful school, and there was a kind of an auditorium, a meeting place for the synagogue. That was used every *Shabbos* always as a synagogue.

JF: This was only for the immigrants?

WS: Only for the immigrants. The whole school was for the immigrants.

JF: So the Jewish immigrants during this time separated socially and then religiously from the rest of the community?

WS: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. They had to.

JF: They were no longer part of the religious community after a period?

WS: No, they never were, they never were.

JF: I thought you had said in the beginning that there was...

WS: The, only, only in some cases.

JF: Oh, I see. Oh, I see.

WS: He was dominant about the functioning of divorce and marriage, and so he was controlling that. That was the only thing.

JF: I see.

WS: There were only a few, there were some, but I would say not more than twenty Jews who belonged to any of the other synagogues.

JF: O.K.

WS: The other belonged, and this was the most important synagogue, I would say, the only one. The other synagogues were in the so-called "*Heims*" [homes] where the camps -- There were, oh let me think. I forgot, I think seven camps.

JF: So there was one large synagogue in Hong Kew.

WS: Yeah.

JF: For the refugee population.

WS: Yeah. And...

JF: And then there were individual synagogues in the camps.

WS: Yeah, but they belonged all together.

JF: But they were all under the, uh...

WS: Jewish community.

JF: The Jewish...

WS: And this was the...

JF: The refugee Jewish community.

WS: Refugees. Yeah.

JF: So there was a t-, it sounds like there was a real separation then between the refugee community...

WS: Yeah yeah.

JF: And the native...

WS: I will mean, I mean in that way with service and synagogues?

JF: Uh huh.

WS: Right. But not in their ritual supervising I would say.

JF: The, the, uh...

WS: For instance, he...

JF: Total supervisory responsibility.

WS: What was kosher and not kosher the Rabbi Ashkenazi took care about this.

JF: I see. I see.

WS: The people could go by that or not go. That was not his business.

JF: And your father worked for the synagogue, the large synagogue in the Hong Kew area?

WS: Yeah. There were a force of four. Four rabbis.

JF: Now, I'm, we were talking before, before we got into this area, about your father's reporting to you that there were many divorces during this time, that there were, he got several a week?

WS: At least, I would say, an average one a week.

JF: One a week. And what do you think this was due to?

WS: Hmm?

JF: Why do you think there were this many divorces? Do you have any idea?

WS: This is also difficult to say. People and marriages went up already on the ship. [laughs]

JF: The marriages on the ship started to break up?

WS: Because, you see when, that need is part of the ma-, human nature. People who were living all their lives in a quiet and comfortable environment, and all of a sudden they're out; they lose everything. They lose all their senses. I have seen it on my ship, on my own ship.

JF: You mean their sense of morality?

WS: Yeah, yeah. They said, "Now we are free!"

JF: I see.

WS: They are free. No more social behavior, no nothing, huh? And then they get wild and on and on. And there is one thing I have to say. I'm also afraid to say, but this is a fact, that none of the marriages with Christian partners went broke. I don't know one case.

JF: Were these marriages where someone had converted?

WS: Yeah. Converted or not converted.

JF: Mmm hmm. But the intermarriages stayed together.

WS: They came after their husbands. Their husband had to leave from the concentration camp. There was a woman on my ship, who came with her son, a little boy at that time, on my ship. And she told me her husband is from there, and this was one the best marriages. And all these people didn't go in the bar.

JF: These were women, Christian women...

WS: Christian women.

JF: Who had followed their husbands...

WS: Mmm hmm.

JF: To Shanghai.

WS: And I can tell you I knew at least two or three dozen, and I don't know any marriage from that kind that broke and they were sometimes, the husband didn't have anything. They were hungry. They didn't go somewhere.

JF: Are you saying...

WS: Of course, I must tell you that some of that women got separate help from the Christian organizations.

JF: In order to...

WS: Yeah.

JF: Live in Shanghai during that time?

WS: That went, but it wasn't much, of course. But it was a little help. But I knew a lot of them, and in some broke up on the ship. A young, I remember there was a couple, and my father, this one of his last marriages in Germany. He had married that couple. It was a young girl. And she wasn't on my ship, but I heard that. On the ship she went through with all the officers. The first step her husband did was to go to a lawyer and get a divorce.

JF: Were there marriages as well? Were there many marriages?

WS: Yeah.

JF: There was still a population of young people or, that were interested in marrying?

WS: There were children born also.

JF: The young children who were born and growing up in that atmosphere who were interested in getting married...

WS: No, where there were born they left Shanghai when they were eight, nine years old. But of course, this was not all but generally, but also families with children broke up. I don't know if they'd have broken up before under regular circumstances, but under that circumstances, I think, they just on that account.

JF: Now you mentioned a school that was established. This was at the behest of Kadoorie that you mentioned before. This was an academic school for the children.

WS: Yeah. It was a regular school. They learned there Chinese, English, German, and everything.

JF: Were you aware of the yeshiva that was established there?

WS: The yeshivas were not established. They also moved to Shanghai. I think there were two. Two or three I don't know. Two at least. They were in Japan. In Japan.

JF: The yeshivas were in Japan?

WS: Yeah.

JF: Not in Shanghai.

WS: And they had to leave, because Hitler, you know Hitler was demanding some things from the Japanese during the war. So they had to leave.

JF: There had been two or three yeshivas there before.

WS: Yeah. They came from Japan to Shanghai. And they were well-off, because they got a lot of money from the United States.

JF: You mean the yeshivas moved from Japan to Shanghai at that point.

WS: Yeah.

JF: Was there not also a yeshiva from Lithuania that was established?

WS: From where?

JF: From Lithuania, that was established in Shanghai during those years?

WS: During the war?

JF: Mmm hmm.

WS: I really don't know exactly from where they came to Shanghai–to Japan. That I really don't know. But they came from some occupied territories and they had to leave before Hitler and came to Japan. And then they have to come to, they were in Shanghai.[7]

JF: And this helped you because American and other kinds of monies could be funded in through the yeshiva...

WS: Mmm.

JF: To the community.

WS: To the yeshivas especially got a lot of money. Later, during the war, there is a very complicated thing. The Chinese were financing the, the big Chinese rich people...

JF: Were financing the yeshivas?

WS: No, the [unclear], the immigrants.

JF: They were financing the immigrants.

WS: Yeah. You're wondering why.

JF: Yes. Can you tell me?

WS: Well, they made a big business.

JF: It was big business?

[7]The Mir Yeshiva, founded in 1815, was one of the most famous Jewish institutions of higher learning. It was moved from Mir, part of Poland at the time of the outbreak of WWII to Vilna and later all 500 students escaped to Shanghai where they studied in the Beth Aharon Synagogue, provided by the Baghdad Jewish community.

WS: They had the guarantee, the unwritten guarantee, but they trusted them, the Chinese are the best businessmen in the world. That they'll get their money back, capital and interest, from the United States after the war.

JF: For financing the immigrants during the war.

WS: And so they gave a lot of money. Nobody knows how much. And they got it back.

JF: This is when the Americans could no longer get funds into Shanghai?

WS: Right. They could not transfer the money.

JF: Yes. So the Chinese did it for them with the guarantee that they would be able to collect later with interest.

WS: And they were completely sure that the Japanese couldn't win the war.

JF: The Chinese.

WS: There was not one Chinese who was believing that the Japanese could win the war. That's why they gave the money.

JF: What other changes occurred once the war started? In Shanghai?

WS: It started in the night Pearl Harbor was. I was [unclear], and most of the people were feeling that something was in the air because the whole military was gone. You know they had all military gone.

JF: They moved all the Japanese military out of Shanghai?

WS: No, no the Japanese. The other people. Americans, Chinese. The American was the last one who left.

JF: Uh huh.

WS: This was the First Marine. They were the last one that left, and the British had left already before, and the French, the French were staying, but the French at that time were kind of neutral. You know, after, after, eh, what is that general, Pichon, the general who went to Hitler, the French general. So the French were kind of neutral. The Japanese didn't trust them, but they couldn't do anything because the French government went with Hitler. Pétain.

JF: Pétain, mmm hmm.

WS: Pétain, under Pétain. And as a token they left only the American as well as the British one cannon boat, this was it, you know *Kanonen boote*?

