

2-22-1990

Borenstein, Fanny and George oral history interview

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FANNY AND GEORGE BORENSTEIN

DEL REY BEACH, FLORIDA

FEBRUARY 22, 1990

Interviewer: Steve Hochstadt

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Fanny Borenstein: I came from, I was sent . . .

George Borenstein: All right, do you want my story first?

Steve Hochstadt: It doesn't matter who goes first.

GB: You want first? Because mine is a long story.

FB: Mine is also a long story.

SH: They are all long, well, all stories are long stories.

GB: You have it on all right?

SH: Yes.

GB: I was in the army, the Polish army when the war started, was mobilized. And I start running. The first place was, I was afraid when they took us towards Lemberg, Lvov, that there will be the Russians, but it was false, there was the Germans there. Then on the way there I saw the [unintelligible], I wasn't to go, to fall to the Germans so I run away from the army and went in, in a temple. It was dark at night with another friend of mine, I say, "We have no where to go, we have to try to go towards the Russians." So we went in the temple, it was night and quiet, I get up in the morning, was about forty Jewish soldiers, everybody hiding in the temple.

SH: This is in September, 1939?

GB: '39, right when the war started.

SH: And you were how old?

GB: Twenty-one, twenty-two. This, this age when I was, right after the army, I right away was mobilized because I was in the Polish army from '35 to '37, and then I was every year, for months coming in for maneuvers. So when we walked out on the street, we didn't know where to go, we start looking how to go towards the Russians. In the meantime I saw our trucks, the Polish army, was coming back from there. And I was scared the moment they would see me, they would shoot me because I'm a deserter. So we run behind the, the cemetery, behind the, till the trucks went away, and then we start walking towards Kremenets, towards the Russian side.¹ We came in a little town, was it Kremenets, the same story, where you can't see where you're going, so we went in *schul*. They took us a very fine, they give us to eat. And we were standing there and they say, this is, the side where you going, this is the right direction towards the Russians. And we stood there for a while.

SH: Was it all forty of you walking?

GB: No, no, no, no, me and my friends.

SH: I see.

¹ Kremenets lies 75 miles east of Lvov. It is now in the Ukraine.

GB: Everybody split, went different directions. And when I came in this town was already a couple of hundred Jews from all kinds. Besides this, when we was going toward the, the Russian front, from Poland the busses was going, running away way with some people, I don't know who they was, but there were no Jews in them, because you know how the Poles were. Because I am born in Warsaw and I spoke a better Polish than most of our leaders in our camp, but still the moment, the moment they saw that my name is Borenstein, they know I'm Jewish and I was persecute. And I saw the busses and I saw Jewish-born people walking and I had still my carbine and my radio, you know, you don't know what your, and I hold up the busses, I say, "Why you going empty? You running away, take those people." Because I was thinking of our kind of people. They took in the people and left. When I was there a couple of weeks . . .

FB: You were still in uniform?

GB: Yeah, I had the uniform, but I took off my initials. I was a like a corporal, I was afraid also that the, this in a minute I will tell this story. So when we came, one of my youngest brother came to me. You know that, that, that there was such a, a dilemma. Nobody knew who was alive who was not. He says, our parents and my sister, they are alive, but the home everything is burned down.

SH: From the Germans?

GB: Yes, bombed Warsaw, it was bombed completely. So my brother went back to Warsaw to tell them where I am and this was already occupied Kremenets from the Russians. Me as electrician, they gave me right away a job, which was a big mistake, but I took the job, because in Russia the moment you take a job, and you are a guy with a profession, they don't let you out, you already. So when they come in I had already an apartment for them. Because . . .

SH: Your family came to you?

GB: That's right, my father, my mother, my brothers, and my sister, the whole family. And the younger brother, he didn't, he didn't come back anymore, we didn't know what happened to him. So, in the meantime, the, one of the boys what I got acquainted went into NKVD and says, because I was in the searchlight, very expensive equipment, the searchlight against the airplanes. When the airplanes appear you put the light on them, you blind them, they can not see, like. So this guy took me in and I didn't speak Russian at the time and he introduced me to this NKVD officer. I didn't like it right away, I saw, and if you can recall they killed out 360 Polish officers that time. He says to me, "What was your rank?" I say I was a corporal. He said, "Show me your hand." I, he says, "You don't have callouses. You must have been an officer." I right away see I'm in big trouble and I explain to this guy, I said in Yiddish, I said, "Tell the guy that in the Polish army, Jews was not officers." So this was the savior, if I wouldn't fall to this trick he would be, put me away with the others. Okay. And then my parents came down, we settled down and comes this time when the Russians, going from one town to another, you needed a paper, you know, like a, like a pass . . .

FB: A passport.

