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## Blumenthal, Michael oral history interview

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**W. MICHAEL BLUMENTHAL**

**BERLIN**

**FEBRUARY 3, 1995**

**Interviewer: Steve Hochstadt**

**Transcription: Nicci Leamon  
David Lieber  
Steve Hochstadt**

**Michael Blumenthal:** . . . family originally lived in Oranienburg, just north of Berlin. Now it's a suburb of Berlin. In those days it wasn't any further away, it just took a little longer to get there. Where, they had come a long time ago, that is, in the late eighteenth, early nineteenth century, and those who had come there had come there from another place in, thank you, from another place in Brandenburg. They, in the second part of the nineteenth century, early part of the twentieth century, the family owned a bank, the Blumenthal Bank in Oranienburg, which went bankrupt in 1929 or 1930 during the world depression, which I gather was fairly, was not uncommon in Germany during this time for many banks, went spectacularly *kaputt*. My family lost their money, my parents with my sister, who is four and a half years older than I, about 1930 or 1931, moved to Berlin. I was born in 1926, so I came to Berlin when I was four or five, and lived here until we left in April of 1939. My parents, from, I would say, upper middle income level, suddenly had no money. After some trial and error and what to do, my mother opened a store for ladies' accessories in the west of Berlin, off the Kurfürstendamm, and opened it in 1932, just a few months before Hitler came to power. My father helped in that store, but were fundamentally my mother who ran it. It was not a large store, but it did give us, as I was a child during the Hitler years, it did give us a adequate middle-class income.

My earliest recollection actually is the boycott of April 1933. My earliest recollection having to do with Nazis and Jews, I have other recollections for this, specific to this situation, and that only that there was tenseness in the family during that day, or during that period, and that there were Brownshirts standing in front of the store with signs saying, "Don't buy from Jews." With the benefit of hindsight, although it was a frightening experience, because it was in fact the first such experience, and because it was all very new because the Nazis had been in power only for a very short period of time, it was also really benign as events go, everything being relative. Because, fundamentally, at least in most places, if I recall correctly, no damage of any kind was done, except there was just a damn boycott. And probably verbal excess, and maybe some people got beaten up, but fundamentally it was nothing.

From then forward for the next, '32 to '36, for the next four years I went to a regular public school up through the fourth grade. Then from '36 to '39 I went to the Kaliskischule, which is a Jewish *Waldschule* out in the, all day school, out in Dahlem, quite a well, quite a good one, quite a well-known one, for three years, [unclear] fifth, so likely fifth, sixth, seventh year, and then after that my schooling in Germany ended.

The years in, in Germany, in, in Berlin, the first four years were, if I recall correctly, as far as my parents concern, characterized by building up, trying to develop this store. There was talk of emigration as something that a lot of people did, as something that might have to be done, as something that in the beginning didn't really apply to us. And it became more real, I think, beginning in '35, '36 because my father's youngest brother left. My father's youngest brother is much younger than my father. My father in 19-, was born in '89, so he was in his mid-forties when Hitler came to power. But he had a brother who was, his youngest brother, who was in his late twenties, who had just gotten married, they had no child, and, and he and his young wife left to go to Brazil. And that made emigration real to me for the first time, that they were leaving. I thought it was very exciting, going to Brazil, and I remember my parents, as jokes to, you know, tell, tell their children funny stories, telling children, telling me how my uncle had gone into the countryside to look at a farm, a *fazenda* as it was called, I remember they used that word, and they had met a lion and they had

scared away the lion by opening and shutting an umbrella, that had scared the lion away. Obviously a tall tale, but I remember being very impressed thinking of my uncle standing in a car with an umbrella and scaring away a lion. I don't think there are lions in Brazil, but it was just a story they told a child, somehow. So this was all very exotic, very exciting to me. My father's sister, also quite a bit younger, maybe eight or nine years younger, then left the next year with her husband. That made it even more real, and, but still, there was at best only desultory talk about, well we would do the same and we would probably go to Brazil. And once they were settled, they would arrange it. So I remember when friends asked me, "Where are you going? Are you going anywhere?" as a child I would say, "Yes, we're going to Brazil." But fundamentally it was not a, I did not have the impression it was something that was seriously pursued in the years '35, '36, '37.

**Steve Hochstadt:** Do you think that that had something to do with the store, with owning the store, or with having children?

**Blumenthal:** Yes, it had something to do with the store, the store was doing better, particularly during the 1936 Olympic Games and so forth, things were going well. They were wrapped up in it, and then my parents were quite German, and I think the idea of leaving to go someplace did not particularly appeal to them at all. I mean, only if they had to. I, I do remember the other part of my youth was an underlying sense of tension in the family, clearly because of external circumstances. Sort of the need to speak in a low voice, the frequent admonition to not say anything because the person that you s-, who might hear you in the street or in a store might be a Nazi, to walk carefully when somebody in a brown shirt or with a swastika on his lapel, to recognize that and to be very careful, to avoid such people. And not to stand out, *nicht auffallen*, that's a frequent word. You know, keep a low profile, basically. And this general tension, and there was a certain amount of whispering about, is that a Nazi or is that not a Nazi, is that a, you know, is that person *arisch* or *nichtarisch*, the same expressions that the Nazis used began to be used by the Jews amongst themselves. *Das Nichtarier* and words like that. So I remember that and I, it became just part of my life. I was a child, I didn't make much of it, part of my life. But it was a, thinking about it over the years, it was this underlying sense of tension constantly with which we all lived and which to a child were not that difficult to, sort of became a part of our existence. I didn't know it was tension, I didn't know you could live without it really. It was just part of it. And that was there.

It is my impression that, well, in 1936 then it was no longer possible to go to a, the, the idea of going to a regular *Gymnasium* seemed to be excluded and my parents somewhat reluctantly, somewhat reluctantly because they were totally un-Jewish, they knew little of things Jewish, they never went to the synagogue, they did not belong to the Jewish community, and, and they were always somewhat embarrassed, I think, about their Jewishness and, in fact, had many opinions about Jews which border on the anti-Semitic, I believe. That's strong. So obviously they weren't anti-Semites, my parents, but they shared the same prejudicial views about some types of Jews, put it that way. And there would be expressions in the family, *jüdische Manieren*, those are a pejorative term for a certain type of Jewish man, is to be too loud, too aggressive and so forth. *Jüdische Wirtschaft*, which meant sort of messy, "*Der sieht sehr jüdisch aus*," he looks very Jewish, that wasn't considered to be a terribly good thing. So I, you know, you, obviously you get thinking on it in my adulthood, it's a, reflecting on it, it's a, it is a form of, it is adopting, absorbing

unconsciously, well you see, if my parents were here they would protest very loudly against me and say it doesn't mean we're anti-Semitic. They weren't anti-Semitic, but it's, they, they adopted these manners. So all of this was, therefore sending me to a Jewish school was not something they would have nor-, it's not something they really wanted to do, but they had to do. I obviously at that age, age ten, did not know what the legal situation was. I think it became increasingly difficult if not impossible for me to stay in a non-Jewish school anyway. So I went to the Kaliskischule, which actually was a wonderful school, and I would say, from my memory of the three years, '36 to '39, a very happy memory. Why, because there were very nice people there and very nice kids. I was getting a little older, I was there ten to thirteen, I learned a lot, I learned to speak French very well, which has stood me in good stead all my life. And I had happy days there and that's why, and incidentally, that's an experience that is commonly shared by a lot of the kids there, and that is why in recent years there was a book written by Michael Daxner, Michael Daxner, who was the president I believe at the University of Oldenbourg called, describing the Kaliskischule and is called *Insel der Geborgenheit, The Island of Refuge*,<sup>1</sup> which describes that, how that was done by Fräulein Kaliski and, and describes the, the feeling that I had was one that was shared by, obviously I didn't know that at the time, but it was shared by a lot of kids, but a lot of grown ups now, older people and, that he's met all over the world who are graduates of that school.

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<sup>1</sup> The book is by Hertha Luise Buseman, Michael Daxner, and Werner Fölling, *Insel der Geborgenheit: Die private Waldschule Kaliski, Berlin 1932 bis 1939*.

During that period beginning maybe in '37 and certainly in '38, as far as I was concerned, I would say my perspective changed, clearly because I was amongst nothing but Jewish children. It changed, first of all I learned some Hebrew, which I never knew before. I must say I didn't learn much, but at least I know how to read and write and put the consonants and the vowels together. Read and write, and I learned to sing some songs and say the blessings and stuff like that. I learned a little something of Jewish history, not much, but I heard a lot about emigration, because all the kids, of course, that's what they were talking about. You know, "Where are you going?" "Where are you going?" and I heard this at home when we discussed it. Like every once in a while somebody would leave. And it's during that period when I'd say, "Well, we're going to Brazil." I, and it is indeed true that there was correspondence during this period, '37, '38, with, between my parents and their, my father's siblings, but whereas it had been easy in '35 when my young uncle went, for them to go, it had already become much harder when my aunt went, and it was becoming very difficult to be allowed in by the time we wanted to go. And there was a lot of, those were murky situations. They were not well regulated, there were rumors we had to bribe somebody, you had to do this or that, or you needed money, or you needed a false certificate that you weren't Jewish, or there was always something going back and forth. And I think the matter was pursued with some greater vigor, but not with great vigor. And then there were discussions about different people going to different places. Some people went to Palestine, some people went with a permit to Palestine, some people took off and went illegally, some young people went for, to work in the country, called *Hachschara*, I believe it's something like that. And life went on and then in '38 the roof fell in and a lot of the fathers, including mine, were carried off to, arrested and it was panic, panic time. And at the same time I recall the *Kristallnacht* very well, our shop, my mother's shop was smashed, not burned, just smashed glass. I remember my mother crying and desperate. I remember my father being arrested at six in the morning and disappearing, and I remember my, somebody saying, I was twelve at the time, somebody saying, "Stay home," a rule which I promptly vio-, promptly violated and I ran down here, across the street from where we're sitting right now.<sup>2</sup> I was just about, maybe next to where the Jewish Community Center is, where the synagogue was burning. I remember seeing the synagogue burning and I standing, standing close to the Kurfürstendamm because it was blocked off, you couldn't see anything, saw the smoke coming out, policemen, people standing around looking at it. I don't remember any further details. Then the desperation about, then I recall very clearly that the situation was that you could leave only if you had a place to go, and that again there was a kind of a bureaucratic obstacle course. How you got your man out was that you showed, you showed that you had a valid visa to go somewhere, or a valid means to go somewhere, you had the money to, etcetera, etcetera, to pay for it. And those were bureaucratic obstacles that were extremely difficult to overcome. And that's what my mother was preoccupied with.