JF: A cannon.

WS: A gun boat.

JF: One boat was left.

WS: Each one.

JF: Each...

WS: And then...

JF: Each government only left one boat.

WS: As a token. And on that night when that happened, this was on a Sunday, the Sunday, Sunday to Monday, that night, we awoke from a very big boom. We lived

near the Whangpoo, the river. And I knew exactly what's doing. I sprang out of the bed and threw on my pants and said, "That's the beginning of the war, this." And there were not only two, two, or three shots were fired. And the American have surrendered right away, without a shot. But the British don't do that. The British were going out, tried to go out, and the Japanese were following, so they exchanged some shots. One people was killed, and that was that. And the next day they took over everything. The Japanese took over everything, the whole town. Everything.

JF: What happened? What was it like when the Japanese took over?

WS: Really, politically we didn't feel so much in the beginning. It was only economically. First of all, they took all the buses from the streets.

JF: They removed the buses from the streets?

WS: Yeah, because they were so poor that they started the war with nothing. They took everything over to Japan. They took out the rails from the railways and from the, because they didn't have steel enough. Everything they took. The radiators from the houses they took out.

JF: The what?

WS: The radiators.

JF: The radiators they took out. To get the steel?

WS: Not the steel, the radiators from the heating.

JF: Yes. To get the metal from them?

WS: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. They didn't have anything.

JF: Mmm hmm.

WS: And they always had a big mouth, the Japanese.

JF: What do you mean?

WS: They had a big mouth, but they didn't have anything. And I still don't know why they started the war.

JF: Did it affect the ability to find work also? The war?

WS: Yeah, in a way, of course. They closed down American businesses, American banks, the newspapers, and all these kind of, not only American, English, British, everything they closed down. And people who were working there, well, lost their jobs.

JF: Were you able to find work at all during those years?

WS: It is difficult to say. I have really not worked in that sense. I was, of course, free-lancing. What I could find. Sometimes I worked as interpreter, I gave English lessons, I was a bookkeeper, sometimes I'm a teacher, and I, I was always short-time jobs. You have always to look for something. My longest job this was as a book dealer. And that I started during the war. Just at that time I saw now I couldn't make anything else anymore. So, and a friend of mine was in that business there. I was dealing with, I knew something about books and book dealings, second-hand books. That was a big, big business, when I would filled all the orders I had, I would get rich. But this wasn't

the reason people will asking for, you couldn't get books. From the war, nothing came in. And there were a lot of people, the immigrants, who had brought, some people brought a whole library with them. And they needed the money. Everybody was living from that, what he was selling, huh? By and by, everybody was selling, selling, selling. Some people there had nothing. And so I was selling under so-called foreigners who lived in the town, and they had money, especially the German. The German was untouched by the Japanese because they were their allies, hmm? And the Germans there, there were no Nazis, and I knew already a lot of them. And one recommended me to another. I made a kind of a living, but not much.

JF: Was...

WS: I would say from day to day.

JF: What was the...

WS: You couldn't make it on another basis, because tomorrow the money wasn't worth anything. The inflation was going up, that something you don't know that kind of inflation. I mean that's what I call inflation. But when you got, let's say, twenty dollars at three o'clock and you came at eight o'clock, you could buy only a half of it and the next day it was nothing, so you had to live from day to day.

JF: Was there any antisemitism that you experienced on the part of the Japanese or the Chinese?

WS: Yeah, that's what that book say. Read that book.

JF: Did you experience anything?

WS: No. The Japanese wasn't nice to us, but it was not antisemitic. That was, a, they knew we were not on their side. They knew that. I had known some Japanese, of course, this was very well-educated people. One was the *Kommerzattaché* from the *Botschaft* [Embassy]. Uh, I think he is named in that book. He was a very nice man and I came together with him many times. I am thinking, this also never was clear, the general opinion was that the Japanese killed him because he was on the side of the Jews when the ghetto came. And he had something, they told to use people, which he shouldn't have. The only thing I know, he was in one day after another, he was out of Shanghai, and I knew they ordered him back to Japan, eh, to Tokyo. And then people said the order came to shoot him. [unclear]. You must read this anyway. It isn't quite as it is, but it gives you a picture. You see the Japanese didn't know that I'm a Jew. They'd never seen a Jew, and they couldn't distinguish a Jew from another white man. So for the Japanese, we were white. That is something he doesn't bring out.

JF: So the Jews were just seen as more white people. They were not...

WS: We were white people. The Japanese... [big construction noises in background; tape goes off then on.]

JF: This is the end of the recording on tape three, side one.

Tape four, side one:

JF: This is tape four, side one, of an interview with Mr. Walter Silberstein on November 17, 1981. You were talking about the Trans-Siberian Express.

WS: I will only tell you something what my parents told me. That in Moscow, there were about forty people on that train, forty, forty immigrants. That most of them went to the German embassy in Moscow and got money, got assistance.

JF: From the German embassy?

WS: My father wouldn't go. He said, "No, I never go to them and ask for money." Because they were all short on money, you see. Everybody could leave with ten dollars, ten American, no, ten *Marks*. Ten *Marks*.

JF: How do you explain that?

WS: Huh?

JF: How do you explain that?

WS: What?

JF: That the German embassy would give them money.

WS: Yeah. They gave them. They did it always. They were German citizens, they had the German passport. The rule, the general rule says that the embassy has to give support to German citizens who are in need in a foreign country.

JF: But Hitler had not...

WS: They were not Nazis, by the way.

JF: I see.

WS: They were always not Nazis, all these people were not.

JF: Hitler had not made such an order that this would, this kind of aid would not be given to Jews.

WS: Yeah, that came later.

JF: I see.

WS: Yeah, but that was very easy to do. He took away the citizenship. So then they couldn't get it any more.

JF: But in 1940 they were still able to do this.

WS: They took it away. This was also the same thing with the Japanese. You see, as long as you had the German citizenship, they didn't do anything. Only when Germany took the citizenship away, by one short order, huh? Every immigrant, every Jew who immigrated, wherever he lives, wherever he went, lose the same minute, is losing the same minute the citizenship. So we were free. They could do with us what they wanted.

JF: You had started to say that your parents went for some time by train and then there was a period of time by boat. At what point did they switch to the boat?

WS: *Das war in* Dairen. Eh, I don't know what it's called. They changed the name so many times. I might look it up.

JF: O.K.

WS: You see, in the old times, the so-called Siberian Express went through till Shanghai. And then, what is the name of this harbor?

JF: This had stopped by the time...

WS: Oh, this was long before already.

JF: Mmm hmm.

WS: And because they were always wars and battles go on there, this was stopped, I really don't know when, but years, years before Hitler came to power. This was in Manchuria, huh? So they went through Manchuria to, I forgot what is the name of this harbor. And in that harbor there was the end of the trip, and they had to take a boat. The boat took two hours. This was very primitive at that time. This was not a ship in our sense.

JF: When they arrived in Shanghai, you were living where at that point?

WS: In Hong Kew.

JF: In Hong Kew. And this was in a room in Hong Kew, or...

WS: I lived in a room, and I had rented my parents also a room.

JF: Mmm hmm.

WS: We thought later to settle somewhere better but my parents didn't get their baggage.

JF: Never?

WS: There were a lot of people.

JF: They never got their baggage?

WS: They never got it. Only what was, only the hand baggage they had.

JF: Was your father able to work right away...

WS: Yes.

JF: With the Jewish community?

WS: Yes. Yes. They were in a way waiting for him. And another one came after my parents. This was Dr. Kantofski. [Kranzler: Dr. Georg Kanterowski, p.413] I think you found his name in. He came after my father. And there was another one. They were, altogether were six. There was a doctor I have never seen him. He was before me in Shanghai. He was a young man, Winter, I think, Dr. Winter was his name, and he, he was only a short time in Shanghai. And then he got a visa for America. And there was a Doctor Teisner. [Kranzler: Rabbi Willy Teichner, p.413] He was also a very young man. He was there before my father came. My father knew him, and he died there on. This was a very tragic thing. He died from yellow fever, I think. He was maybe thirty years old when he died. And there were four rabbis. Two were Orthodox, and two were Liberal, or what you say, call here, Conservative. But in the whole, I would say there were not enough rabbis for us. And we were about 23 to 25,000 immigrants. And with all the weddings and divorces and funerals, they had a lot to do.