GB: . . . because you cannot move from one town to another, and I saw that's bad. So I said to my parents, "You know what? I have an apartment for you, you already settled, I'm going Vilna." Because that time Vilna used to be Poland, but when the Russians came in, they give it

back to Lithuania, because originally Vilna used to belong to Lithuania. So my father says, "Well, you want to go maybe you find a better life for us, too. Maybe you take us out, too." So when I, to go to Vilna wasn't so easy, because you have to go to borders. So what do you do? You go close to the border and when, in a Jewish little town, I don't remember the name, and I said I wanted to go over there, the Jews were helpful everywhere. When I come to the border, he says, "You have to stay here and we have to pay a guy, you know, for taking the black border over, we have to pay him." I didn't have much money with me, you know, I was, so a couple says to me, "You will go with us." They was very nice, they paid for me. And we start going through the woods, there was big snow and you fall in and, you know when, when it's heavy snow, yes, we got cramps in the legs. Finally, thank God, we come over to the other side, was a town before Vilna, a little town. The same story, we went in to the *schul*, and they say, "You have to be quiet now, at night we take you over to Vilna." And it was, we come over to Vilna, it was beautiful, we was in the thousands of Jewish refugees it was there. And the Christians, which was from the elite from the Polish society, they all ran away. They ran mostly towards the Germans. They was afraid, because the Russians was for them like, like for us was Hitler.

And we staying in Vilna a couple of months, the Lithuanian government couldn't handle so many refugees, so they split us, put up to little towns outside Vilna, the little towns near Kovno, Kovno was the capital. And this is the way, when I came over there When I come down to this little town, the Jews were so fantastic. I, I, I am from Warsaw, we had a different dialect, the Galician, or the Polish, and they, they called the Litwaks. They couldn't probably understand me, like you have here the, the Texans talk with, with a different accent. And I said, "I'm lost, I don't know where I'm going, I'm going a little town Jonava."² They say "Don't worry," they took me in the train and I went to the toilet, I come back to the train and they said, "This is the town, you go down," and I put my coat on, I feel it's heavy. I put my hand in the pocket, it was full of money put in there. And I come in this little town, so I go over to where we're going is there *schul*, no, go to the rabbi. I went over to the rabbi, he says, "*Mein Kind*, don't worry, you're in good hands." And we was there for over a year. He assigned me to a couple, they had a pharmacy, and I went to eat in it, they assigned me a room, and he also want to give me money. I say, "Rabbi, I don't come here as a *shnorer*. I would like to do some work, if you have somewhere that I can work, I'm an electrician. He says, "You're not allowed to work here, you're a refugee." So I went to lunch with those people and it was already Pesach. Next day I didn't want to go, I didn't want to be a nuisance to people, and I sit in my room. I had a little room, the room was about 4 by 5, like a big closet, but this was fine, it was, they come to me at lunchtime and say, "You should be ashamed of yourself. We wait with our lunch, as long you're here in Jonava, you are our guest. My son," he says, "is in the United States. You are like my son." It was very fine. And I was trying to feel, then I got a letter that my parents are all in Siberia. And I was crying.

² Jonava is 30 miles northeast of Kovno in what is now Lithuania. Borenstein had traveled 350 miles north from Kremenets to get to Kovno.

Then I was not direct hooked up with the Mirrer Yeshiva,³ but they had a big crowd and I heard the rumors that you go to Kovno, the capital, to the Japanese consulate. You say you want to go to the United States, they give you a visa for one dollar. At that time I didn't have a passport, because the Polish Consulate was already not there, but the British delegation give us out forms like a passport, which is the British Consulate Polish Legation. And this piece of paper I got the visa for one dollar.

SH: A visa to America?

GB: No, a transit through Russia.

SH: Transit through Russia. So you had gone to . . .

GB: Because I had the Japanese, I had the Japanese done, the visa . . .

FB: He couldn't come to America.

GB: When I got the Japanese visa, went in for the, applied for the transit from Russia. But at that time was a lot of people afraid, because the moment you apply a visa for Russia, for Russia out, they send you to Siberia. I took a chance, because my parents are anyhow in Russia, Siberia, so I figured if they don't let me out, I will be with them.

SH: Tell me a little about going to the Japanese Consulate to get these papers.

GB: The visa?

SH: The visa.

GB: This was very easy. It was like a piece of cake. You went in, you said you want a visa, and this, this was later, but is not important now, but this Japanese Consul, we found out later, he defied his own government. Because we found out that he wasn't supposed to give out visas. But to give everybody who came in, over five thousand people, he gave visas.⁴

SH: Was it just Jews who were, who wanted these visas?

GB: Mostly Jews.

SH: So did you have to stand in some long line? Were there lots of people?

GB: No, no, no. You came in, you, you show him the pass, the paper like you have and they give you a date, two days, or three days later, you come in, pay a little, it was like a piece of

³ The Yeshiva in Mir was one of the best known Jewish schools in Europe. Nearly the entire school traveled to Japan and then Shanghai along the path taken by George Borenstein.