**Hochstadt:** Starting after *Kristallnacht* especially?

**Blumenthal:** Yeah. And obviously there was no plans of going anywhere, but Shanghai

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<sup>2</sup> The interview took place at the Hotel Kempinski on Fasanenstrasse.

came up, and Shanghai had the name, it had a bad name, it was the worst place to go to. It was sort of a hierarchy of things. If you went to the United States, that was a good thing. If you went to England that was a good thing. If you went to another European country, it was fine, to Holland, to France, all that was good. If you went to New Zealand and to Australia and then to Canada, that was good. There were countries that were considered to be okay. Brazil was okay, Argentina and Uruguay were okay, maybe Chile. There were countries that were considered to be not so okay, Paraguay and Bolivia figured frequently, and . . .

**Hochstadt:** Why were they at a lower level than the other Latin American countries?

**Blumenthal:** Because they were considered to be primitive countries in which it was difficult to make a living, where a European wouldn't be happy. Dominican Republic, Panama, certain Central American countries were considered to be, I wouldn't, semi-desperation countries you went to, *faute de mieux*, there was no place else. And the worst place was Shanghai. Shanghai, we heard rumors of people, you know, poverty, illness, disease, death, and these refugees being thrown in the middle of it, and so forth. And of course we, as of that time, 1938, we knew we would leave with nothing, no possessions fundamentally. So this is, was a very frightening prospect.

**Hochstadt:** Do you remember what, where you heard of, you know, where you got this idea of this hierarchy? Was this something the kids also talked about in school?

**Blumenthal:** No, I'm telling you about the hierarchy. Nobody said, "Hey, we have a hierarchy here."

**Hochstadt:** Obviously.

**Blumenthal:** I'm just, it was just, by 1938 and certainly from then, during, say, the second part of '38, things started getting bad through *Kristallnacht* until we finally left in April of '39. One heard of very little else but emigration, even as a child in school. In fact, the school closed later in '39, so a lot of people, there was a big wave of people out in '38 and '39. So you heard a lot about that and it's just, you just knew what was a good country, was it a bad country. Somebody went to the United States, that was terrific. Somebody went to Canada, it was considered very good. It's just that you knew, but, but, mainly I heard my parents say, "They're in La Paz, La Paz is so high . . ." I remember my father, or somebody, again, saying, La Paz is, now where is it? Is it La Paz or Ecuador? Because one is Cocha-, where is Cochabamba. Cochabamba, I think, is Bolivia. La Paz and Cochabamba. "La Paz is so high, they have to run down the hill to Cochabamba to catch their breath." And it's a very primitive and very poor, and it's not, it's, it's a good place, but you just, it's not a place you go to if you really, if you have a choice between Cochabamba and New York, you go to New York, you don't go to Cochabamba. It's just, that was the hierarchy, that's all [unclear]. But Shanghai was sort of the, the, the last stop. I mean, that was at the bottom of the hill. Oh, you know, only the, the people who had no place else to go, they went to Shanghai and it was a close call or they wouldn't stay home, rather than going to Shanghai. It was considered to be pretty awful. And I recall my father, I don't know whether I was told this, because my parents did not believe in sharing things with their children. They, like many

Germans, believed that children, children were children, they should be seen and not heard, and such things as family councils or sharing with your twelve year old what's going on, was not something that my parents thought was a very wise thing to do. They weren't, my parents thought I wasn't smart enough to understand these things. But later on I did see it, a letter from my father which says, which I've mentioned before, it says, "I got to get out of here," and which basically says, "*Ich mache alles*," I'll go anywhere. My mother, if I recall this correctly, and if she were here she would probably change the story somewhat, but I think it's, it's correct in its essentials, got at first one and then very quickly two *Passagen*, that is two tickets on the "Haruna Maru," which is a Japanese ship. There were fundamentally two, which you must know by now, two shipping lines on which people went to Shanghai. One was the Lloyd Triestino, and the other one was the NYKE, the Nippon Yusen Kaisha Line. There may be some people who came on other ships, but very, very few. There, a few people came via Siberia, but . . .

**Hochstadt:** A few people went on German ships.

**Blumenthal:** A few people went on German ships, but very, very few. The great bulk of the people went on the "Conte Verde," "Conte Rosso," "Conte Biancamano" and then some went on the "Haruna Maru," Haruna something, there were various Harunas. She got these two tickets, I believe she got, I remember she went to Hamburg. She may have gotten them in Hamburg, I don't know, but she got, may have got them in Hamburg. She got them by hook and crook. My mother was a very strong, resourceful woman, also a very good looking woman. She was [unclear] with the Gestapo, as a matter of fact, she was blonde, good looking. She was a prototype of an Aryan looking woman, even though she was anything but. Anyway, so with the ship's ticket my father was released. He was in pretty bad shape, he'd lost a lot of weight . . .

**Hochstadt:** How long had he been *in Haft*?

**Blumenthal:** About two months, about two months. He worked in a stone quarry and he'd never done, my father had never done [unclear] time of year, never done any physical work in his life, so, he was really in a state of shock. Psychological certainly. Anyway, and they, for a few weeks during this period, since it was considered unlikely or impossible to get more tickets, my sister was to go as a *au pair* to England, as a domestic to work in England. My sister was then seventeen going on eighteen. And I, having been a good student in French, there was a scholarship or two to go to an *Internat*, you know, to a, you know, boarding school in France. And that was offered to me and I was accepted. And it is my father who really put his foot down, who in this instance did, and said, "No, no, no, we must keep the family together." So they continued to work and I don't understand, don't remember the process, but anyway, there was a third, and at the very last minute, now, we left on the sixth of April from, from here, from New, from Berlin. This must have been in the first part of March, a few weeks before, very shortly before, the fourth ticket, my ticket, was somehow secured. And so we, the four of us were together and fortunately we were not left behind in Europe, which at least in my case might have been my death warrant, in France.

**Hochstadt:** Had you thought up until that time in March that that's where you were going, to



France?

**Blumenthal:** Yeah, yeah, exactly. And then they got, but I knew there was this effort scrambling around, seeing if they could get a fourth ticket and they did.

**Hochstadt:** Do you know any more about the scrambling around, about how, anything about how that was done?

**Blumenthal:** It was done with finagling. It was done with knocking on doors, calling people they knew in the travel business. Meanwhile, they were selling, you know, they, there were these ads in the local paper, long pages of ads of Jews selling their stuff. And on Sunday I remember people trooping through the apartment looking at our stuff, buying the dishes and the silver and the glasses and rugs and whatever was in the apartment. Lampshades and everything. And with that money the clothes were bought that you took with you, and of course we all bought wrong clothes, clothes we couldn't use it in Shanghai. Different story. And that money was used to buy the tickets. You couldn't take any money out anyway and you could take out very little jewelry and stuff, I think you got a watch and a ring, wedding ring, that's it. And nobody wanted to smuggle anything out, because if the Gestapo caught you, you know, you were a dead duck. So, so, I think it was a question of both having enough money, paying people extra, and finding one, and putting all that together. Anyway, but I, I don't know, I'm sorry, I don't know the details.

So, finally the day came we, we left in the evening on the train about nine o'clock. I had a, we had a *Kinderfräulein* who had come to us in better days, that is in the Oranienburg, and when we had such things as *Kinderfräuleins*, and cooks and my grandfather even had a chauffeur, because he had a car in the 1920s, which shows certainly that he was up there in income terms. But those things had long, were long gone as far as we were concerned. But the *Kinderfräulein*, which had come to us when my sister was one year old, so three years before I was born, had stayed in the family throughout, and she was old enough, you know, the Nazis had a law that you couldn't work for Jews if you were below fifty, because Jews were well known to be rapacious defilers of Aryan womanhood, so, and that, I guess the idea was if a woman was over fifty, she was damaged goods anyway, nobody would want her, so. Anyway [unclear] really the woman who raised me as much as my mother did, stayed with us all these years and the day we left she went with us to the station to see us off, as did my mother's sister and her husband, her husband having somehow escaped being arrested a year earlier, and I don't know why, I think he was out of town or he wasn't where he was supposed to be. They took us to the train and I recall that they, my mother's sister and her husband who had always said, "We're not going, we're not going, we're staying, this will pass," were saying that evening, well, you know, "Let us know what it's like in Shanghai." And by that time one tried not to, one tried to be cheerful, but they weren't, my parents weren't cheerful, they were sad. They were sad and scared.