JF: Can you describe your living quarters to me?

WS: Hmm?

JF: Can you describe your living quarters to me?

WS: Now, they were very, very primitive.

JF: Can you describe them? Was there any...

WS: We didn't have...

JF: Indoor plumbing for instance?

WS: We didn't have a WC [water closet]. We had nothing. We were happy when the water didn't come through the walls. Huh? We had the cooking and everything, cooking, washing, in one room.

JF: Were there stoves available to you?

WS: No, they didn't have stoves. They had these so-called Chinese stoves. It's very difficult to describe them.

JF: These were heated by coal, these stoves?

WS: Yeah, by, and sometimes you have to make the coal ourselves from coal dust. With water, and then...

JF: Squeeze it together?

WS: Together to little eggs, and dry them, hmm? And we were heating by, by mostly wood, wood. And it was very primitive.

JF: Did you live in those conditions throughout the time of the ghetto also?

WS: I would say yeh. I would say yes. Of course there were people who were well-off, but this was from the whole immigration, maybe, not more than five percent, maybe less, who brought money with them, or they got money from relatives, or they had a good job. There were very few. You must understand, we had about 200 doctors there, 200 doctors. And I would say only 20 to 30 percent of that doctors were well-off. The other doctors went begging on the streets, and they went barefoot. I have seen the cases, huh? They couldn't make a living, not at all. There were, I mean, sometimes special reason that they had to do. There was one doctor, was a very young man, and a very bright man, and a very special doctor. He had immigrated to Dutch colonies, what is that, em, Sumatra or Borneo or somewhere. And when the Japanese came, he had a good job there, and he was a specialist for that tropical diseases. But he became accustomed to that, you see, he had dope, huh? But I learned there, everybody told me, people who lived there for a long while cannot live without that. They have to take opium and all this. So he came back, and he couldn't get settled and lose that habit. And this was one of the worst things I have seen.

JF: He was no longer able to get the drug that he was addicted to?

WS: No, he had to buy it, and everything he had, he was selling and selling. And in the end I was so friendly with him, and I tried to save him and it was impossible. He died on the street, and went in the winter barefoot and was begging [unclear].

JF: Why did he come to Shanghai?

WS: Yeah, they threw him out.

JF: Oh, I see.

WS: The Japanese threw him out when the Japanese took over this. Right in the beginning when Japanese went in the war, they threw him out.

JF: The conditions that you're describing now where the doctors are begging on the streets and this...

WS: This begging, this was only a few.

JF: A few.

WS: But the other, in between, they just made very poor living and they had patients and didn't get paid, and all the people also were poor. And...

JF: Are you talking now before the war...

WS: No, this was...

JF: Or after?

WS: This was already before the war, too. This [unclear] this really had not so much to do with the war, but, of course, there were other doctors who were there before, I think I told you that in the beginning. There was a kind of a colony, about ten, twelve doctors, who came right '33. And they were settled there, and they made there good, a good clientele, good patients there. They had the rich Chinese. And all these people, hmm? There were some dentists, and they made it. But, I told you, this were not more than 20, 25 percent. The others, up to some exceptions which I told you, couldn't make it right to keep their nose out of the water, I would say, hmm? They had to struggle.

JF: Can you tell me now about the formation of the ghetto and what happened to you?

WS: It really, it wasn't a ghetto in the way you would tell it a ghetto. It was a part of the city where everybody lived. The Chinese, most of all I would say, at that time the Japanese lived there. And English, Russian, everybody. The not so-well-off class of the people, I would say, of the population lived there.

JF: This is in part of Hong Kew?

WS: In Hong Kew.

JF: In Hong Kew.

WS: Yeah. And there, we were only restricted to this part, but this was such a big part, I would say, you can compare, when you say here West Philadelphia.

JF: Was this the section where you were already living, or did you have to move into it?

WS: No, I think I told you. First I lived in the French sector, and then I went out of money I had to move to Hong Kew because it was cheaper. I lived there already, and, I would say, at that time when the declaration came, the declaration of that ghetto, there lived already eighty percent, eighty percent of the immigrants lived there. And then they had to move in, but also not all. There was also a limit. That same immigrants who kept come in, I forgot the date, they could still live outside. That means the first settler of immigrants could still live on the. But I would say about 97 to 98 percent lived in, in that so-called

ghetto. But you had not the feeling you were in the ghetto. You could move around, free and out.

JF: You mean you were free to move in and out of the ghetto area?

WS: No, no. I come to that. I mean the so-called ghetto was such a big area that you can compare here to West Philadelphia, including Overbrook and Overbrook Park. It was a really, you could go for miles in that ghetto.

JF: I see.

WS: And you have everything. I mean you didn't miss it. The only thing was to get out. In the center city or to other places you had to get a pass.

JF: Was that difficult to come by?

WS: This was difficult. And I was once beaten up by this Japanese guy who was in charge of that.

JF: Which Japanese was that? Which man was that?

WS: Ghoya. He's in the book here.

JF: The "King of the Jews," he's been called.

WS: Yeah, but after the war he was a freed man.

JF: Tell me about your...

WS: And this was told to the Jews, "Don't do him anything." He was a spy. He worked for the American. And to hide that, on the outside, he was so rough. To hide that for the Japanese he was such a rough guy.

JF: It was proven that he was a spy for the Americans?

WS: Oh, he ran around, and he was good for the Americans. I have seen him myself.

JF: Where did you see it?

WS: I saw him running around, and he was shaking hands with Americans.

JF: Did you know anything of his spying activities during the time of the ghetto?

WS: Yeah. You see there was, this is also in history always the same thing. There was the Chief of the Gestapo. I forgot his name. They had the Gestapo there, and he was the Chief of the Gestapo. And he always ran around in S.S. uniform. And the German people, the German population there; they hated him, and they were so afraid of him. His wife, I think, was French. He was with a French girl married. And when the war was over, you wouldn't believe it, in the same minute he was the best friend with the Americans.

JF: This Gestapo officer.

WS: And then it came out; he was a spy. He worked for the Americans.

JF: So this Gestapo officer and Ghoya were both spies?

WS: Yeah. Yeah. This one was, too. I mean, I have seen both of them later together with the Americans. I've seen them.

JF: During the time in the ghetto, you observed Ghoya being friendly with Americans?

WS: During the ghetto?

JF: During the time of the ghetto.

WS: Now, what you mean. I tried to get friendly with him. Everybody was afraid of him. I, I...

JF: You didn't know at that point.

WS: Hmm?

JF: During the time of the ghetto, did you have any knowledge of his involvement with the Americans?

WS: No.

JF: This was later you're talking about.

WS: This was later. It came out after the war.

JF: O.K. Tell me about your encounter with Ghoya when he beat you up.

WS: This was the first time I applied for a visa. I remember exactly it was on *Erev Yom Kippur*. I was called for my, I made application some weeks ago, and it took awhile, and then I was called. And I came in, and all of a sudden I didn't know what he wanted. You see you have to come in. You have nothing to have in your hand. When you have a coat, you have everything to leave out, hmm? The only thing what they don't want from you is to keep off your, take off your shoes. And your other [unclear] you have to take off. And then you have to bow, and to bow, I didn't bow enough. I don't know. The girl who was working with him was a Jewish girl. She was a daughter from a doctor. I asked her later, "What he want? What I did wrong?" And she said, "You, you, [clears his throat] made some noise." And the [unclear] Japanese have a, how you say, complex. *Na, minderwertig*, inferiority complex, in English, em, min, ah...

JF: A mental?

WS: Yeah, a complex, and they feel, ah, I cannot come on the word.

JF: A suspicious?

WS: Hmm?

JF: A suspicious?

WS: No, no. They think you respect, you don't respect them. How you call that? It's a complex.

JF: Oh, inferiority?

WS: Inferiority complex.

JF: Inferiority.

WS: Every Japanese has an inferiority complex. So, [clears his throat] maybe I, maybe I did it, and he thought I was making some fun or what. [makes sounds aping Japanese] Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, out went my paper–and that was that.

JF: He hit you.

WS: Yeah.