⁴ The Japanese Consul, Sempo Sugihara, defying explicit instructions from his own government, issued between one and two thousand transit visas to Japan to Polish refugees in Kovno within a few weeks in the summer of 1940. Although Sugihara was disciplined by the Japanese government, his heroism was recognized later by Yad Vashem.

cake. But then was the, they're afraid, you didn't know if you going to get the transit from the Russians, because you applied for the visa and you know in Russia the, the moment you apply for something against them, you're, you're out.

FB: At that time. Today it's a little easier. [laughs]

GB: And it was frightening. It was a week, was two weeks, three weeks we was going around. A lot of people who left out us, we just run out from the towns where they used to live, because this little town when I was there was mostly already communist, the Jewish boys was running it. And they asked me about a couple of boys which they belong to the Bund.

FB: Workman's Circle here, you know, the Bund?

GB: Bund. And the Bund is against the communists. So when I heard those two names I went down, I say, You fellas, the mayor asked about you." They split right away to another town. So suddenly middle of the night about four o'clock, a knock at my door. So I figured, you already going to Siberia. They called that I have to come in, in the morning to pick up my visa.

SH: Your transit.

GB: Transit to go. Now is another question. To go to Japan costs hundred and fifty dollars. Where we get the American monies? There was a black market, you could buy the dollars, but when you went there to tell them, "Listen, I don't have American money, I can give you rubles," they say, "Now go to Café Moynicke. You buy the dollars from your Jews." Here you're not allowed to have Jewish, American money and here they asked you to pay with American money. But I took the same chance. I bought the dollars and I paid them and I got the visa. On the way to Vladivostok we was on a train for twelve days. And this was the . . .

SH: Who was on the train? You and other people?

GB: A lot of people. This was a Trans-Siberian train, goes twelve days from Moscow to Vladivostok.

FB: There were, there were only the Polish Jews?

GB: No, no, no, the Russians. There was a lot of people. There wasn't . . .

FB: No . . .

SH: Were there a lot of other Jews, too?

GB: Yes, yes, yes.

FB: Other Jews, German Jews and then, no . . .

GB: No, no, I'm talking from, from our kind of Jew, Polish Jews.

FB: No, that's, that's what I ask you. And he is afraid that I am on the defensive. All right wait, okay, okay, okay.

GB: So when I come closer to Vladivostok, to Novosibirsk, where I know my parents are there on the train, I told them, "Hey, my parents are going to be there," and they was collecting money and food to give it to them. I come to Novosibirsk there, nobody's there.

SH: You expected them to meet you at the train.

GB: Yes. Right!

SH: You had sent them a letter.

GB: I sent them months before a letter that which day I'm going to leave, which day we will be more or less in Novosibirsk, and the people in the train was every excited. So we went down and the train was about forty below zero, when I went down, you don't feel it because there's no wind, was not, but you [unintelligible], and I was disappointed, they didn't come in. When we came on to Vladivostok, right away we had a group from our people waiting to go on the little boat over to Tsuruga, which is already Japan.⁵

SH: How many people?

GB: I think was about eighty people or maybe more, but I, that's about. When we get up on the ship, was an overnight cruise from over Vladivostok to Tsuruga, and we got up in the morning was like sardines, everybody was puking up on each other, was laying like sardines. But the smell was terrible. But the moment we got out in Tsuruga, it was like you come to heaven, was beautiful blooming the trees, was a little snow, it, and I never in my life saw this kind of life, because you saw the Japanese in the kimonos. We never saw this in our life. So I pinched myself. I say, "Am I alive?" It is, here you come from, from, from dead and, and hunger and all this, and here it's blooming everything. We were there couple of hours and a committee came and took us to Kobe.

SH: All of you eighty?

GB: Yeah. We came over to Kobe, was a little town, a beautiful town. Kobe is in Nagasaki, no, Kobe is a little town which has a harbor from, I don't remember the, the harbor now, but that, that isn't important. And we were there for quite a while. In Kobe was the, about four hundred people already. It was a Jewish synagogue from the white Russians what ran away from the revolution from Russia. They was very nice to us. They took in four in a room, rent us rooms, and it was beautiful.

SH: Could you say what month you made this trip across?

GB: It was in February, must been in February or January in 1940 to '41, '41. When we got in this little, Kobe was beautiful, there was a big committee, and a couple hundred people was walking around, because there's no European restaurants or coffee shops like we are used to. And the place I was staying there I got acquainted, because I speak six languages, with the people in the hotel, which I wasn't living in the hotel. I would come in because there was Armenian people, no Jewish people, and I got acquainted there. And when they saw me, with that acquaintance, he says, "We have a room for you." It was a room like we call it a porch, a closed-in porch. He says, "If you want, you can stay by us." I was happy all by myself. The

⁵ Tsuruga is a Japanese port 50 miles north of Kyoto.

porch about six foot by ten. It was a li-, it was fine. But when I lay down sleeping, next morning I get up, I think something on mine, on my bed is laying, I think, what a cat, a dog. It was a big rat.