So we were in Shanghai, they didn't know what was going to happen, they had no money. The idea was that upon arrival in Naples, they would go to a bank there, and there would be some money waiting from Brazil that my uncle and aunt respectively had sent. Now they themselves were poor, having only arrived there a little while before that, but they were sending something. I think they sent a hundred or a hundred and fifty pounds between them, which was like a couple of hundred to three hundred dollars, U.S. dollars, which seems like

nothing today, but it was quite a bit of money then. I mean, you could live on very, very little in U.S. dollars. In Shanghai, actually, you could live on five U.S. dollars, not well, but you could. My, I'm jumping ahead. But, during the war my mother and her husband, my, my, mother's husband had some money stashed away which I found out after the war was a thousand dollars. They lived on five dollars a month, I don't know what it was, in '39, maybe ten or twenty, but, still, a hundred, a couple of hundred dollars was quite a bit of money. And the other way you could get money is if you could pay in money, *Bordgeld* it was called here, then you got it in hard currency at the other end. You know, there was currency restrictions so you got it at the other end. So, the idea was to be sure that you paid in the maximum of *Bordgeld* for everybody, for each person. And then spend nothing. And then they would, and the NYK Line at the other end would pay you, pay it out. So that, if I recall correctly, my parents told me later, they had about three hundred U.S. dollars when they arrived in Shanghai, which put them into the monied class as compared to those who had nothing, who had a) no relative who could send them something, and b) no, had no, had no money here to pay in the *Bordgeld*, who arrived literally totally destitute in Shanghai, and then, hence were sent on a truck to Hongkew and to a camp. Whereas we got into rickshaws and instead of going that-a-way, we went this-a-way, we went to the left rather than the right, and went to the International Settlement and the French Concession and found a room where to live, which means we were better off. The worst thing was to go to Shanghai, the even worse thing when you got to Shanghai, was to have to go to the Hongkew Yangtzepoo area and into a camp. And the, the, the better off you were, the more you could go into where normal, more normal westerners lived, and so forth.

So, anyway, we went to, we said goodbye, it was a rather tearful goodbye, we went, it was overnight. The next morning, mid-day, we arrived at the Brenner Pass. I remember that quite well, and I remember it as a somewhat fri-, a very frightening experience, because there were SS guys together with the border guards running up and down the train and shouting, "*Juden und Auswanderer raus,*" or "*Jüdische Auswanderer raus,*" or, I think it's "*Juden und Auswanderer raus.*" And they had dogs, shepherd dogs, which is why, incidentally, as an aside, ever since, I do not like shepherd dogs, German shepherd dogs. Can't stand them [unclear] I shudder, I've had friends who had these dogs. I have a, I, I just have a, almost a physical reaction to a German shepherd dog. And everybody had to get out and we had lots of pieces of luggage, because it, in 1939, benefit of hindsight, probably for the preparation of the war, there were shortages, and one of the shortages in Berlin was large suitcases. So my parents were unable to find large suitcases, so they bought little ones. So we had something like twenty-three pieces of luggage, not because we had that many things to take with us, we had a few large pieces, but because we just had small pieces of luggage. So all of this stuff had to be dragged out onto the platform and examined. It was examined carefully while this train stood there for I don't know how long, and then there was something called *Leibesvisitation*, which means it's a strip search. Not for me, they left me alone, and I don't believe for my father, who was scared to death of the whole thing, but for my mother and my sister. And they got out of there, and apparently it was a very unpleasant experience, but they got out of there and we managed to get our twenty-three bags back into the train just as the train was leaving, which was also a frightening experience. And then I recall the sigh of, sort of a sigh of relief, we're out of Germany, we're in Italy.

And we went on, we arrived and changed, through Rome, arrived in Naples. At three or four o'clock in the morning my parents went off to find a hotel room, which we did at the

Hotel Nationale, a tiny little hotel. We went to sleep, but I remember waking at noon the next day, opening the windows and the sunlight flooding in, very bright, and noise of the southern Italians in the street, the shouting, hawkers, you know, selling things, first time I was in an environment like that. I thought it was fantastic, wonderful, exciting. I remember my parents getting dressed in a hurry, nervously, admonishing my sister and me, my sister had to look after me, and they hurried off to this bank to see whether the money was there, and it was. So we had a day, and I don't remember what we did, we had a day in Naples.

**Hochstadt:** Was there any contact there with representatives of Jewish organizations?

**Blumenthal:** I wouldn't know, I wouldn't know. If there was, I wouldn't know. Maybe, I don't know. And the next day we went and we got to, we went out to the ship, there was the good old "Haruna Maru." My mother took one look at it and said, I feel seasick. We went on board, we had some, my father, I believe, was in the first class, and my sister and she and I were in the steerage area, you know, the lower whatever it's called, I know there were two or three classes. It was a ship, it was a half freighter, half passenger liner, about a hundred and fifty people and the rest was freighter.

**Hochstadt:** Were most of the hundred fifty people refugees?

**Blumenthal:** Most, not all, most. And as a matter of fact, in Shanghai you formed, a lot of friendships were formed with people you met on the ship. The expression "*Wir sind auf dem selben Schiff gekommen,*" was very common in Shanghai. "*Die kenne ich, die kenne ich von der 'Conte Biancamano' her,*" the people, sort, sort of the first, it's a community of fate, you know, and you have, soulmates, you know. These are all these shocked people getting on these ships and going off to the Orient, you know, there was European, with middle European horizons all of a sudden going up. It's very difficult for Americans to understand, because in the age of the, first of all Americans are not wedded to one place anyway, but in addition to which we have lived for so long in the age of the jet plane, that it is, for today's people, my children totally impossible, maybe even for you, difficult to understand, to fully appreciate, you can hear it, but to fully appreciate how big the psychological, the differences psychologically between today when somebody says, "I'm going to China," I mean, he's just going to China, he's going on a trip [unclear] , it'll be over in three weeks, you know. You go today, you'll be in China tomorrow. And for people who grew up in the beginning of the twentieth century, when there were no airplanes, not just jet planes, there were no airplanes that you could take, I mean, an ordinary mortal couldn't go on a, there's no way you could go on an airplane to China, there's no way you could go on an airplane to the United States. There were airplanes, they flew some airplanes, but that was a special thing. Some diplomats flew on an airplane perhaps. And people who had gone, there were these odd types who had once been to America or someplace like that, but fundamentally, if one traveled outside of Germany, which very, very few people did, you had to have some money. You went to Czechoslovakia or maybe you went to Venice on your honeymoon, or maybe, as I did, I went to a *Kinderheim* on the island of Bornholm in the Baltic Sea, and I suppose there were people who went to Paris, but that was a really big trip. But your horizon was limited to this place in Europe, and the notion that you would go into the Orient, China, India, for people like my family was just, it was another world, it was another world, and one didn't know how this was done then. So this, going into that world with little money and no idea of what to do

when you got there, or how long you would be there, nobody expected to be there forever, obviously, it was, something would have to happen. It was bearable only because it was the price for getting out of Germany and I think there was a sense of relief to be safe, and away from the Nazis. So the common fate of being on that ship with other people who were going through the same experience, was really binding. And that's why I say it's so interesting that they were, that this, it's a little bit like saying, people who have been in the war, "He was in my outfit," you know, there's a solidarity to that. "Oh yeah, we were in the same company, you know, Fourth Infantry Division, we were in B Company," or something like that, it's a little bit like that.

And there was a mixture on the ship, at least on my ship, and I'm told that it was true on others, although again I was young, to me this was nothing but fun and excitement. But as I observed it and heard it, there was a mixture of, in wave-like, in wa-, in wave-like proportions of hilarity and *Ausgelassenheit* is the German word, you know, people letting themselves go, and celebrating, and fear, depression and fear, some of both. I don't know this but, for a fact, but I'm told that there were quite a few affairs started on ships, people used to somehow, I don't know, the, the bonds were loosened. This is of course something that happened in Shanghai a lot, that the bonds, once people are taken out of their normal environment and the normal bonds are, are loosened, they're gone, people begin to behave in strange ways. It's like in the Middle Ages, the time of the Black Death, you know, these, people became a very lawless society, because people said we're going to die anyways, so they walked through the street, flagellating, flagellants walked through the streets, but at the same time, you know, normal moral restraints were gone. There was some of that, in Shanghai, it began on the ship, in my view. There was certainly a lot of loosening of moral restraints in Shanghai, under these circumstances.

Anyway, so we had one month of, took a full month to get to Shanghai. We went to Port Said, Suez, Aden, Bombay, Colombo, Singapore, Hong Kong, a month later, left on the ninth of April, having left Germany on the night of the sixth, gotten to Naples on the seven-, afternoon of the seventh, no, night of the sixth, no, the morning of the eighth and then on the ninth we went, got on the "Haruna Maru" and left, and on the tenth of May we arrived in Shanghai. I don't know whether this is worthwhile for you, but I will briefly mention, jump ahead some many years. In 1977, I believe, '78, somewhere around there, when I became Secretary of the Treasury, there were of course lots of stories written about me. Most people, I hope that's not the only thing they know about me, but one of the things they know about me is that, the Shanghai experience. And *Time* magazine, at the time, or *Newsweek*, or once, I was, I was on the cover of both of those, but once, maybe it was, I don't remember if it was on the cover or was in the beginning, they got photographs of me on the "Haruna," "Haruna Ma-," of me on the "Haruna Maru," which I had given them, and the, a few weeks after that, I think it was *Time*, I received a letter from the Chief of the Tokyo Bureau, *Time* Bureau, saying the, it didn't mention the name of the ship, it just said, you know, Blumenthal, Blumenthal as a young boy *en route*, Jewish refugee *en route* to Shanghai, that's all. And it showed me, you can actually see the ship, you know, I was a kid in short pants, thirteen year old. [unclear] the president of the so-and-so, NYK doesn't exist, it's called something else now, oh yeah, it still exists, but it's not a passenger company anymore, it just does container ships, called, and all the old ships, including the "Haruna Maru" is at the bottom of the ocean, they were all sunk during the war, called and he said, he's got a guy working in the office here who thinks he knows . . .