JF: He slapped you around.

WS: He threw me out without a pass.

JF: He never gave you the pass.

WS: No. No. No. No. And so then what could I do. About six weeks later I was called to the Jewish, to the Community, and they had a whole list. And they asked me, "What happened to you with Mr. Ghoya?" He didn't give; I told the story. And so they said, "Here is the list. He will revise it. You have to go again. But you have to tell them some, some explanation." So I had applied, I had applied for, for book dealer, hmm? For book dealer, and they gave me now the application. The Japanese, I couldn't read it the translation. They had taken it down as "bookkeeper". So when I came to Ghoya, at that time, he was very nice. You never could know in which mood he was. And he said, "What do you mean? Why [Japanese words]?" I said, "It was a mistake. I applied as a book dealer and not as a bookkeeper." So, and, oh, he was laughing. "Oh, such a mistake! Oh, yeah, yeah. Here is your pass." But I had to go every month, every month, for a new one.

JF: And you were permitted then to be a book dealer with that pass?

WS: Yeah, yeah, no, not a book dealer, to leave the city.

JF: To leave the city. And what did you do when you left the city?

WS: But I must be back in the evening.

JF: What did you do when you were out of the ghetto? Where were you going?

WS: No, I got everywhere where I had to go. I didn't go every day. When I had business, of course.

JF: This was the period of time that you referred to earlier when you were dealing in second hand books?

WS: Yeah, yeah!

JF: Yes.

WS: It started, this was in fall of '42 til the end of the war. And, I would say, I never had after that some quarrel with him, because he knew exact, they had a very good memory. When he saw me, he knew he had once quarreled with me and that was that. But a lot of people had later quarrel with him. Everybody was afraid days before he had to go there, because you never could, he could put you in jail. He could do everything.

JF: What language did you speak with him?

WS: English.

JF: In English. Did you have any other experience with the Japanese authorities in the ghetto?

WS: I was beaten up once again during an air raid. The guy I didn't know. I had air raid patrol to make, and I was smoking. And it was a blackout. And the guy thought when I was smoking, they can see it up in the air, so he was beating me up. That was all. He didn't say anything to me. It was only [unclear].

JF: Can you tell me what you know of the *Gemeinde* that was formed in the ghetto? The Jewish community organization?

WS: Yeah, in which way?

JF: Any experiences that you might have had with them?

WS: Well, my father was a rabbi there. They were mostly sustained by, supported by Jewish organizations from outside the Shanghai, and voluntarily gifts and donations. This was the only way to sustain them.

JF: How were...

WS: Cause his salary, I think, my father got at that time $30.

JF: Thirty dollars?

WS: Thirty dollars the whole month.

JF: Mmm hmm.

WS: I mean compared to American...

JF: Yes.

WS: So it was dollars. In Shanghai dollars this was much less.

JF: How was the money gotten to the *Gemeinde* from outside of Shanghai?

WS: Yeah, till the outbreak of the war, I mean the American-Japanese war, it came regular. And then...

JF: But in the ghetto.

WS: There was a short intermission where it didn't come anything. And of course [unclear] did not come anything, but I think I told you before already. There were some Chinese merchantmen, very, very, rich men, who gave them money. And they were so sure that America would win the war, and they got it back, interest and capital.

JF: So it was through these Chinese merchants...

WS: Yes.

JF: That the other organizations outside of Shanghai were able to get money into the city.

WS: Yeah. They paid it in Shanghai to the Jewish organization and they got receipts for that, and this was going on two, three years, and after the war they were paid off, of course.

JF: When the ghetto was formed, what was the feeling among the Jewish community about the ghetto? Were they frightened that more was going to happen to them?

WS: It was so, I would say, the people who lived that ghetto or in that region already were not so afraid, because it wasn't any change for them. And I think I told you that about when at least one third of the people never went in town.

JF: So for the people who had been in Shanghai before this period of time...

WS: Yeah.

JF: They were not frightened.

WS: In Hong Kew.

JF: In...

WS: In Hong Kew, in that region. In that region, there was no change. They lived there, they had their business there, or no business, and lived in the camps.

JF: And they were not alarmed by the ghetto?

WS: No. Not really. The other people were so far alarmed because they had to give up everything outside what they had there, their shops there.

JF: The people who had to move into the ghetto.

WS: Yeah. And that was very hard, because they lost the little bit what they had already. They lost it. I wouldn't say all of them, but part of them, because they had to sell it. And they had to give up their businesses there.

JF: Was there fear on these people's part that there would be camps, concentration camps, or experiences like in Europe?

WS: At that time there were rumors, but we found out already that these were only rumors, that the Japanese wouldn't do it. In fact, when we moved over in the ghetto, it was clear for everybody that the war for Hitler and the Japanese was lost. And we knew that the Japanese was not so senseless to do things under that aspect. You see, I remember we were still outside the ghetto. We had to go in the ghetto, but we still lived outside when Italy went out of the war. You remember when the capitulation was? It was in September, I think, September '43 I think was it, hmm? No, you didn't live at that time. '43 I think it was. In September, when all of a sudden the capitulation of Italy came, and at that time the Japanese were very, very weak already, because we had a big colony of Italian people there and soldiers. They were, of course, they put them all right away in camps. They are all of a sudden, overnight, they were enemies. Before they were friends.

JF: What kind of camps?

WS: This was as a prisoner-of-war.

JF: I see.

WS: ‘Cause these were soldiers, as far as they were soldiers. There were maybe a thousand, two thousand. They were soldiers, they were friends, and all of a sudden, overnight, they put them in prisoners camps.

JF: Where were these prisoner-of-war camps located?

WS: Outside.

JF: Outside the city.

WS: I've never seen one. Some miles, ten, twenty miles, thirty miles outside. I remember we had a ship in the harbor. This was stranded. It couldn't go out. This was the Conte Rosa I think was it, or Conte Verdi then, I don't know the word right, three "Contes"– Conte Rosa, Conte Verdi, and the Conte, em,

JF: This was an Italian ship?

WS: Yeah. Good liners. At that time luxury liners. That last one was stranded when Italy went in the war and the ship just came in. I remember, when it came in, friends

of mine were on that ship and then that ship couldn't leave, and all the time it was anchored on the *Bund* [Shanghai harbor highway].

JF: When you say friends of yours were on that ship, do you mean that refugees were still coming in?

WS: Yeah. I told you, til the time the moment when Italy went in the war; then it was over.

JF: The ship...

WS: The ship came in May or June, I don't know. So around that time '40, '40, 1940. This was the last trip of that ship, when there were all trips over by ship from that...

Tape four, side two:

JF: Tape four, side two, of an interview with Mr. Walter Silberstein on November 17, 1981. So the reason that the ship was kept in the harbor was that it was dangerous for this Italian ship to be sent.

WS: Yeah, it was impossible. It was impossible. They would wait for it. Right on the, as soon as, comes to the open sea, they would, this was impossible. This was the only ship that was caught in the harbor. There was a German ship too that was caught in Japan. That also couldn't leave. It was all during the war in, I think, in Kobe, couldn't go out. So the only time they used that ship was for the exchange of the diplomats. This was about half-a-year later. This ship was sailing under a special flag, and everybody knew that. That ship brought out the British, French, American, and all the diplomats in exchange for the Japanese. They went over to Madagascar, I think, brought them all over with their families, with everything. And there they had concentrated all the Japanese diplomats from Europe, and they brought them back. So on the same day, on the same day, when the capitulation was I, would say in the same minute, they scuttled the ship that the Japanese shouldn't take it. So it sank, but only half, and it was laying there til the end of the war, in the middle of the harbor, the half of the ship.

JF: During this period of time of the ghetto, were you aware of any resistance on the part of the people who were there?

WS: What people? Chinese?

JF: No, no. The Jews.

WS: No. Resistance against whom?

JF: Being in the ghetto.

WS: No.

JF: Was there any kind of fight that they put up?

WS: It was senseless.

JF: It was senseless.

WS: This was senseless.

JF: Was the Jewish *Gemeinde* in charge of the police, or were there Japanese police as well in the ghetto?

WS: No, the Jewish community had nothing to do with the police. The police was completely in Chinese hands.

JF: In Chinese hands?