FB: Oh.

GB: And, but the Japanese they don't kill rats.

FB: Why not?

GB: They don't kill 'em. So I was meeting the people and I said to this owner, I say, "I am from the restaurant business. We had a restaurant in Warsaw. I would like you to open a restaurant here. I will be your waiter." He says, "Why do you come with that idea?" I say, "In Kovno, in, in, in Vilna the people, the Jewish people congregate in the coffee shops. The politics, they sit down, they, they, they get together." He says, "It won't work," he says "I have an empty place." I say, "You have tables, chairs." One thing what they didn't have European food. And all those people, everybody got money from the committee every day a few yens for spending for food. I said, "Do me a favor, try to get some eggs and bread." Because the Japanese don't eat bread. So he start getting in white bread and eggs and I went into the committee and I put a big sign that I, George Borenstein, am the waiter in this hotel, you can have breakfast and lunch. The next day I had about eighty people come in to eat, and he was stunned. He says, "How did you do it?" I say, "I know my people and I know how they feel. They have a place to come in and they have to have European food." He says, "We going to pay you so and so much." I say, "I don't want any pay. You did nice for me." He says, "You know what?," he says, "You doing a good job. We going to take in two waitresses and you will be the manager." I said, "Fine." And business was booming, hundred people, hundred twenty people a day, twice and three times a day. Two days later the Japanese police came in and I'm not allowed to work there, because I'm a refugee, so this stopped already and a few days later they send us out to Shanghai. But this experience I will never forget in my life. This was the worst experience. As clean Japan is, and beautiful and the air is good, Shanghai is . . .

FB: Dirty.

GB: . . . the humidity is [unintelligible] and, and so I came down I had a suitcase, my suitcase I had, I think, two shirt, and a pair of pants, that's all. And I come down in this little town, this same committee picks us up from the, by the harbor.

SH: How many of you were on this ship? Or so?

GB: I would figure about hundred twenty, hundred fifty. And they assigned me to a room a Russian woman. She was with one arm, and all right, a little room, a very tiny room. I laid down . . .

SH: Was that in Hongkew?

GB: No, in Shanghai. In Hongkew.

SH: In Hongkew.

GB: Yeah. Yeah. They call those little rooms a *Zähler* room, *Zählerzimmer*, the little room,

Zählerzimmer. It's like about four by five.⁶ We, we used to live in this, a room like this. So when I lay down to sleep, at midnight in the night, I'm itching, I'm itching, I'm itching. I put the light, was hanging a lamp, I pulled the pull chain, millions of bed bugs are on me, and it was in a cot. I was sitting all night. I was crying. I come from heaven to hell, from beautiful clean Japan to China. And I was waiting the morning to tell her, "Lady what's going on?" And the moment I got up, I say, I say, in Russian to her I say, "What are you doing here? It's all bed bugs." You know what she answered me? "You'll get used to it."

FB: [laughs]

GB: I was going around, I didn't sleep all night and I talked to some people there and they say there is one remedy to it. Go into pharmacy, they sell you little bags, like tea bags, put it in the four corners under your sheet and the bugs won't bother you. Sure enough, I lay down sleeping I was waiting that night to scratch me, I slept through the night. I got up in the morning I see in all four corners [unintelligible] spots. I lift up the sheet, thousands of bed bugs by those bags. And this was my beginning. Then money was scarce, you know, we didn't have money and people, I was looking, what do you, the committee used to give you every day, or you go to the, a place where they give you breakfast and you take it home where you eat it, or they give you some money. So we used to take some money and was walking around the, it, it, by night you couldn't sleep, because the heat was so, the little clothes you have after three, four days with the mildew so big that you have to clean up your shoes, and whatever you have because the, the mildew was on your clothes, green. Then I saw, I have to make something. Working as an electrician is no, impossible because you cannot compare to the Chinese, they're working for, for, for handful of rice. So I saw guys taking suitcases with piece goods going in the Japanese quarter and selling three odd pieces for suits. I, I, I was never bashful, so I went to another guy, I say, "You know, I would like to go see where those guys are going." So I followed a couple of the guys and I see what they doing in the Japanese quarter. They taking out the material and open out, and sell three piece, for three piece suit or whatever. So now I went into this place where they going in, and I went into and I say, "Mr. [unintelligible]" I say . . .

FB: [unintelligible]

GB: [unintelligible] . I said to him, "I would like to go with material to sell, but I have no money to give you for deposit." He says, "Wolfgang, give those boys whatever they want. It's all right." I went out next day with four pieces. I sold two pieces right away. We made five yens a man. I was already in business.

SH: Now you say, "those boys". Was there more than one of you? Were you with friends or . . . ?