**END SIDE A, TAPE 1****BEGIN SIDE B, TAPE 1**

**Blumenthal:** He says his name is Hiroshi Furuno and he sent a picture, and he was a purser on the ship, and sure enough, I don't know how this guy recognized me, all these many years later. Furuno was a guy who was a second-class purser, a second-class, second-class purser, who befriended me. Very nice guy. He spoke Japanese-y type English, I didn't speak any English, or just a few words. I was just a kid, but I guess I was lively and curious and he liked, he had fun with me, taught me a few Japanese words, I remember. He had a parrot who taught me that you say "Ohio" to the parrot, which meant good morning, you know, stuff like that. And I liked him. And this guy knew the, remembered the name and recognized me. So, when I went to Japan as Secretary, we had a, I don't think it was a summit, we had a summit in '79, but well before that I had to go, I was on a trip, I got to Tokyo and *Time* magazine came with photographers and TV cameras and the president of NYK showed up and Todashi Furuno showed up and we had a tearful reunion, thirty years later, whatever it was. And of course that made all the paper, all the Japanese papers but also the foreign papers, this reunion. Well, anyway, this is jumping ahead. This guy, but I was always amazed that he would, you know, somehow put together some kid he met, I was thirteen years old, with this guy who was a Sec-, had just been appointed Secretary of the Treasury.

Anyway, we got to Shanghai. *En route* there was always a question about whether we would, two things I remember. One is the constant admonition, don't spend any money. Sometimes I would ask, kids get, can I have an ice cream or something? No, I can never have. Can I have a drink? You know, a juice? No. Nothing. You know, save the money. There was always concern about whether we could get off the ship, because every port that we touched on, the Union Jack was flying. It shows that the British Empire was far flung in those days. Every, every single port, one, all the ones that I've mentioned, quite something, was under the control of the British. And it was always uncertain whether they'd let us off, I guess they were always afraid we wouldn't get back on, because people didn't like the *Endstation*, they didn't like the last stop at all. In some places it wasn't certain until we actually got there, but somehow I believe we got off everywhere, although the reception was not always friendly. And in some of the ports the Jewish organizations showed up at the dock or on the ship, that were there to, Jewish communities. And in some cases they were, it was well organized and they were quite good. I remember that was true in Port Said or in Suez. There was a big department store called Simonard's, probably still exists, I've heard people say that, and they came and they brought presents, probably, you know, maybe like a dollar or two or something, which was probably valuable for people who had nothing.

**Hochstadt:** But hundreds of them, they must have been there.

**Blumenthal:** Hundreds. Well, they collected, you know, the Jewish, Jewish community

collected money, they came, they brought things, clothes, presents, and so forth. Some of them, not in all ports, but I remember, I know they did, I know it was true in Egypt. There was a large Jewish community I think in Alexandria, must have been Suez. No, Port, in Port Said, Suez is a smaller place, in Port Said, big department store called Simonard's. We got off everywhere. But always this concern that, would they get back on, and stories of so-and-so's thinking maybe of staying. And people sometimes trying to finagle to see whether they could stay. In Bombay, in Bombay, I told you my mother was a tall, good looking blonde woman, the British, I don't know what he was, customs officer, police officer, he wasn't in a uniform, immigration officer of some kind or other, for some reason or other befriended my mother, or my mother befriended him. And there was some talk, and I don't know if this was serious or not, but I remember this incident, because it was also a, an omen of things to come. We spent two days, since it was a half freighter, we had to wait for the ship to unload and load again, two, two and a half days it took. They suggested that maybe, since our father was, quote, a banker, get him a job in a bank, in a British bank in Bombay, and might be able to stay there. Well, I don't know whether Bombay in the end would have been that preferable to Shanghai, probably would have, but anything was considered preferable [unclear]. So I remember hearing that that was a possibility and we'd find out the next day and maybe we could stay. And I believe the mistake was made by my parents, by my mother, that this was mentioned to other people, and it was, and there's this tension and fear and competitors felt tremendous jealousy and there was a kind of, almost a kind of a small uproar over, "Did you hear? They're gonna stay. How come they can stay? Why can't we stay?" Well, anyway, it didn't work out, we didn't stay. But it was the, the beginning of the attitude of *sauve qui peut*, you know, you, everyone's on his own in jockeying for advantage and saving yourself and being quite ruthless. Not people congratulating you, think, "Gee, I'm happy you, you get out of it at least." It's like, "Wait a minute, if you can get it, I want to get it." So anyway, it didn't work. Oh, I don't know how serious it was.

We got to Shanghai. In Shanghai we got off, got into rickshaws, our first rickshaw ride. To me, incidentally, all of this was nothing but fun. It was May, tenth of May, it was already quite warm, humid, hot in Shanghai. Down Nanking Road into this maelstrom of humanity. Not as many people as you've seen now when you go to Shanghai. On board ship, my parents read two books, one book was called *Tausend, Tausend Worter Englisch*, were learning a thousand words of English. And the other one was a book by a man named Carl Crow, written in English, read partly for, I don't know where they got that book from, maybe it was on board ship, called, this was an American living in Shanghai who was in the advertising business, called *Four Hundred Million Customers*. It had this faulty thesis that, this is the greatest market in the world, there are four hundred million people there. I mention it only because now there are 1.2 billion, so, and urbanization has proceeded further in the last fifty years, so the teeming mass of humanity that you see today when you've been in Shanghai, imagine half to two thirds of those not there. I was shocked even when I came back in the early 1970s, you know, first time to Shanghai, all these people. It was very crowded by Berlin standards already. Everything's relative. Four hundred million people was a lot of people, but it's not a billion two, and it's just incredible what has happened there. Nowadays you can't, Nanjing Lu you can't walk on the sidewalk. Literally, I mean, people are everywhere and it's, very few places in China you don't bump into people. Solitude is something that is a commodity in short supply in China. Pootung, you know, the area on the other side of the Whangpoo River, was farmland. I mean, we used to go there when I was in

the Boy Scouts, we used to go there to, to camp. Now it's nothing but houses, so it's changed. But, anyway, we plunged into what then seemed like a mass of humanity, but it's only one third of what you've seen. And went down Nanking Road, passed the racecourse, and to what was then called Bubbling Well Road, Nanjing Xi Lu, and we got to the other side of Shimo Lu, we got to a fleabag called Burlington Hotel.

**Hochstadt:** And this was next to the Uptown Cinema.

**Blumenthal:** Right next to the Uptown Cinema. Well, yeah, it was like, it's not, it's not adjacent to, but it's maybe, there may be three houses in between. It is on the exact same site, partly, although probably that site now uses more space, but it includes, it is a part of the site where is now the J.C. Mandarin Hotel [unclear] . There's the other one across the street which is even bigger which is, I can't think of the name of it now, which also has a big office complex and which is owned by AIG, by Hank Greenberg, insurance company. But they, you know, the Mandarin Hotel is also in Hong Kong, it's a very, very good hotel, J.C. Mandarin. Actually that's, I've stayed there, now when I go to Shanghai that's where I stay. Because I always think of the Burlington, because the Burlington had a fancy name, it sounds like a place on the west end of London, because you think of the Burlington Arcade, but it's really a fleabag, was really a fleabag where I first made acquaintance, we first made acquaintance with bedbugs and cockroaches, a constant scourge in Shanghai, and very disgusting. And we stayed there for five days. It was very hot and so forth, and of course, there's no, there's no air conditioning in Shanghai. Certainly not anywhere where we were, there's very, almost none anywhere, except for ceiling fans maybe. You used fans like that.

And almost immediately we were told of and went to the Café Louis, which is just a few doors down, none of that exists any more. If you keep going on what was then Bubbling Well Road, another seventy-five yards on the same side of the street, you come to the Café Louis, which was run by the Einfelders. And they had a good, they made good cakes, and foreigners came and bought those cakes and they, they were well off. They had a good, they had a good business. I don't know how they'd gotten it, but they'd gotten there somewhat earlier, probably six months earlier. But that's where we went and that's where you got information, you know, what are you doing, you met other refugees, you exchanged information.

And I would have to ask my sister, but within the first five days, my sister got a job as a nanny to a Portuguese family, whose name was [name unclear] . The man I believe was a diplomat and the woman was British, I'm pretty sure, yeah, the woman was British and he was a Portuguese diplomat. So she was taken care of, she had a place to live. And we found a room, one room, in the French Concession on the Rue de Grouchy, still stands, I've seen it many times, that house, in a lane, 51 Rue de Grouchy, 59 Rue de Grouchy. In the house of a, he said he was a colonel, but I think he was more like probably a sergeant, in the White Russian Army. Kichigin, his wife was Kichigina. A room, use of the bathroom. Where did we cook on that place? Maybe Mother cooked on a kerosene stove in a corner, yes, on a kerosene stove in a corner of the room. The room was fairly large, fairly large, I mean somewhat, a bit larger than this, good sized room. There was a bed for my parents. They had built up, my mother had built up, we had a large steamer trunk. Oh, did you, when you go to the exhibit you see, you saw the steamer trunk with which George Grosz came to the

United States?<sup>3</sup> That, exactly the same. You know, you open up, with drawers on the inside. Exactly the same. We had one of those. When I looked at that I thought, it looks like ours. That's the largest kind we had one of those and it came with us on the, it came all the way, my father brought it to the United States. It was opened up so that it was wide, and behind that there was a cot, which was put away during the day, a camp bed. I slept on the camp bed. So that my parents quote, had privacy. I was isolated behind that. I always resented it, isolated behind that trunk. And in another corner they cooked on a, that was a table.

Kichigina, again Kichigin didn't do anything but drink vodka, but Kichigina worked as a masseuse, had two daughters, Yanna and Marina. Marina was a beauty parlor oper-, I mean, she worked in a beauty parlor. And Yanna was a prostitute. And they had a Chinese houseboy whose name was Grisha and who spoke fluent Russian and this is, from Grisha I learned some Russian. And there I was. And my parents had to go out and get, find, try to make some, make a living and then began the losing struggle of my mother, who was trying to keep me under some control, but in Shanghai you ran wild, I mean, it was impossible. So I began, I was thirteen, puberty was just then beginning, I began to learn about life very quickly. Very, very quickly. I was wise to the world by the time I was fifteen, believe me. I've seen fifteen-year-old kids in the United States and it was entirely different then. By the time I'd spent a year or two in Shanghai, I knew all about gambling and prostitution and drugs and, you know, it was all there. Horse racing, dog racing, trading in slaves, it was all there. And being curious and adventurous all my life, I wanted to learn about it all, and I did.