WS: In, eh, yeah. This was completely in Chinese hands, at least *de nomine*, [official/in name], at least official. Of course, when the Japanese came in, this was under their control.

JF: In the ghetto?

WS: In, all over.

JF: So...

WS: All over. The Japanese had the last command.

JF: Who were...

WS: The Chinese police did the same duties and service as they did before, but all the commanders and everything came from the Japanese.

JF: So the policemen were Chinese in the ghetto?

WS: In the ghetto this was more Japanese. This was, the police was completely mixed. I think I told you in the beginning in the police were Chinese, Indians, Russians, Russians were in there, Jews...

JF: There were s-...

WS: And also Germans.

JF: There were some Jews involved in the police?

WS: Yeah. Not many.

JF: Not many.

WS: Three, four, five, I would say. And the German, every nationality. When the Japanese took over, I think they didn't throw out anybody. The Germans they didn't throw out. The French were not in that. The French were in the French sector, and the French sector official went with Vichy. They declared themselves officially to go with Vichy. You know Vichy? I don't have to explain. And so they didn't do them anything. And in the settlement, there were not much change in the police. The only change was, I think, but I'm not quite sure if that was during the war or after the war. This I cannot remember so exactly. That they took out the Indians, the Sikhs. This was a special tribe. They were famous for their loyalty to England, the Sikhs.

JF: What did they do with these people?

WS: Nothing.

JF: They just kicked them out of the police force.

WS: Yeah. I'm not quite sure, but at least I know that after the war they were gone. After the war. I don't think they shipped them out during the war, because there was no transportation at all. I mean when Japanese took over. I think they still were in duty. They were the best policemen that, that...

JF: The Indians that you're talking about?

WS: Yeah. That was maybe that principal reason that they let them stay. We had only the *Pao Chia*, the *Pao Chia*. I think in the book he writes about the *Pao Chia*.

JF: And who were they? Can you describe them?

WS: No, the *Pao Chia* were everybody. Not only the Jews, the Chinese, too.

JF: These were all of the police?

WS: No, this was not police. What really the reason was for that I don't know. This was a kind of civil organization installed in, the main reason for the outside was against the air raids.

JF: And what was their job?

WS: But they were, in the beginning there were no air raids. Sometimes there came airplane, and nobody didn't know what it's a Japanese or American or what. Sometimes a bomb fell somewhere. So everybody had to do, in the age between, I think, 20 and 40, between 20 and 40, every male person, Chinese and Russian and Jews, everybody had, I don't know, two hours or four hours, that I forgot, in a week. And this was organized. And the organization of that was given to each specific group.

JF: Each specific Jewish group?

WS: Jewish group, Russian group, Chinese group.

JF: I see.

WS: They had to organize it, to call the people, and to make a schedule, and it's your duty.

JF: So everyone was involved in the *Pao Chia*.

WS: Everyone. Everyone. I think the main reason was, is to get the influence and a kind of grip on all the male population.

JF: I see.

WS: You see on that way they had them all registered. They had the lists. And maybe somebody was doing something wrong or he didn't come to the duty. This was very, this was very punishable.

JF: This was under the Japanese control?

WS: This was under the Japanese.

JF: What was your experience with the *Pao Chia*?

WS: Hmm?

JF: What was your experience?

WS: Yeah, I had to go.

JF: What was it like?

WS: I say I cannot remember. Was it two hours or four hours? I think it was four hours. That means two times, two hours a week. And we got the band, here, [he means an armband for identification] and we got the night stick.

JF: And what did you do?

WS: And we had to report, and then we were put on a place. And mostly, I wouldn't say always, mostly I had together a duty with a Chinese. And then there, I don't know if from the beginning on or later, they built small huts, huts.

JF: Huts?

WS: Yeah, where you could sit in when it was raining and so. And you had, there was also something, but I don't think this was the reason. The, most of that posts were on the border, on the border of the district of the ghetto. We had, there is also something I have to tell you. For a Japanese you have never to use the word "ghetto." He could beat you down when you said "ghetto."

JF: Why?

WS: This was, you have to say "district."

JF: Why was that?

WS: Now they wouldn't say they put the Jews in a ghetto.

JF: It was...

WS: It was the district.

JF: Was this bad public relations or something?

WS: They knew that was bad for them that they did it, so they have not to say "ghetto."

JF: Right.

WS: You had to say "district." And then it was mostly on the border. Mostly on the border, but on the border was always, on each street was a, in outside direction, and you had, you had to ask the people for the passports.

JF: Was the border of the ghetto sealed in any way...

WS: No...

JF: Or was it just guarded?

WS: It was not sealed. This was only by signs on, at the end of the district. Signs, I would say that was for the people who was not quite familiar with the [unclear] were not visible, hum? Only you had to show them that. And then we have to ask the people for the passport, but it was also a rule you had not, we, the Jews, had not to ask a Chinese. For that reason was the Chinese.

JF: Wait...

WS: Not to interfere with the Chinese.

JF: Wait, the Jews were not allowed to ask the Chinese for their...

WS: No, they, because for that reason was the Chinese guard there. The Chinese had to ask him.

JF: I see.

WS: And the Chinese also had no right to ask a non-Chinese.

JF: The Chinese were kept to their own.

WS: Yeah. But we made it a [unclear] duty. And we had to, what was more, everybody became a pass in Shanghai. Also the non-Jews.

JF: What do you mean?

WS: Every, all the Chinese, everybody became a passport, or a certificate, something. Hmm? Because, I think, it was always a big pleasure for me. Outside from the district we could not, for a long time we lived there, on, near the border, but the border side which goes out in the country, not in the city. There is a bridge. On that bridge was the border. And I made there, I had a, for months and months I was in the same place for my duty. And outside, far outside was a German factory, a chemical factory, with German engineers and so. And they always came in town, and it was always a pleasure for me to halt them. I knew who they were, hmm. But I had to, was my duty, and they got so excited, and I knew there was one lady, I think she was a Nazi; she said, "I have shown you mine,

my pass by now you have to know me." I said, "It's my duty. I have to ask you. The Japanese want it." When I say "Japanese" she was quiet.

JF: So...

WS: The Germans also were afraid of the Japanese. Everybody.

JF: So this, this, eh...

WS: So then, after two hours they came back.

JF: Mmm hmm.

WS: I wrote them up to show me the passport. I was so strict with their people [laughs].

JF: So this organization, then, provided the actual guarding of the perimeters of the ghetto, as well as the, serving for the air raids?

WS: Yeah, yeah.

JF: To warn people of the air raids.

WS: Yeah.

JF: And was there any supervision over you in your guarding?

WS: Yeh. We had a man, and he was, [laughs] he was one of the few German officers in the former *Reichswehr* [German Army]. I, he was a half-Jew, and he was the commander of that. He was a real, real German officer, a young boy, he was maybe thirty years old. He was a lieutenant in the *Reichswehr*. Up to that time I really did not know that Jewish officers were in the *Reichswehr*, but he was one in the, he was my section commander.

JF: You mean one of his parents was Jewish?

WS: Mmm?

JF: When you say a half-Jew, was one of his parents a Jew?

WS: His father was.

JF: His father was Jewish.

WS: Yeah, he was baptized.

JF: I see.

WS: He was a lawyer. The father was a regular Communist name. They were neighbors from us.

JF: Oh, you knew them at home? This family?

WS: What you mean, from Germany?

JF: Yes.

WS: No, no. I knew them there. They were neighbors in the ghetto.

JF: I see.

WS: They were lived three, four houses away.

JF: His parents lived there?

WS: His parents were there, and the two boys.

JF: But he was in the *Reichswehr*, the son?

WS: I don't know what the other boy.

JF: Now the father had not converted?

WS: I think, yeah, but at least he didn't belong to the...

JF: I see.

WS: He had his sons baptized. They didn't know anything from Jewish.

JF: The parents were not involved? Or the father was not involved in the Jewish community?

WS: No, no.

JF: No.

WS: He didn't care for nothing. If he was really a Jew or not I don't know, but by birth he was Jew.

JF: What was the attitude of the Jewish community towards a family like that?