GB: I with another guy, but, because other couples was always going throughout and this was starting to bring me to, to make a living. Then I was doing all kind of business with buying stuff and selling. It, you know, here they call it black market, over there it's a way of living. You buy an oiler, I can of oil, it's a gallon of oil, you keep it for three days, you sell them for double the price you paid. Everything was going up. Went through a time that one U.S. dollar was twelve million Chinese dollars. And I was trying, doing all right, and I was making us money, the same story. I had some friends, they had a pawn shop. A store from the street going up,

⁶ A *Zählerzimmer* is a meter room, where the meters for electricity are located.

but the guy didn't do any business. So I said to him, "Markus, you know what? Let's open a coffee shop here." He said . . .

FB: . . . and we had a coffee shop.

GB: So he says, "Come on." I say, "Do you have nothing to risk. I have a place where I can buy the tables, the chairs, and lunches which is closed, you just give me this place." Sure enough, we opened this business and . . .

SH: Where was it?

FB: Chusan Road.

GB: In Hongkew, on Chusan Road. [unintelligible]

SH: Chusan Road?

GB: Yeah, and after . . .

FB: Tell him the, the, what, what the name of the store was. What the . . .

GB: After a while we had bought the furniture . . .

FB: Don't!

GB: . . . if you, but then you don't have the story!

FB: Never mind!

SH: It's all right! It doesn't matter to me.

FB: It's all right. [laughs]

GB: So we said, "What name?" I said, "Let's call it Café Europe, because European people." Sure enough, we kept the name of Café Europe and it was a booming place. But for me, you know, I, I was a . . .

FB: Better that this story don't tell.

GB: I, I was . . .

FB: Better stop it already.

GB: I didn't want to be tied up. I was going all the time out with women, was dancing. We had nice night clubs there and I was doing everything, night life. So after about two months I said to him, "Pay me out." He says, "George, you have a good business. Why do you selling it?" I say, "I don't want to be tied up. I want to be free to go where I want. I want to sleep when I want." He paid me off. This was the biggest mistake. And then I met my wife and we got married in Shanghai. And that's the story. And then we went from, further you have to know the whole story? Or you were just interested in Shanghai?

SH: I'm mainly interested in Shanghai. But tell me about how, what happened when the Japanese said everybody had to go into Hongkew.

GB: No, we went right away to Hongkew.

SH: You were already there.

GB: Okay, now I had a pass to go out to the free towns. You know Shanghai was five boroughs, the French Concession, International, the British, and Hongkew. And when you make a living, they give you a pass to go out.

FB: I have it still here. The pass.

GB: And I was a guy who made a nice living, so this I got a pass that I could go out in town and I was making business. That was the story. Otherwise the people, we was like in a ghetto. The ghetto wasn't like the Germans', only for Jews. You live in a district with the Chinese, but you cannot go out when, and everywhere was a check point to go out. Our people used to stay on duty to see . . .

FB: They checked it.

GB: . . . if you have a pass to go out and you have to be back by this and this time. And I was the fortunate one, was making a nice living and I got a pass. That why I was doing business.

SH: What were you, what were you doing for work after you bought out of the restaurant, got bought out of the restaurant?

GB: I was in all kind of business. What type was it? I was dealing with diamonds and I was dealing whatever! It was funny, I used to go into, with exchange people, there's so many exchange stores, you know, they call it pawn shops. I could've, go into a Chinaman, which they knew me already, I say, "I need a one karat diamond, the European people want to buy it." I say, "How much is the diamond?" He could say, "A hundred fifty dollars." I say, "Too much." He says, "No less than a hundred twenty." I take this diamond, go around the block to another Chinese pawn shop and say European . . .

FB: You want a drink or something? You want a cold drink?

SH: Coffee, if you have some coffee or something.

FB: Coffee? Yeah, I have only the Sanka.

SH: Oh, that's fine.

FB: Yeah?

GB: I went into a Chinese man and I said, "A European want to sell this diamond." He says, "How much you want?" I says, "I want two hundred dollars." He says, "Oh, no, I can give him hundred and fifty." But this was kind of business, you don't do every day business, but I was doing a nice living, and was living nice. This was the story about what I did all the time and

then . . .

SH: Had you moved out of this little tiny room?

GB: Yes. We are, oh, this is a, when we got married, I rented an, one room with a balcony, it was twenty dollars a month. It was a lot of money. People didn't make this money in a year. Because I was living comfortable, I want to live like a human being. When we got married I rented this room.

FB: Ask for sugar or . . . ?

SH: Just a little milk or cream or something. No sugar.

FB: No sugar? Because I have sugar in the . . .

SH: No, no, no sugar. Thank you.

GB: So . . .

SH: When did you get married?

GB: In '46.

SH: So the war was over already.

GB: Yes.

FB: Yeah, we were sure . . .

GB: Because my wife . . .

FB: . . . because I was a widow already . . .