So, but in that, in that lane, those houses are built in these lanes in Shanghai, there were kids my age, boys my age, and I very quickly got separated from the refugee community, because in that lane we were the only refugees. They were Russian, and assorted, now, it was lower-class whites, you know, Germany, Shanghai was very, very stratified, stratified, not stratified, stratified. I would not have, I never came into contact with the children of expatriates, Americans and that, that was high society. You were the representative of RCA, I wouldn't come into contact with such people or the children of such people, they went to different schools and everything, I wouldn't get in. Of course we had to pay money and I didn't have any money. But there were sort of, I would say, white trash, that's where we belonged, you know. [laughs] It was just, white trash was sort of one step above Chinese. Ridiculous, but that's the way the system worked, so it's the other white trash, poor Russians, there was a Finn, [name unclear], and they belonged to the, the social life of teenagers was built around the Boy Scouts. In the United States, Boy Scouts are considered to be probably somewhat sissyish or something, you know, they don't, aren't too many kids who once they're fourteen, fifteen, sixteen want to belong to the Boy Scouts, but in Shanghai that was, that's where a lot of the social life occurred. And that was stratified because, depending on which Boy Scout troop you belonged to, you could tell where you fit in the society. Eventually Hongkew had a troop also. And there was Thirteenth Troop, it was a Jewish troop I can tell you, Thirteenth Troop was a Jewish troop. And the carryover from Shang-, from Europe still was that I didn't want to belong to the Jewish troop. That somehow my parents considered to be not quite as good, but these boys that I met there belonged to the Third Troop, which was called independent, sort of, like outside the, stood outside the, the, wasn't quite kosher but wasn't unkosher either, you know, it was sort of mixed. And I

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<sup>3</sup> Blumenthal refers to the exhibit in 1995 at the Neue Nationalgalerie of the works of George Grosz.



belonged to that troop, it was sort of a mix. There were a couple of French, a couple of Russians, this Finn, and so forth. And for some reason or other they took a liking to me and they asked me to join. So we had a British scout master, and that's where I learned English actually, very, very quickly. So I met these boys, I hung around with them, and they taught me the ropes and how to, what do thirteen-, fourteen-year-olds do in Shanghai. You know, spent the summer there, with them, joined the Boy Scouts.

**Hochstadt:** So that was the first summer that you arrived?

**Blumenthal:** Right. And then I went to, started school in the fall, the Shanghai Jewish School, which is a British, you know, on Seymour Road, the British school. Again, there were refugees in Hongkew went to the Kadoorie School, if you were lucky you went to the better school, you were in the west, there you went to the Shanghai Jewish School. Occasionally one or two or three people went to one of the "good" schools, which would be PTH, public school, or to Western District Public School, Public and Thomas Hambry Schools, they were PTH. Then there were two very good schools, one couldn't get into them. One of them was called the Cathedral School, connected to the Cathedral church, Episcopal Church. That was where the best British kids went. And then there was the Shanghai American School. Sometimes I meet people, tell them I'm from Shanghai, they say, "Oh, did you go to the Shanghai American School?" Well, the Shanghai American School was about far, as far out of reach as the moon was, which was where the missionary kids went, and the expatriate kids, and so forth. Had a very nice campus, you know, like American schools do, with a football field and all this kind of stuff. I should stop here for a minute, but you want to ask some questions. Catch my breath and . . .

## INTERRUPTION IN RECORDING

**Blumenthal:** . . . yeah.

**Hochstadt:** . . . but that's what's, that's what's . . .

**Blumenthal:** Yeah, all right. Well, Shanghai is a, I was going to say, Shanghai's an interesting place in many ways, because I'm interested in, I've always been interested in life's paradoxes and in the fact that, you know, things are rarely what they seem. Shanghai has the image and the justified image, deserved reputation, of being a totally lawless place. And it was a totally lawless place in many ways. You didn't need a visa to get there, there were no taxes, I mean, no income taxes, the laws didn't apply to the foreigners that were there, they were judged a different way, it was a haven for all kinds of adventurers and shady characters who were washed ashore there. But the society that functioned here was a highly stratified society and the values, all wrong in my views, but the values were all in terms of this kind of stratification. All you needed to do is to look at the police, for example. And someone like me very quickly saw that and began to absorb it. The, in the French Concession, the top officers were French. That would be down, you know, from the police commissioner on down to the major or the captain or whatever you would call him. The lieutenants, the lower level officers, were White Russian who spoke French. Those might be the people who would be in charge of the single police station, or of a bunch of police officers [unclear]. They either came in a

car or sometimes they rode on a bicycle. Well, the top people came in a car. Below the lieutenants were the sergeants and they were Vietnamese, what we called Annamese, Annamites, they were from Annam. They had been brought from Indochina. They rode on a bicycle, were bowlegged and rode on a bicycle, and the lowest were the policemen, the Chinese. So, you had the Chinese, their own country but they were at the bottom, the Vietnamese on top, sergeants, White Russias on top of that, and the people with French passports on top of that. Same thing in the Fr-, in the International Settlement. British on top, Russians, Sikhs at the next level, imported from India, the, directing traffic, making sure that rickshaw coolies, you know, didn't loiter on corners where they're not supposed to be, and then people, at the very bottom, the Chinese policemen. Very, very stratified. The same thing with the Boy Scouts.

Same thing with school, I told you the schools, there was Cathedral School, American School, Public, the Western, Western District Public School was a school where the good British families sent their kids, but not the top British families. PTH, Public and Thomas Hambry School was a public, British public school where the lowest level of British sent their kids. Who were the lowest level of British? They were British men who'd married Chinese women, so there you would find so-called British kids who looked a little Chinese, which in China, which in Shanghai were called half-castes. Or you might find a Sephardic Jew with a British passport, although some of those went to the Shanghai Jewish School. Now, the places when, then of course, outside all of this stratification was the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Schule, which was the German school where kids went, the German kids went, and outside of it stood the Shanghai Jewish School which was, sort of had no prestige at all, but it was just where the Jews went, and where the poor Jews went, because if they were really wealthy you'd go to one of these other schools. [unclear] worm your way, certainly go to PTH, maybe you could worm your way into Western District Public School. And you could see by the uniforms the kids wore. And the same thing applied to clubs, the same thing applied to country clubs, downtown establishments.

So it was, in the, in the highly, highly stratified, stratified society in that way, and you could tell by where people lived and where they worked. That had to be, did you have an income in foreign currency? Were you an expatriate? Were you sent there? And then there were, that, there were these odd categories like missionaries, although they were poor and loved the Chinese, the expatriates didn't love the Chinese, they just lived off them, but they didn't love them, but the missionaries, they were acceptable because they were, you know, they were of decent stock, put it this way. You know, after all, they were from the Midwest someplace, they were okay, you know. You sort of let them in and you probably give them a cheap price to get into the country club or something like that. So that, that's my point. And then, and you very quickly, your tenor very quickly is developed to understand where people fit in. So the fact that they said to me, you can be in the Third Troop of Boy Scouts, instead of in the 13th or the something, meant that I was being elevated into a social stratum different from the one that you'd expect. And at the time I thought, I was rather proud of that, but it's obviously ridiculous, but, so that, that's how Shanghai was. And it stayed that way. And, and, you know, after all, even the Japanese observed that, because the Japanese made a distinction and they said, as you found out from talking to Evalore<sup>4</sup> that if you came after

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<sup>4</sup> See interviews with Evalore Wulff, Berlin, January 16 and May 10, 1995.

1938 you belong to one class, but if you came before '38 you belong to another class. Makes no sense at all, I mean, if you think about it, why did they do that? By what, but somehow they were saying, any of those Jews who came from Europe after 1938 are inferior to, must be handled differently from those that came before. So Shanghai was, it was a lawless place without rules but highly stratified, stratified. If you think about it, it's kind of, you know, paradoxical.

**Hochstadt:** Did you, what kinds of, what real difference did it make to you, aside from a, perhaps a feeling of status, that you were in this Boy Scout troop instead of in another one?

**Blumenthal:** What it meant was that I learned that by not being around refugee kids, until I, I did, finally was amongst nothing but refugees during the war, of course, was that I learned English very quickly. And learned to speak it quite well. And . . .

**Hochstadt:** I was going to ask you why, I've met many, many, many German-speaking refugees, and very few of them speak English without an accent, no matter when they started. And I wondered why, you know, where your accent-free English came from.

**Blumenthal:** Well, it isn't totally accent-free, but it's, it gets there. Where does it come from? Ah, well . . .

**Hochstadt:** Is that part of it, what you just said?

**Blumenthal:** I think, I think that, no. That's what I've always had in a, I thought of something funny. I think it's God-given. If I believed in God, I'd say it's God-given. By that I mean it's, it's a, it's a talent like any other talent. It's not a sign of intelligence, particularly. It's just a, like having a musical ear and not having a musical ear. Some people learn languages more easily than others, and I think I do because I learned other languages easily too. [knock on door] *Wer ist das? Ja?* No, I think fundamentally it's that I just have an ear for it. I learn languages easily. But I, as a result of it I like languages, as a result of it I apply myself to it, you know. You like, I see in my children, when they like to do something, they do it well. They don't like to do it, they don't do it too well. So it's partly that. And other people don't have the ear, but, actually I'm not totally without an accent, but close to it. And I've met others who are like that. On the other hand, you're right, particularly somewhat older people would have more of an accent. But that, it helped, it helped that very early on I was with these kids, not all, some of them had accents too, those Russian kids and so forth, but there were others. There were these, in the Third Boy Scout Troop there were some of those odds and sods, British kids who had a half-Chinese mother or something like that and who spoke, obviously English was their mother tongue, but who spoke with a bit of an accent or, after all, British accents are funny accents of one kind or another, colonial accents, there was a British colonial accent.

**Hochstadt:** Are there other things, then, that you can attribute, benefits that you got from this somewhat higher status?