WS: Didn't care about them. There were a lot of them. You see this Blumenthal, Blumenthal, the Secretary of, didn't you read it? He was in Shanghai, Blumenthal. Wasn't that his name? Blumenthal? [Michael Blumenthal, U.S. Secretary of Treasury '77-79]

JF: The Secretary?

WS: Of Commerce he was.

JF: Yes, he was in Shanghai.

WS: He was in Shanghai. I met him here last year, and he was on that meeting. He gave me his autograph.

JF: Mmm hmm.

WS: He was the same way. Nobody didn't know him.

JF: Mmm hmm.

WS: Of course, he was a young boy. There was, I remember, on television they interviewed at that time. Can you remember? And they take, they brought his picture, his picture from that time, when he was sixteen, seventeen years old. And he said he was delivering bread from the bakery. You remember that? And then he came back, he said, "Oh, yeah." His face I can remember. He came from this bakery that was a Jewish bakery, and he delivered the bread.

JF: Can you describe any changes during the ghetto years as far as how the people lived? What was going on with the community?

WS: No, I would say there was no change at all. The only change was that with the going on of the war, everything got harder because food stuffs became harder to get by, and the inflation, but that had nothing to do with the cattle.

JF: Were there still the schools as before the war?

WS: The school was already in that district.

JF: Mmm hmm.

WS: The Kadoorie *Shul*, and the other school too. It was a *Freysinger* school. There were two schools. They were already in that district.

JF: Were there still able to be productions, plays, and musical productions during the ghetto?

WS: Yeah, yeah. This was all the same.

JF: And your father was involved with the Jewish community?

WS: Yeah, he was the rabbi there, one of the rabbis.

JF: Is there anything more you can tell us about his experience in that role than you've already told us?

WS: You mean in this rabbinical? No, only what I know from him. I mean he had a lot of divorces, and weddings, of course. The only thing I remember was his first wedding. His first wedding [laughs] was with a guy who got married with a Japanese girl. This was his first experience. He was maybe in Shanghai one week, and this girl didn't speak German, and my father had to prepare a speech to her in English. And my father couldn't speak at that time not twenty words English. And I had to make it up in phonetic. And I was so afraid that he was delivering that. It was a terrible thing for me to hear that. But I knew this girl was so thankful to my father. To every holiday she brought him food.

JF: Did this woman convert to Judaism?

WS: Yeah. This was done already before my father came. She was converted.

JF: Were there many marriages like that?

WS: I wouldn't say many, but some.

JF: Primarily Japanese women and Jewish men, or any vice versa?

WS: There was one case, there was an Indian. He was a very rich man. He married a Jewish girl. And this marriage is still going on, I learned last year in San Francisco. I met a cousin of that girl and he told me, yeah, they were still happy. I didn't believe it at that time. There was one case, I remember, where a man *geheirite* [married] married a Chinese girl. And they had to get divorced when we left Shanghai on, this was in Tientsin. Now, you see, I come to the name Tientsin, where we have to leave the train in Tientsin.

JF: This was the town that they left the train in order to get the boat?

WS: Yeah. Yeah. So in Tientsin, it was so, there is a law in China that a woman, regardless how long she is married to her husband, when she leaves the country, her family, you know the family is a very important thing in China, I think still in all the Communist, that their family can prohibit that. The family can say, "My daughter, or our daughter, cannot leave the country." So, in this case, they went to the, yes, [unclear] already was the Communist. They went to the government and said, "My daughter is leaving the country, and stop it." And they came from the government, from Peking, came a wire on the train that she cannot leave. And the police stopped her. And the man, he was an Austrian, I think he was from Vienna. So he could go alone or he had to stay, so he want go, and they were divorced on the platform, on the–I don't know if I told you that before, how they do that in Shanghai, in China. That is a matter of a snap, you get divorced.

JF: Who snaps?

WS: Yeah, they have their old Oriental law, hmm? You know this, in a way, the same as the Jews have, with the *get*, you know a *get*? You can go. The man has only to

say "you can go", then a certain, only four witnesses, and they have, and they have some railway officers who witness that and I saw it. It took two minutes.

JF: And what happened after that to the family?

WS: No, she had to stay...

JF: She stayed.

WS: And he went with us on the, the only thing is they sorted out their luggage, and they left.

JF: Now you were...

WS: I would say there were very, very few cases like that. There were maybe some between Whites, I mean Russians and us, but in a moment I wouldn't know any, remember any. It was very, very few cases like that.

JF: We had talked prior to taping a little bit about the bombing. You said you wanted to describe the experience of the bombing.

WS: The bombings were in the last four weeks before the end of the war. I think the first one was on July the 15th. And this was, this was a very bad experience. This was only small bombers, the 25, and small bombs, but there were about 30, 30 airplanes. The whole thing is, they later, they called it the carpet, you know? In the language, the military language. They rushed over a special strip, and one after another, and let the bombs fall. They call it "they lay a carpet." And you could see it later. This was all covered.

JF: Did this go through Hong Kew?

WS: Yeah. This was through Hong Kew; really through Hong Kew because it was against the Japanese.

JF: This was American?

WS: Hmm?

JF: This was American? These were American planes?

WS: Yeah. And this brings me to another thought. We had discussed that, also, I remember, with a few people in Shanghai. The Japanese used the Jews in the ghetto, or in the district, as a kind of defense. They thought the American, everybody knew they are the immigrants, so they will not bomb us. Because the Japanese, all Japanese installations were there Admiralty, the cadet school for their sea cadets. And everything was there. The big antennas for the sea radio, oversea radio. Everything Japanese was in that, and that was their aim, they aimed on that, and I would say to 60% they hit them. They hit all these installations because what was on the side.

JF: Where were you during that bombing?

WS: I just, I, didn't I tell you that? I went to a friend with books. He would sell me some books, and I had an appointment with him at 1:00 o'clock. It were a very hot day. And I was there about 12, and I thought, "Maybe he is home." But he wasn't home. And then I thought, "What I do now? It is so hot and other business I don't have in a moment. I will go home. Maybe I can tomorrow or another." And just 1:00 on the dot was that bombing, and his house went up. And I went there. I was just, I just came home

and was ready. My mother prepared the lunch, and then I heard this coming. It was so that all the doors and everything was trembling. The whole thing took about five minutes.

JF: Mmm. What about the other bombings that you referred to?

WS: Now the other bombings were in other parts of the town, but, uh, we heard them. We tried to get some shelter what we could. This one, all four, but this was the worst, because, I think, on that day were 15,000 deaths. Alone, there were over 40 of the immigrants, over 40. The president of the Jewish Community was one of them.

JF: Was one of them?

WS: Mmm hmm. He was a lawyer from Vienna, Kardegg–He was one of the victims.

JF: How were the victims and the wounded helped?

WS: Yeah. This is something also I will tell you. That was a very, very good example there how the Japanese recognized the Jewish help. We were all helping. The deads, the wounded, all were in the streets, and all the doctors they came from the other part of the city from all over to help. And the Japanese gave a big, big declaration how helpful the Jews were in cleaning up this whole mess and in helping the wounded. And they brought them all in hospitals and in the Jewish schools and in the synagogues and everywhere. This was a very good example of cooperation. And then when the war was over, there was also something remarkable. This was, I remember, the night. The people were running around there, "Japan surrendered! Japan has surrendered!" And then our [unclear] there was a boy that was a redhead. He was a *brustig* boy. [show-off]. And he ran around and saying, almost was crying, "Back with you on the trees! Back with you on the trees, you apes!" [laughs]

JF: He said this to the Japanese.

WS: Yeah, they, the Japanese didn't understand it really. They didn't speak English. Very, very few spoke English. "Back with you on the trees, you apes," he was telling. And now, we were afraid the Japanese would do something, hmm? Or the Chinese, but this was a condition of the, of this capitulation. They had to keep the order till the last minute. And they did it. Nothing happened. Nothing. We were afraid also the Chinese would do something, because this was on August the 15th, I think. And the American troops came to Shanghai on September the 6th. I remember it was the day before Rosh Hashanah. And there came and, and now when the Americans came in, they didn't take the, the, their weapons from them. They let them do their duty. They made together duty, the Americans and the Japanese, up to the last minute when the last Japanese had left Shanghai.