GB: She, her husband was killed there when the Americans, they bombed Hongkew where the Japanese were and there was closed and he was killed.⁷ Afterwards, it, I knew of them before, and then we got married. We went first out, got married in the Polish Consulate. A couple of months later I went to the rabbi and made a relig-, a religious ceremony.

FB: We had the ceremony in the house.

GB: Yeah. And this is about Shanghai, then when we left . . .

FB: George, where is the, George, where is the cookies?

⁷ Nearly every refugee remembers the terrifying day, July 17, 1945, when American planes dropped bombs in the heavily settled area of Hongkew. About 30 refugees were killed, and hundreds, perhaps thousands of Chinese.

GB: In the back. When, before we left China I had, I, I was very acquainted with a lot of people who, people were a friend of mine in the United Nation, in URRRA, URRRA.⁸ They call it for relocation refugees, and I said, I want to be repatriated back to Poland, which I didn't have the intention to go. But my parents, I got in the meantime news, they had come back from Siberia and they all in Paris, living in Paris. So I said, I want to go back to Poland, the reason that when I come back to France, I can ask for refugee status, what, what they call it, not, asylum, political asylum and sure enough. She had her Austrian passport, no, at that time, she was on my Polish passport.

FB: No, I was not on your passport. I was on . . .

GB: From Shanghai, from Shanghai when we came, was on Polish.

FB: I had no Polish passport.

GB: You was on my Polish passport.

FB: I had an Austrian passport.

GB: When we, before we left, I said to my friend, I said, "I would like to go to repatriate, but I would like to go first class." He said, "You're crazy, George. You're young people." I said, "I don't want to go." Because it was like a turmoil, the, the, and people didn't know when to go, because the war was over and you don't know, the United States I was applying, I couldn't get my visa, because I was waiting for eight years. Then my uncle sent me papers to go to Cuba. Because I applied for Cuba, I lost my status to go to United States. So I had to apply from the beginning at new. So when I told them this, I want to go first class, he called me up at night, he says, he says, "Because we are friends, I make you in charge of the group, you will be the leader. For this you will get first class and you will get fifty dollars traveling expenses for telegrams." And this was the reason we went from Shanghai to, to Marseilles. Five weeks in a first class ship.

SH: When is this? When did you leave Shanghai?

GB: This was in, in '46. Was in April, in May '46, and we arrived in . . .

SH: Who was on the ship with you?

GB: A lot of people repatriated to Austria, Austrian Jews and . . .

FB: From there, you are from, from Los Angeles or where?

SH: No, I'm from New York.

FB: From New York, because I don't know if you know, because he's from Los Angeles. He came with us on the ship.

⁸ Borenstein means UNRRA, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency, responsible for resettling stateless and homeless refugees after the war.

GB: They went back. He's now the vice president of ABC.

FB: He's a big shot now on, on ABC.

GB: He's in Los Angeles. A good friend of mine.

FB: We met him in, in, because my son-in-law is also at ABC.

GB: Talk later. Let's finish mine, then you will tell your stories.

FB: You know, you take, you take . . .

GB: Am I right? You want to have . . .

SH: [laughs] You can't ask, you can't ask me to be in between.

GB: Yeah, but you want to have my story, then you have your story, because he's confused. So this was the reason when we came to Paris.

SH: So how many, how many Jews were on that ship, about?

GB: About, about two hundred.

SH: And all kinds, Austrian . . .

GB: Austrian to Yugoslavia . . .

SH: . . . Polish . . .

GB: . . . Polish, Czech, and Hungarian, was all going back to Europe. And this was the story about, from Shanghai.

SH: Now tell me a little more about, how did the Japanese affect your doing business, the Japanese occupation of the city, or . . .

GB: Personally with me, it came out afterwards that this Toga, what was his name, Toya?

SH: Ghoya?

GB: Toya. Toya was . . .

FB: Toya. Toya.⁹

GB: . . . in the beginning he was very bad. If a guy was taller than him, he would slap him in

⁹ The Borensteins are referring 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.

his face. Like her boss was a tall man, good looking, he jumped on the table and hit him in the face. He says . . .

FB: Oh boy, please . . .

GB: . . . "I'm bigger than you".

FB: He was a six footer.

GB: But after the war, shows out that he was collaborator with the United States, that he helped Jews.¹⁰

FB: You want the, the . . . ?

SH: A little bit, please.

GB: But this was, but that was very rough. We were, I was standing with a friend of mine in the alley, we was talking, and a lot of the Japanese was not Japanese, they was Korean, but they talked the same and looked the same, and this guy came over because we was talking Yiddish and he didn't like it, he smacked him in his face and broke all his things, but you go to the police, you couldn't do nothing . . .

SH: Thank you.

GB: . . . because you are a refugee, you have no right. But the police told us, the Japanese police . . .

FB: He was also mean to women.