**Blumenthal:** Sure. First of all I met kids who'd been around in Shanghai all the time so they knew their way around. Third, I learned, I mean, many benefits of being outside the, getting,

widening my horizons outside German Jews. I learned what life for them was like, where their parents had come from, what schools they went to, what they did, what they had to study, some of them went to French schools, because we were living then on Rue de Grouchy. I learned, I mean, I just learned, as I say, I learned a lot about life in a, in a exciting sense, I mean, in tasting all there was to offer, but also in getting a perspective on, on how things happen to people, you know? And, and, and those are things that have, I'll tell you this now, I've told everybody that, I think the most valuable lesson I learned in Shanghai, and I think it began then, began then, but later on the, the ghetto has much better examples of it, which has stood me in good stead, because in my, I've been very lucky in life and I have had big jobs, and I have met people who have had even bigger jobs. I mean, I worked very intimately with one president and directly with two others, and I've had many dealings with, I mean, I've been a CEO of two large corporations, but I've had many dealings with other people here and in other countries who, you know, had large jobs. What did I learn which helped me in these jobs? I learned that power and position is transitory. It can be here today and gone tomorrow. I learned that money is great to have, better to have it than not to have it, but it can be here today and gone tomorrow. And I learned that one better not be too wedded to, attached to, or proud of one's title or possessions, because they can be here today and gone tomorrow. And above all I learned what counts is not who you are and whether you are a *Herr Doktor* or *Herr Doktor, Doktor Mult*, or *Herr Professor Doktor*, this is stuff that you have to address people here, or Mr. Ambassador, and Mr. Secretary, or Mr. President, or any of that stuff, that's just names, words. It's your inner resources that matter and when, I have a colleague on a board of directors who's a CEO of a large bank, and I know he's there because he just rose in the bureaucracy to be there and he has certain talents, obviously, not a stupid man or he wouldn't be there. I say to myself, oh, and he sits behind a desk that, big desk, and he's very proud of himself, or in the younger years when I used to be interviewed for jobs, you know, and people would, you know, secretary would bring you in and there would be a guy behind a big desk with all the symbols and appurtenances of power, I would say to myself, "I wonder how you'd do in Shanghai?" And it's a very real, it's very real.

Because I saw in Shanghai, in the ghetto in particular, unless I'm jumping ahead now, I saw people who had had large jobs in Berlin or wherever in Germany, and I saw people who had, came from environments where they had nothing, lived somewhere on Oranienbürgerstrasse and the father was a tailor and he was a waiter, cope with the adverse, cope with adversity, cope with the very difficult environment that existed there. And I saw that once the deck was reshuffled, thoroughly reshuffled, they could all, everybody was at the same level, they're both in the camp, they both had nothing, there was no way of telling who'd come out on top. As a matter of fact, more often than not the guy who had been a waiter would come out on top. Because the, what turned out is that the fellow who had been the editor of a large newspaper, for example, did not have the inner resources within himself to cope with the situation that he was faced, which meant not just that he remained poor, there were, everybody was poor, but that he degenerated as a, disintegrated as a person and as a personality. Stopped to wash, became obsessed with eating because he was starving, and became really a pitiful, pitiful human being. Whereas the other guy somehow, you know, it's like the guy in his jail cell who exercises, who always tries to keep fit, you know, tries to keep fit, tries to go out and hustle, do things, and so forth. So when, you know, frankly, right up to the President of the United States, of course, I always have great respect for the office, but I'd say to myself, I wonder what you'd do? You know. You're there by the grace of the good

Lord, I mean, it's luck to a large extent. Certainly what I have thought, I mean, why'd I get to be Secretary of the Treasury, why'd I get to be a chairman of the board of Bendix or Burroughs or something? It's luck. And, and, and, you know, even the fact that I'm smart enough to get a Ph.D. in economics from Princeton is fortune, you know. It's not something that I achieved. Of course you have to work hard, it's not only luck in life that happens, but some people work very hard just to make a bare living. So Shanghai taught me that what matters is what is within you and that one should not be too proud of what one has or to attach to what one has, because it may not be there and things change. Your health changes, all kinds of things change. And that life is full of, there are many roads to happiness, many roads to unhappiness, I mean, these are all trite sayings but, but it, they're very, if you, once you really understand them it means they have changed your outlook on life. That's what Shanghai taught me.

And Shanghai taught me that life is full of people that seem strange to you, because they look different, some have a beard, some do not, some dress differently, some talk differently, some come from exotic areas that you've never heard of before, but fundamentally, though they come from different cultures and have different ways of thinking, fundamentally their basic desires and wishes are pretty much the same. And you have to be open to people regardless of skin color and culture and learn about them and take them the way they are and, predictability about human beings and the foibles and the temptations of human beings is very uncertain, and courage is a commodity and scarce, all of that you learned in Shanghai. It's a wonderful laboratory, wonderful laboratory. Because there were the refugees from Russia, there were the, the, those people who thought of themselves as being something special, the tycoons of Shanghai, who, you know, if I think about it now, were nothing special at all, but they, because they could, the place was cheap and they got their overseas allowances, they lived like kings. There were the injustices between the Chinese that were huge, there were the prejudices and the tensions amongst different types of people. I could see what pressure would do, external pressure would do to the small-mindedness within, within the refugee community, the petty intrigues, but also grandiosity of spirit at times, and, so that by the time I came to the United States, I was twenty-one years old, I had, whether I understood it or not, I had seen enough and absorbed enough that I had a certain philosophy of life which stood me in good stead [unclear]. But that's, obviously I could spend, I could write a whole book about that, you know. But it's sort of, I was trying to sort of, by integrating it, that's what, and that began really in the Rue de Grouchy and it began in the Boy Scouts and in the kind of people I met. We'd go camping together and in meeting their parents, [name unclear], the guy who lived in the lane, his father was a Russian, was a Russian married to a French woman, but there's also lower-class French besides the higher-class French who were in a different school, who went to the College de Jean d'Arc, which was right around the corner on Rue Doumer. So I learned about, I learned about the conflicts between the White Russians and the Russian Jews. Of course I learned about conflict between German Jews and Austrian Jews and Polish Jews, but I already knew *Ostjuden*, I already knew a little.

I learned about illness and disease, how impor-, you know, how, how, how unpredictable health is. I mean, you know, we take our health for granted. Well, in Shanghai you very quickly learned that you may be, I mean, people dropped dead, you know. I remember there were, my parents knew, of course, got to know some refugees who lived in the general area we lived there, and very early on, the first summer, I think it was the summer

of '39, or it may have been the summer of '40, the next year. The summers were awful, it was very, very hot and sticky, and no real escape from it, because you lived in these crowded miserable quarters and you hated to go to bed because you couldn't sleep. And you hated to go to bed because you, it was a constant fight with vermin and so on. So the people sat outside for a long time, also Chinese sat outside. It was hard to go to sleep, because it was so very noisy after one, two o'clock in the morning, people playing *mahjong*, you know, you hear that. But my parents would go out with several people and one of them was a couple, name was Löwenberg. Now, what happened in Shanghai, again, was that my parents at least I think [unclear] did that, would classify people in their minds according to where they had been in Germany. Because my parents were full of these distinctions, and they were not unique at all by making these distinctions. One of the earl-, one of the questions my father would ask almost immediately when I was a kid in Berlin was, "*Was macht der Vater?*" You know, on the one hand very materialistic, but it was a way for him to classify, what kind of people are they? And so they would say, "[grumbling sounds] *ganz kleine Leute*," you know, these sort of, I don't know, "*Der war ein Verkäufer*," you know, he was a, he was a sales rep, some place, you know, sales reps are never [unclear] . "*Kultivierte Menschen*" [laughs] these expressions, you know, *kultivierte Menschen*, [unclear] *Doktor*, these things are all very funny. Even though I would say my parents weren't all that *kultiviert* themselves, but they thought of it that way, they thought of themselves that way. So Löwenberg were *kleine Leute*. They were nice people, they were funny, and had a Berlin accent and, they, they went out one night and they drank of something called kvas, you know what kvas is, it's this Russian drink made out of bread, without alcohol, drank it cold, big bottle. And the man got sick. He was a young man, much younger than my father, I don't what he got, maybe dysentery, I don't know whether he got it from the kvas, but anyways, after drinking that night, he may have eaten something else, I mean [unclear] , he was dead within three days. So the transitory nature of life, the disease, amoebic dysentery, typhoid, paratyphoid, I got paratyphoid years later, cholera, small pox, although you obviously tried to protect yourself. The illnesses in the street, the proximity of war, the cruelty of that, the after-effects of war, I could see it in them. You learned a lot in Shanghai, [laughs] you know.

And so when I look at my kids, my son horsing around in Princeton, five ya-, five acres in the back yard, you know, with the tennis court and a tree house and everything else, swimming pool next door. He has no idea about that, he'll be sixteen and have no idea. But I see kids, you know, students come to me, well, you must have that all the time at Bates College, they don't know what the hell they're going to do with their lives. "What should I do?" you know. Don't know their major, or if they know their major, they don't know, should I go to graduate school, or this or that. They're really still children, a lot of them, you know.

**END SIDE B, TAPE 1**

**BEGIN SIDE A, TAPE 2**

**Blumenthal:** I, I went to the Shanghai Jewish School until, that is thirty-, from the fall of '39 'til early '42. In 1941 when Pearl Harbor occurred, oh, incidentally, my mother earned a living

for us, which was enough for us to get by, by selling cloth. What she did was, she found some Russian Jew who had a wholesale business selling piece goods, you know, piece goods, and she would get this at a discount and then she'd go around to the little salons in the French Concession, International Settlement, that catered to the, the, the couturiers, that catered to the ladies that had money, the expatriates, and sell them, these, I guess she was an intermediary between the wholesaler and the retailer. And that way they made en-, she made enough money that we could live and we had a, we moved eventually from Rue de Grouchy to Rue Maresca to another, to an apartment, actually, where we had two rooms and a kitchen. And it wasn't bad.