Tape five, side one:

JF: This is tape five, side one, of an interview with Mr. Walter Silberstein on November 17, 1981. You were talking about the, when the Americans entered Shanghai.

WS: Yeah, this was the end of the whole affair, when we were waiting to get out.

JF: Can you tell me about that?

WS: Yeah. We all knew that this wouldn't be in one year or in two years. You see the war was over '45, and, I would say, the first immigrants really left in '47. I would say before this one maybe a handful, but I wouldn't say anything.

JF: What was the reason for that?

WS: Mmm?

JF: What was the reason for that delay?

WS: Na. Na, first all the big countries must get settled after the war. There were no ships. This was the worst problem, the ships. And the processing, they didn't have a consulate. This took all the time, *bis* [until] every official was again established.

JF: The consulates had to be reestablished after the war?

WS: Yeah, yeah.

JF: During that period of time, what were living conditions like for you? Did they change at all?

WS: No; of course, they were better, in the same minute when the war was over. Also before the Americans came in and the British, everybody, they sent us food, food stuffs. And we had so plenty that in two or three weeks we really didn't know what to do with this. You see, that's the American way, this wasting. The soldiers told us they had on two islands in the Pacific stapled up for years so many food stuff that the American Army could have lived from that for three or four years. And the first thing they did was that they put it over in the camps, for their own civilian prisoners. That we could see this was over the Bund [Shanghai harbor highway] because they came about every fifty minutes came an airplane and threw down with parachutes. The parachutes were all in red, and white, and green and every. It was beautiful to see.

JF: Mmm.

WS: And big crates they put down with food stuffs. So, at that time, I will tell you, in about three or four weeks the Chinese couldn't buy it, I mean. We got so much that we, we couldn't eat it. We were selling that. And this was excellent. And I tell you also something. You cannot get it here.

JF: You can't get what?

WS: Here. You cannot buy it.

JF: You can't buy the kind of food that they were giving out?

WS: Mmm. And they still have it now. This was, everything was so excellent. When we came here, I've been here now thirteen years, and I asked for that. They didn't have it. Only in the surplus. But I think they don't have that anymore. They still have the

army surplus store? There you could buy it, but this was old, of course. And everything was, was every, this was so excellent. And they told us that, they make it only for the Army.

JF: Now at this time, once the ghetto was reopened, was there any moving out of the ghetto into the other areas or did they stay?

WS: Very few. Because the people all had the mind to leave Shanghai. I mean why? Very few changed back.

JF: Let me ask you something before we end the discussion of the ghetto. Was there much help that the Jewish community outside the ghetto could give you inside the ghetto? Was there much interchange during that ghetto period?

WS: Very few instance where personal contacts were made, but not in general.

JF: What was the attitude of the people in the ghetto towards the other community? What was the feeling?

WS: I would say most of them, because I told you then how I left the ghetto, or in Hong Kew before already, after, they didn't have any contact with them. This was the most reason. This was not a special attitude.

JF: It was no special attitude.

WS: No.

JF: There was no resentment towards them being independent of the ghetto restrictions?

WS: I wouldn't say that. Not as a general expression.

JF: And were the Jews on the outside of the ghetto able to, as a group, get any help to the Jewish community in the ghetto?

WS: Yeah. The problem, he brings that up in the book. They gave something, but really, compared to that amount that came from abroad, especially from America, it was nothing.

JF: I see.

WS: I mean it was not any load on their part. They gave, but very few. I would say not two to three percent. Compared, there were some rich people, of course, the big men like the Sassoon and Kadoorie. They gave some more. But not in a general.

JF: Now you said that most of the people could not leave at least until 1947. When were you and your parents able to leave?

WS: Ya. I could have left there, I would say, '48. But it was so, my father died '46. And when my father died, my mother came under the Polish quota. And the Polish quota was very bad. So...

JF: This was where her family had been born?

WS: Mmm.

JF: I see.

WS: She came on the, before she was on the German quota. And then she came under the Polish quota and there were for them long time no chance. And on the second hand, I had, at that time, a very good job with the American Jewish Joint.

JF: With the American Jewish...

WS: Jewish Joint.

JF: Joint.

WS: Joint. Yes.

JF: Yes. Joint. Mmm hmm.

WS: And the Joint had taken over the whole administration after the war. And I was there as a librarian. And, I mean, it was not a position I could make much money, but I had a good living at that time, and, I would say, that at that time we really didn't think of leaving Shanghai, and this was only because when the Communists came in. The Communists came in, I don't know yet in the moment exactly, '49, I think they came in, yeah, '49. But the struggle was going on already for one year. We saw it coming that there were Communists. And then, of course, we tried to get out, and in the end I decided and my mother also decided, that I should go out anyway, and she would leave later and maybe over Germany. So I got in '49, I think, I got my visa for America. This was, to me, was not a big problem. But then I got, then the Communists came, and the ships didn't come in, and I got sick. And I had to undergo some operation, and my visa expired before I got a new one. And then it was no chance anyway to get out because no ships came in. The ships didn't come because the nation of China had located the harbor from Taiwan. And that was the worst time when they came and were throwing bombs.

JF: The, who was throwing bombs?

WS: The Nation, Nation of China. They were throwing bombs. They came every day. And this was at random, you know? You never, first they didn't have a warning. The Communists had not a warning. And they came at random. One flier, one airplane, you saw it, like a mosquito. And he threw some bombs, and went. When you had bad luck, you got it, hmm? This was a terrible thing.

JF: This was from 1949?

WS: Yeah, this was going on till we left.

JF: Until you left...

WS: And then, and then...

JF: What year was that?

WS: And then when the American consulate closed, all the consul–no, not all, only the American closed, and that was that. And then we, the, IRO, you heard the name; IRO, International Refugee Organization. That is a part of the United Nations. They brought us out, with, there were, I think, two or three mass transports. And mostly, the first two went only to Israel. And they couldn't go through the Suez Canal at that time, the King Farouk was there. So they had to go around the Cape, the Cape, eh, Cape, what is it, Cape of Good Hope, hmm? South Africa. And we were the first and the only ship that

went through Panama, the only ship. You also cannot remember that, that this was 1950. So we left...

JF: This was in 1950?

WS: Yeah.

JF: And you, at this time your mother was able to go with you?

WS: Yeah. They took everybody. They took us out.

JF: How many Jews do you think were left in Shanghai after that?

WS: I tell you, when we left 1950, I say there were maybe left, after us, about twelve to fourteen hundred.

JF: Twelve to fourteen hundred Jews?

WS: Jews, people of all denominations, I would say, or origins. And I would say half of the people at that time said they would stay there. They were married to Chinese, or they had some business, there were some doctors. There were some Russian doctors there, they had no big chance to go, or they were too old. I don't know how many still lives there. The figures vary very much, but maybe two or three hundred, but I think this is the highest are still there. After our ship another transport...

JF: Are still, are still there, you think?

WS: Still.

JF: Are still there, two to three hundred are still in Shanghai.

WS: Jews.

JF: Jewish people. Yes.

WS: But not all immigrants from our time, I mean all together.

JF: Right.

WS: Who lived there before.

JF: Yes.

WS: Or who came after the war to Shanghai.

JF: I see.

WS: I would say no more. And then, then we left. It was so, the Chinese were so afraid when we got out. It happened to me many times that when I was riding in the bus, or in the streetcar, in the trolley, a Chinese went out and with tears in his eyes he came, "Don't leave Shanghai," he said. They were so afraid.

JF: They were afraid of the Communist controls?