GB: . . . that he is not a Japanese, the Japanese are not so rough, this is the Koreans, that's what it was. What else you want to know? The Japanese, when I dealt with them in business, they was very nice people and very polite, but on the other hand when, when comes towards the Americans in the other, they, they was very rough, they was wild like animals.

SH: And then how, how did you, how were you affected by the end of the war and the coming of Americans.

GB: Oh it was, it was, to America? I didn't come to America.

SH: No, the coming of Americans into Shanghai.

GB: Oh, we, we, we was waiting for it. This was the, like, like, like the, you see, heaven opened up. We was jumping for joy in the street. And the funny part was that, one day was too early, we were jumping in the street, it wasn't declared that the war was over and the Japanese was running with their bayonets in the street and hitting people. We thought . . .

¹⁰ After the war a rumor circulated in Shanghai that Ghoya may have collaborated with the Allies. There is no evidence for this belief.

FB: Because it was too early. But it was over and they didn't want to tell us. Afterwards we found out it was two days before and we were, I was a widow, I was not under the very happy one, because the, when the war was over, over, I was a widow about thirteen days, because he was killed. This was the last hurrah what the American did, you know?

GB: They bombed the Japanese . . .

FB: They, they bombed the Japanese . . .

GB: . . . warehouses.

FB: . . . warehouses and I was living next to the warehouse and they bombed it like a carpet you know, they did everything. They bombed it but we was also, the fact that it was . . .

GB: They put the Jews close to the camp.

FB: Yeah, they did it special. We, we were supposed to go, to live there that, but this was in District, you know, that they was thinking, they wouldn't bomb because the Jews were living there. But they bombed and then forty-seven Jews . . .

GB: Died.

FB: . . . died and also were a lot of in-, injured people at that time. And I was injured also, because I, I run out, because I couldn't even run out in the street any more, because one of the houses fell down and I didn't know that my husband was under this, under those things, because he came, I was sick on this day and I had, had attack of my kidneys. He came to, to take my, from the doctor, doctor was by me, you know, to take the, the prescription, to go and bring me the medication and he never came back. And he was with a niece from me, and she was thrown up on the, on the whole, on the mountain where the house fell in.

GB: On the roof on top.

FB: On the roof I found her there. So both we was running like the crazy one, she was ripped off, everything. Thanks God, nothing really, she had shrapnels . . .

GB: Scratches.

FB: . . . scratches, she was a kid, I think she was that time fifteen years old. And everything, she was in her brassiere and it had all the clothing, like you see the, the, the Vietnam kids. But she was not complete naked, but that's how she was, no shoes, no everything, she came out with him from my house and through her I know that he was, so all the Jewish people came and, came to, to . . .

GB: Yeah. Bury the people.

FB: . . . bury the people. I was, they, they took me from, from, they wanted to put me in hospital there. I was very sick. I had a very bad attack that time, but I wanted to be by the funeral. And two days later we had another bombardment and they disturbed the, the, the, the . . .

SH: The graves?

FB: . . . the, the, the graves, the graves were, everything because when I came out four weeks later, everything was, that whole thing again was opened up, you know. And I have pictures, but now I found out because I'm not in charge anymore, that there are sisters and brothers there you know, they came, you know, and they, they took all those Jewish people in there.

GB: Now you start up, you better start from how you came to Shanghai.

SH: Well, wait one minute, I wanted to ask you a couple more questions and then we'll do your whole story.

GB: Yes. Yes.

SH: What was your, what kind of relationships did you have with German Jews or Russian Jews or Polish Jews?

FB: Not so good.

GB: Oh, good question. My, no, I had a good one. The Polish Jews especially we, they, they didn't, you see, there was a time that the German Jews was always figuring that they are the higher echelon, but I was dealing with German Jews, with Austrian Jews, and with Czechish Jews, with Hungarian, I was with them all mixed, I was in, in a good, but actually each group was by themselves. You know we had the same problem, when we had the people, we didn't have enough money during the war to supply the poor people. We the Polish people, our group, we had a kitchen to ourselves. Why? Those people who make money was donating. Those guys who made money, they was . . .

FB: That was not cliqueish? You know they had for them.

GB: Yeah, but . . .

FB: They was not together.

SH: Where was this kitchen?

GB: In Shanghai.

SH: Where? Where was it?

GB: In one of the, the places.

FB: Because I didn't . . .

SH: In Hongkew was it?

GB: Oh yeah, all Hongkew, everything was Hongkew.

FB: Yeah, Hongkew. I didn't know him that time.

GB: But we was . . .

FB: The, the Czechish is, was different, you know, clique . . .

GB: . . . yeah, but the German Jews . . .

FB: . . . and he was cliqueish . . .

GB: . . . was dying in the streets.

FB: Yes. Nobody take care, took care.

GB: They was puttin' in those, you know, what . . .

FB: Red clothes, you know, the sacks were from the mi-, from the flour.

GB: Flour. They was making from this clothes.

FB: But, they, they, they was falling in the street dead, you know, we found.