**Hochstadt:** So she was doing all right with this work, then?

**Blumenthal:** She was doing all right. She was doing all right. My father wasn't doing much of anything.

**Hochstadt:** Was that out of shock at this transition or . . . ?

**Blumenthal:** No, it has more to do, yes, I, I think. I think my father was shocked when the bank collapsed in 1930 and his shock lasted until he came to the United States. [laughs] He really only changed when, he did, actually, when we came to the United States. But my father was an interesting man, a nice man, interesting man. He was a man who really would have been better off to have lived two centuries earlier. He, and he was, he went through a lot in his life and yet he was lucky enough until, always, always to have somebody to look after him. He always had somebody to look after him. His mother looked after him, his wife looked after him. For a while there he had to look after himself, when he came to the United States and then, my parents were divorced in Shanghai, then he got another woman who looked after him. And then she died and then he got to be quite old, but he remained in very good health until the end, and my sister looked after him, and that was okay with my father, and, you know. He was a, so, Shan-, in Shanghai, my mother looked after him. Now, before we mo-, you know, we didn't move, you know, the Stateless Refugee Proclamation was in February of '43, we moved in May.<sup>5</sup> Early 1942 that business stopped, because they couldn't get the cloth in any more. So life got much more difficult, and I don't know what the hell my mother did during '42. It must have been turning over the stuff that was still there.

But anyway, things got a lot tougher, and also then my parents divorced, during that year. There was a man whom my mother had known, my mother and my father had known in Berlin, he arrived, he was a very late arrival, he came through, through Siberia, and he hung around for a while and my mother went off with him, not particularly, I think, because it was, obviously she said she was in love with him, not because of him, but there, it was, had been a bad relationship with my father for a good many years. This my mother would have said

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<sup>5</sup> On February 18, 1943, the Japanese authorities in Shanghai issued an edict forcing all "stateless refugees", meaning Jewish refugees who had arrived since 1937, to move residences and businesses into a bombed-out square mile in Hongkew, the so-called Designated Area. The move had to be accomplished by May 18.

and did say that she was tired of taking care of him. She needed somebody to take care of her. Now, as it is, she went from the frying pan into the fire, because, which frequently happens, because this guy that she married was no bargain either and she wasn't much happier. It made, my mother was a very strong person, and she, not so sure that she could have been happy with any man because she's, that's a different story.

But, at any rate, my parents were divorced and in early 19-, and we lived in Rue Maresca, in 1942 I had to leave school because I had to earn some money and I got a job together with Horst Eisfelder and a bunch of other people in a so-called Swiss chem-, bear in mind it's 1942, the war hadn't really broken out, in a Swiss chemical factory. That's putting it, putting some gloss on it. There were a bunch of, there were three Swiss men who were expatriates, who had, the Swiss were in a kind of privileged position because they were neutral, who had come, been sent out from Switzerland and worked in a Swiss import-export company which dealt with chemicals called Lieberman Wälchli, quite a well known one. Well, they couldn't get stuff any more and I think on the side, I don't know that Lieberman Weltschli knew they were doing this, on the side, they got into business for themselves and how did they go into business? They found that there was a tremendous shortage, Shanghai was now closed off, the Japanese had occupied everything, shortage of certain pharmaceuticals, among them caffeine. And they came across a refugee scientist, whose name is Wertheim, Doctor Wertheim, and Wertheim said, "Oh, I know how to make caffeine. You make it out of tea dust." Lots of tea in China, you make it out of tea dust, and it's theine, but theine is chemically, once refined, indistinguishable from caffeine. And it was extremely expensive, I mean, if you could really produce it, since, and it was very important because you have it in all kinds of medications. So, they said, "Well, show us," and he had a little laboratory and he got some tea dust and showed them how to make caffeine and they said, "That's great." So they invested money, not a hell of a lot, I should add, you know, it was the most primitive of factories, and they hired some people, they hired sixty coolies, because the coolies had to carry the drums, big fifty-five gallon drums with fluid around the place. And on bamboo poles, it was a very, very primitive place, and some centrifuges and a place to heat and some things to refine and a little research lab and little office. And then they hired some cheap refugees, yours truly included, and we were gonna make this theine except, which you buy by these big bags, they had a Chinese compradore, everybody has a Chinese compradore as a middle man between, he's the guy that really makes the money, gets a rake-off for everything. You get the tea dust in, you know. Then we had a test, I was working in the lab basically to be, what did I do? I worked in the lab and I helped wash the glasses and get them ready, because they didn't trust the Chinese to do that properly, and there were, there were two refugee girls and they would, under the supervision of some people who were supposed to know something about chemical testing or pharmaceutical testing, test these samples to see whether the theine content in the tea dust was sufficient. First, and then also test the, the product as it went along. Very, very primitive. I don't have time to describe to you how the whole process worked. I mean, laughably so. Some things had to be shaken, you know, mixed. Well, what'd you have? You'd have a little machine that shakes it, you know? So you shook it. That was my job. For a half hour.

**Hochstadt:** Shaking stuff.

**Blumenthal:** I was walking around shaking something for a half hour, had to be shook for a



half hour. I'd walk around and talk to people and shaking this damn thing, all kinds of stuff. And I also had to go out and get Dr. Wertheim's lunch on a bicycle, I'd go get his lunch. It was not too far away. Summer and winter. But the only problem was that Dr. Wertheim, once the factory was built, couldn't make the stuff any more and worked the little lab, but it didn't really work when, *en gros* it didn't work, *en detail* it worked, so they fired him. Now they had this whatever money they had invested, it couldn't have been very much, and they tried to, they tried to make it, and in the end they did make theine, they did make theine. I don't think they ever made much money, because it took a long time, it was, the process was probably more expensive, but they did actually make theine, and I remember delivering, delivering it to whoever it went to be sold. I worked in that factory for a year and indeed, when we moved to the, to Hongkew in 1943, my parents of course were divorced, they were divorced in '42, my mother left on March the 13th, 1942, it was a Friday, I remember my father shouting, he was very sad about all this, "Remember it's Friday the 13th."

**Hochstadt:** Did you stay with your father?

**Blumenthal:** Yeah, my sister and I stayed with my father and we got a room, I don't know how they did that, whether they exchanged actually, or they sold and bought off the same people. Anyway, we got for what would have been a reasonable apartment, I mean, you wouldn't consider it reasonable, but by refugee standards it was, on the Rue Maresca in, off Avenue Joffre. You, we got, on Chusan Road, a room out back, no bathroom or anything, we had to go down, a communal kitchen where everybody in the house cooked, and there were maybe eight families in the house and one kitchen where they cooked. And a bathroom which not all eight families used, maybe three or four used. The bathroom was really a toilet. Actually, we were sort of like a box stuck on the back of the house, where that room was, and outside there was a sink so I washed outside in the sink, except in winters kind of, got kind of cold. And that's where we lived. And there was again, it was one room, but the wall was half built up and behind that wall my sister had her bed. And my mother and her husband, the rich man, the one, where they were living on five dollars a month, lived around the corner, very near, you've heard where the police station is, where we used to line up to try to get our pass from Mr. Ghoya.<sup>6</sup> Right next to it was a lane, Ward Road, Ward Road comes to the, you've seen, you've walked there. Well, one end was called Muirhead Road, the other was called Ward Road, although Ward Road is the first lane, where my mother lived. And then you walk up the Chusan Road, there's a little synagogue, I didn't then know it's exist-, did Pan Guang show you? Did somebody show you?

**Hochstadt:** Yes.

**Blumenthal:** Take you in the synagogue, there's this so-called museum there. It's very funny. I didn't know this thing existed. You go in there, you see a picture of me, I don't know whether you've seen that. Not just of me, a lot of other people, but it's, somebody hung me

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<sup>6</sup> Blumenthal refers here to Kanoh Ghoya, who was a Japanese official in the Bureau of Stateless Refugee Affairs. Ghoya was charged with issuing passes for refugees who wished to leave the ghetto for business purposes during the day. His capriciousness and occasional brutality are remembered by all who came into contact with him.

there, too. You go around, you turn right, you're on Chusan Road and that's where we were, so. My mother didn't have a, she had a room there with her husband, but she didn't have a place to cook, so she would come and cook on Chusan Road, down in that, when her, our appointed time was. And we'd get some of the food and then she would take the rest, and sometimes I'd bring the food over to her and she'd eat, she and her husband would eat there. And, of course, life, oh and I was still working at MCI, Mutual Chemical Industry, we moved in, we had to get a pass from Ghoya. And two things happened, well, it petered out because you couldn't get a pass, I mean, it was such a hassle to get a pass. A few times he threw me out for no particular reason. Then he told me to bring my father, I brought my father, my father didn't want to go, my father followed the policies, "*Was ich nicht weiß, macht mich nicht heiß,*" you know that expression, didn't want to go, then he went, and once he threw me out, the next time he gave me a pass, so, and it took so long you never knew, you had to line up there, that, and then, this place died in some fashion or other.