WS: Yeah. They were afraid not only from the Communist, but you see it was so, at first nearly not a white man left in the city. And that made you so uneasy. It was so you went on the street and some white man whom you didn't know him, English or Russian, you said hello. Everybody was happy that somebody is still there. And that makes you so unhappy, on the millions and millions of not only yellow people, Communist people. So we had no other choice as to leave. And they took us around the world. We went first by train to Tientsin because the ship didn't come. And when we left the Korean war broke out. This also was an experience. We had a delay from at least six weeks, because that

ship, that should take us from the IRO, should come from Australia, that had brought refugees from Europe to Australia. And they should take, this was empty, and the ship should take troops or something to Korea. And the crew refused to take them. They said, "We are hired not for war purpose." So they had to go at least empty. The only thing was they brought over to the army in Korea food stuffs and medical equipment and so on. And then they came over and then the *traject* [train ferry] broke down in Nanking. You know what the *traject* is? Oh yeah, they have it here, too, where they bring the whole train on the ship and bring them over the Yangtze, over the Yangtze. There are two railway stations on both sides of the Yangtze. And that *traject* broke down, and they had nobody to repair it because all the British and English and American and French, they were all gone. And they didn't have the knowledge at that time, so they called in the Russian. And the Russian took over, and then they repaired it, and I tell you, at least it took six weeks. And we still didn't go over the *traject* because they hadn't, it was not declared safe. They took only the baggage over in cars. So we had to go with a ferry over the Yangtze to the other station, and it took them three days with the train to go to Tientsin, and in Tientsin, in Tientsin we boarded the ship. And from there on around the world through Panama to Europe, and I would say, 80% of the people went to Israel. And in, we made it to Napol, Napoli, I don't, Neapel. [Naples] And then came the Israeli ship, the *Nekbah* and took the people and then we had to go all the way back around Gibraltar, Biscaya, to Germany. It took us one year to go before we came here to America, over one year, fourteen months.

JF: The trip itself?

WS: The trip itself on the sea was seventy-two days. But I tell you one thing, I would make it every day again. It was for me, but not for all. Mostly was elderly and sick people. We had, we had a real hospital on ship for about 300 people. We had 11 doctors and 32 nurses. We had a special department for mental sicks, and we had everything on the ship, I think, I told you it started with a divorce. We had a marriage. We had three deaths. We had everything, a birth, yeah, a birth. We had two. A boy was born. The only thing we didn't have, they didn't make the circumcision. I don't know why. They left it for Israel. And so we had everything on board. And there, I told you for most of the people it was a big stress. Because they were sick, and first I was myself, and then I got sea sick, and, but I enjoyed the trip, really.

JF: Why did you enjoy it?

WS: I like the sea.

JF: Mmm.

WS: I enjoyed it. There were maybe ten more people who really enjoyed this.

JF: Now had you intended to come to the United States? Was that your plan?

WS: Mmm. I had an affidavit, I think I told you in the beginning. I had an affidavit from my cousin in New York, and I couldn't make it from Germany because the German quota there was also overdrawn.

JF: So you still had that affidavit?

WS: Yeah, no, he renewed at least three or four times for me.

JF: And your mother was also able to get...

WS: Yeah. And then we had to go to Germany, and we were in camps there.

JF: You were in a DP camp in Germany?

WS: Yeah.

JF: Where was that located?

WS: The first was in the *Rhön*. You know where that is?

JF: Could you spell that?

WS: *Rhön*, in the Eifel.

JF: Can you spell that for me?

WS: Yeah, wait a minute, I tell you a town, Fulda.

JF: Fulda.

WS: Near Fulda. High up in, this was also very intelligent. We came right from the tropical heat to Germany in November. It was that time, yeah, exactly that time. And they brought us up in the mountains where snow was already [laughs]. We had to get used to the change of the weather. And then I found out that the consulate was not the real one for that district. They said we should be processed in Frankfurt. And I was already in Frankfurt, because I had already the visa, and they should renew that. And then I found out they couldn't do it because that place where we were, the camp, didn't belong to that. It belonged to München, München [Munich], in Bavaria. And then we were brought to Foehrenwald. Did you hear of that name?

JF: How do you spell Foehrenwald?

WS: F-O-E-H-R-E-N, Wald, W-A-L-D. [Föhrewald] And this was a Jewish [displaced persons] camp. This was also an experience. They were the Jews from all over the world. This was a Jewish, and they had put on the, on the, on the big meeting hall, *Bamidbar*. You know Hebrew? *Bamidbar, in der Wüste* [in the desert]. And I, it was the first thing I saw. I asked one of the people, "Why they put on *Bamidbar*?" And then they told us, the Jews themselves had destroyed the camp, because before we came, some months or so, because there came an order out, they had to evacuate it for the, for some other purpose. So they said before they give up the camp, they'll break it down. So they broke everything down, and then they had to repair it, so they put on *Bamidbar*. And we had Jewish police and everything. There were Polish Jews, Russian Jews, German Jews, Hungarian, Czechoslovakia, Greeks, everybody.

JF: How long were you in this camp?

WS: We came there in January and left; we were about seven, eight months there.

JF: That was January of what year now?

WS: January, '51.

JF: 1951. And how long had you been in, near Fulda?

WS: There we were only two months.

JF: Two months.

WS: Maybe. And then, and then the last station was, we were processed in that, in that camp, and then we came to the so-called staging center. And this was near Bremen. There we were waiting only for the ship. I think three weeks. Yeah. We left after *Yom Kippur*.

JF: Did you have any experiences in Germany after the war during this time that you want to relate to us, that might be important?

WS: My experiences in Germany, you see, in the first place, when I came back to Germany, I was very depressed because I'm now, I never was thinking that I would put my foot again on German soil. I had very, very little opportunity, and I wasn't seeking it, to mingle with Germans.

JF: Pardon me?

WS: With Germans, with German people. I had no intention. And now is something which made this a little change in my feelings. We were only in parts of Germany which I had never seen before, you see, and which were not so much destroyed, Frankfurt a little bit, but I never was in Frankfurt. You know Germany? You were there? I mean you know this place, Frankfurt, many?

JF: Some of it.

WS: But you don't know this, this places where I told you with the camps, you didn't know that?

JF: What are you describing to me? That they were not touched by the wars...

WS: Munich, of course, but not the part where we were, where we lived in Föhrenwald. These were completely untouched. Garmish-Parten Kirchen, and all this, we made all these excursion. It was a very nice summer, I would say, we stayed there. But I had also position there with the Joint, and in the camp they offered me, I got in touch with some friends from my time before Hitler, before my actual, eh, immigration. And they answered me, and some people were in high positions. And they was begging and begging me. I should stay. But they made me so much promises what I would get and one of my nearest friends, he was vice president of the German *Bundesbank*, the *Reichsbank* was here a federal bank. And he was in a high position. And the other one was in the *Bundestag* [German parliament]. Not senator, representative in the *Bundestag*. They all were right there. And I didn't want it. My mother always told me, "You must make the decision." I said, "I don't want that."

JF: You didn't want to stay in Germany. Did your depression lift at all during that time?

WS: Yeah, the depression, I mean, this feeling was not a little bit, because I also, I could go at that time to Berlin for nothing. There was [unclear] I wouldn't see it. And I have today also got invitations that I could go.

JF: You didn't want to see it.

WS: I don't want to see it. And people tell me how beautiful it is, and I say, "I wouldn't say how beautiful it is. I know how it was before, and I haven't see it again." And

there was one man I didn't know before, but there was a friend of mine. These people, I told you before, were not Jewish, but there was a friend of mine from Berlin. He was a dentist, and he visited us in the summer, and he stayed in Tegernsee and places. And he stayed there in a boarding house with a friend of him. And this friend was a non-Jew. And he had sheltered him all these years in Berlin and this was a *richtiger*, a real *Ur-Berliner*, you know, the old type of a Berliner. And we were there and we were some days there. And he told me the same thing when we talked about Berlin. He went out from the Russians, from Berlin to West Germany. And they bought their house, and, it was a boarding house for tourists. And he told me, "When you have loved Berlin as it was, don't forget it, but don't want to see it now."

JF: I understand.

WS: That is my, my opinion about this whole thing. I only told you. It made it easier for me in Germany this eight or nine, no, we were longer there, ten months, eleven months, that I was in regions of Germany where I never was before and where you couldn't see much of the destroyed things.

JF: And then what year, what month and what year did you come to the United States?

WS: I came here in October.

JF: Of 1951?

WS: '51. It's a fast thirty years. I came one day before Halloween, that I know. Was on the twenty-ninth, I think.

JF: Is there anything else...

WS: Twenty-ninth, I came.

JF: Is there anything else that you want to add to what you've told us?

WS: I don't know. Maybe you ask something?

JF: Do you have, are there any...

WS: I said everything I know.

JF: O.K.

WS: I mean I could tell you about many other things, but they have not really this connection with your book or something.

JF: Thank you, Mr. Silberstein.

WS: You're welcome.