So from the end of '43 until 1945, I was really shut up and I didn't get out much any more. And then I was part of that ghetto culture, and, you know, that again had its own culture. It had the football, the soccer for the kids, you know, the soccer leagues, people played, it had the schools, it had the dating and the mating, it had all of the social, it had its own social stratification. It had the operettas, the art, the jokes, the restaurants, the *Kaffeehäuser*. And outside of it you had the war and you had following the progress of the war on maps where, of the camps, where we would put pins. And it had the Japanese propaganda broadcasts and the Russian broadcast which, until the war, we could listen to because they were neutral, so people who spoke Russian had to interpret for us, and we could see first the German advance and then the reverse of that. You had the first rumors in '44 of the loss of people in the, what became known as the Holocaust, although it was not [unclear] broadcasts from the States and elsewhere, but it seemed unbelievable and of course there was no contact. A lot of thought about what would happen after the war, and you had in the end, it got progressively more difficult, I think, the last, I'd say the last, the period, the per-, '44 was a difficult year, I believe. '45 on the one hand was when we had the air raid attacks, but it's also when somebody got some more money. You can read about that, there are accounts, I think I have that right. It got a little bit better. I got a job actually in forty-, sometime in '44 my mother who, my mother who until the war ended tried to exert some influence on me and it definitely, I mean, I was de-, I was on my own really whether she knew it or not from the time I was fifteen. But my mother didn't surrender, she didn't surrender easily, didn't surrender until the war was over. And I was nineteen when the war was over, she surrendered, because then I went off, I worked for the Americans, I was totally on my own, I didn't even live around there any more, I, I spent a lot of time out on the air base living there. And so then of course, I, we went our separate ways after that. But until then she was trying to exert [unclear] and occasionally she did. There was a lot of, I was very much like my mother in many ways, but there was also a lot of crash. A lot of my personality comes from my mother, but it also comes from, whether I, also comes from confronting each other, you know, battling with each other. My mother's the kind of woman, if I had a, in school, this is an actual story, if I, for each grade, for each class that you took, English, math, etcetera, they would give you a percentage, 88 or 76 or 97 or whatever. And then they give you the rank in the class, form order. I was in form three or form four of form order. So there are twenty kids in the class, they'd say fifth or third or second, it depends, you know, who had the highest. And then they had an average and on top it said, "grand form order." And there

was always a little girl called Lotti Lustig, who was always first, and I was second. Pretty good, eh? I thought it was pretty good. Nowadays, you know, I have learned, you know, my daughters, my children come back and I, you know, you praise them. Not even if they're second, if they're tenth, you praise them. Try to find ways to stimulate them, but [unclear] . My mother would say, I'd show her the thing, my mother would say, "*Sehr schön. Sag mal, wer war denn erster?*" [laughs] See, so my mother would, you know, she did, she, and, and I once, many years later, I said something about human relations, you know, how to deal with people. My mother's answer was "*Oh, weiß Du, als ich groß geworden bin, so was gab's bei uns nicht,*" you know, we don't know about human relations. That's true, she really didn't, she didn't, I think about it now, it wasn't meant to be mean or anything, it was just, that's just the way she was. Her son was second, that was fine, but why wasn't he first? You know. So, out of that thing that I'm sure some good things came, but also a lot of, so my mother insisted that I, quote "do something useful."

She didn't understand I was doing something useful, I was doing a lot of reading, actually. I learned, I learned a lot of stupid things. I learned Esperanto, for example, because I thought that would be the language of the future. And I learned Spanish, I learned Italian, I learned Esperanto, I read a lot. But, you know, I learned something useful, *etwas was man dir nie wegnehmen kann*, something that you, this was a, and what was that? Well, the ORT, you know what that is? The ORT had a course for young people for machine knitting, machine knitting.<sup>7</sup> They had a semi-automatic loom, you went back and forth on the thing and you knit socks or stuff. It's kind of ridiculous when you think about it today, [laughs] but, and also you got a half a bread extra. We were all on the Kitchen Fund in those, or whatever that thing is called, you know, we were all getting stuff because there was nothing to eat. And you got a half a loaf extra, half a loaf was worth a lot. So I, once she succeeded in influencing me, and there's a whole bunch of people, you know, what were we eighteen, seventeen, eighteen. It's mainly a joke, you know, and I learned how this machine knitting was. It's also where I learned about the Yeshiva, because we divided, there was a sort of an old building, there was a wooden wall between us and the Yeshiva who were on the other side.<sup>8</sup> And the wooden wall had sl-, there were slats that were, you could look through. And there were these people that were *davening* next door. That's the first time that I ever had seen, talking about learning things, this, you looked through the wall, you looked into the Middle Ages. These, these people were straight out of the Middle Ages. They had come from Vilna, I think it was, Vilna, to there and they were sitting there and doing their thing. They smelled terribly, and as a matter of fact, I, I think hygiene was not great in Vilna. It certainly wasn't great in Shanghai. So that's where I learned machine knitting, got my extra half loaf, and there was a time I could knit a pair of socks for you, but it's not a skill that a) *man kann es dir nie nehmen*, I don't think I could still do it, and b) I never used it. That's neither here nor there.

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<sup>7</sup> The Organization for Rehabilitation Through Training (ORT), an international Jewish organization, specialized in preparing youth for work in skilled trades.

<sup>8</sup> The Mirrer Yeshiva from Vilna was enabled to escape Poland through visas issued by Chiune Sugihara, a Japanese diplomat. This was the only yeshiva which emerged from Europe intact.

But that somehow ended and in early '45 I got another occupation, which was a very short occupation. I got up very early in the morning and I delivered the bread, where for a little bit of pay of some kind. Because everybody was on the, on the dole at that point. By '45 everybody, everybody, virtually everybody was on the dole, and so we were fortunate enough not to live in the camp. And I, they had a system where you delivered the b-, you picked it up at Ward Road, that's where I went, I picked it up, *zak*, big bag, and then I delivered it to people. And for that I got something extra, another half loaf, a loaf, or something.

**Hochstadt:** Did you deliver it to individual families?

**Blumenthal:** Yeah, yeah, around the street, Chusan Road. So I was the bread man, you know. So from, I don't know, six to nine in the morning I delivered the bread. And for that I got, I got some extra loaf, which I traded for other things. When you didn't eat all that bread, you traded it. But it was, it was the coin of the realm, something to eat was the coin of the realm. Also I got paratyphoid during this period and I spent some time in the, there was a hospital on Ward Road, I spent some time in the hospital, about two or three weeks. Fortunately, now paratyphoid is just twenty-one days of high fever. Just. People die from that, but fortunately when you're young and in good physical health, I mean, probably if I got it now I wouldn't make it, but probably when you're sixty or seventy it's not so easy, but when you're twenty, your resiliency is much bigger, so I went through that. Until the war ended, I spent a lot of time hanging around with some people in the camps, I had some friends there. So I saw what the camps were like and I observed, what I told you, the, the way in which people reacted to and adjusted to adversity.

And I learned that whether you were *Herr Doktor* or *Herr Professor* or *Herr General Direktor* in a prior life, even though people still talked about that and saw themselves in that way, meant, meant nothing. And that your inner resources of dealing with adversity meant a great deal more, and that's what I mean when I said that in later life when I came, you know, you can look at, I don't know, take people, at least you know, we've both [unclear], take somebody like Henry Kissinger. Henry is a man who has a, I would say, who does not suffer from an underdeveloped ego, put it that way. Smart guy, he is recognized by everybody as, well, just think of somebody like that. He's maybe a bad example, because he's so well known that, I don't know what would happen to him under the circumstances in Shanghai. But just somebody who is really well known in Germany, and I, I know of such a person who was an editor of a major newspaper. And you come there, first of all you're robbed of your language, because if your, if your stock in trade is to have to deal with the language and the language is no longer the language in which you deal, and it's a language you don't know, I mean, you can maybe learn to speak it in a rudimentary fashion, but very, very few people can. Very few people can learn a second language so well that they can go back to what they do and be skilled in that language. So you've lost the basic skill which is, which you need, which is a facility with the language. You've lost all your contacts, you know. Here you could call up and say, "Here's Dr. Rosenfeld." Everybody knows that Dr. Manfred Rosenfeld, everybody knows a Manfred Rosenfeld. "Rosenfeld, how do you spell that?" Nobody knows, nobody knows and nobody cares. You know? "Well, I used to be the editor of the *Frankfurter Allgemeiner*." "What's *Frankfurter Allgemeiner*?" "It's a German newspaper." "Oh, you were, that's nice," you know. "But I can't speak English too well." You know, what do you do with this guy? He had no money, no clothes, no language, no other

skills. And there isn't enough to eat. And it's too hot in summer and too cold in winter, and you're sitting in the second bunk of a camp, there's twenty-three other men in the same position. And you don't know how long you're going to sit there. And maybe you're worried about some family members who are not there. And how do you deal with that situation? So some people like that couldn't deal with it at all, and other people could. And that's why, when I, meant when I said, when I ran into people who were behind a big desk and who had big egos, that I would say to myself, "I wonder what you'd be like if you'd be where Rosenfeld was." You know? Without that desk, you know? Which is a part of, without pushing the button and saying, "Mary, you know, could I have a cup of coffee, please?" Or, you know, "Would you get the car," or "Tell 'em I'll be out at the airport in fifteen minutes for the helicopter to take off, you know?" And we can't say Mr. Blumenthal, you know, former Secretary Blumenthal's on the telephone. Today, who really answers the phone, I call, you know, if I were just, weren't a Blumenthal, nobody would know me from Adam, you know? So, it's a useful thing. Well, let's stop there. Right?

**END SIDE A, TAPE 2**

**END OF INTERVIEW**

Michael Blumenthal was born in Oranienburg in 1926, where his family owned a bank. In the wake of the Depression, the family moved to Berlin about 1930, and his mother opened a store for ladies' accessories. He attended a public school until 1936 and the private Waldschule Kaliski until 1939. His father was arrested during Kristallnacht. In April 1939 the family sailed to Shanghai on the "Haruna Maru". There Blumenthal joined the Boy Scouts and attended the Shanghai Jewish School. After leaving school in 1942, he worked for the Swiss company Lieberman Wälchli and for Mutual Chemical Industry. After the end of the war he worked for the American armed forces.

After coming to the United States, Blumenthal earned a Ph.D. in economics at Princeton University. He became CEO of Bendix Corporation and UNISYS, and served as Secretary of the Treasury under President Jimmy Carter. Blumenthal serves on the board of the International Rescue Committee. In 1997, he became Director of the Jüdisches Museum Berlin.

This transcript is part of the Shanghai Jewish Community Oral History Project, an effort to collect and transcribe interviews with Jews who lived in Shanghai, directed by Steve Hochstadt at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine. It was prepared with support from Bates College and the Dimmer-Bergstrom Fund.