GB: But the Polish people and the Czech the same was holding together.

FB: Yeah.

SH: How many Polish Jews were there?

FB: There were not so many. There were . . .

GB: Approximately about two or three thousand.

FB: Because they were only yeshivas, you know, they . . .

GB: Not only.

SH: Were they, were they mostly these yeshiva boys or were they also . . .

GB: Mostly yeshiva boys.

FB: Yeah.

GB: And a couple hundred our, you know, what we are. But we was together like we . . .

FB: They leave us together, to clique together.

GB: We was, yeah, we was okay. The, the German Jews they was, they was open health kitchen, how they call it? They built for them a kitchen and, and a place to live and the German Jews they, they was living there.

FB: In the, in, in, in those homes, you know.¹¹

GB: A home.

FB: You see, I never li-, I was very bad off and, thanks God, I was not . . .

END TAPE 1, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B

GB: My son took a tape also, interview.

FB: Yeah, interview.

SH: Okay.

GB: Now what you want to know?

SH: So you were talking about the, the Germans . . .

GB: Yeah.

SH: . . . the German Jews were not well off at all.

GB: No, no there was, because there was a big, there must've been about ten thousand.

FB: There were more.

GB: Or maybe more.

FB: We were twent-, all together twenty-four, twenty-four thousand refugees there.¹²

GB: European.

FB: Euro-, not European, because don't count the, the . . .

GB: The Russian Jews you have counted.

FB: . . . the, the Russian Jews and also there were, you know, like, like, look the, the, German ex-wife was out of the District, because she was a Sephardic Jew.

GB: Turkey. Turkey.

¹¹ Several thousand German-speaking refugees lived in so-called *Heime* in Hongkew, barracks or factories with a communal kitchen, supported by money from the Jewish community in Shanghai and from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

¹² The best estimates of Central European refugees range around 18,000.

FB: She was not, she was Turkish, but was living all the time in, in, in Germany, but they could, they were allowed to live outside the, the District.

GB: No, we are talking about the Germans now.

FB: Yeah. The . . .

GB: The German Jews was very bad off because they . . .

FB: Not all of them. Don't mix up . . .

GB: Most of them.

FB: Most of them.

GB: They were living in those homes.

FB: In that home.

GB: The home was lived, they got not rooms, they were beds with kids, you know, and they ate there. They got their meals to be done through there.

FB: You know, let me also little talk because you, you know what, I was working with people, because I was in the fur line.

SH: You were in what?

FB: Fur line.

GB: Furs. Furs.

FB: Furs. Furs.

SH: Oh, in furs. Okay.

FB: Most of the German girls were, were in the bars. They were prostitutes.¹³

GB: They're not official, no don't call them prostitutes.

FB: Not all of, official but, they gave themselves, you know. We have a lot of friends . . .

GB: Yes.

FB: . . . who were, an Austrian girl was working and was hungry, you know, because we didn't get very good pay. When I got, got, later on in this first shop, what was a very exclusive one, I

¹³ Out of the thousands of young German-speaking women, certainly some were prostitutes in these extreme conditions, but most likely only a handful.

got very good pay, but also it didn't pay, you know, what, what I needed. We had German furriers with us, they were all from the, from the homes. They had very good pay. Why they were sitting in those homes, where I could afford to be in a, in a, like he says, in a, in a . . .

GB: *Zähler* room.

FB: *Zähler* room, you know. I paid for this and I was hungry. I was thin like a, a, a, weighed maybe ninety pounds.

GB: They had no ambitions those people.

FB: Yeah, they didn't have ambition. Not ambitious, they, I don't know, they didn't care. They were living like, like a, with, with, with three, four kids, but they had kids in, in the homes, you know, they . . .

GB: Was born there.

FB: You didn't have to go very far. He was not in home, but I know him very well, you know, this big painter Max, he was, he was playing with my niece.

SH: Peter Max.

FB: Peter Max. Yeah.

GB: Yeah. His was, his parents was good friends.

FB: Yes, was good friends. She was a very good friend of mine . . .

GB: They used to live close.

FB: . . . and I know him when he was a little, he probably would remember me when he would see me, you know. Maybe not by sight, you know, but if I talk with him.

GB: The former finance minister here was in Shanghai.

FB: Yes. Yeah. He was also in Shanghai, Blumenthal, but he was not also in District.¹⁴

GB: No.

FB: I do not know why. And he was a German. But you know there was outsider who, I, when I came to Shanghai, I . . .

SH: Well, why don't you start right at the beginning.

FB: Okay. I came from Switzerland. I went from, when, when the Crystal Night was, you know, when, when they, after this was . . .

¹⁴ W. Michael Blumenthal, Secretary of the Treasury under President Jimmy Carter, did live in the Hongkew Designated Area. See interview with Blumenthal, Berlin, February 3, 1995.

SH: You were in Vienna.

FB: In Vienna, yes.

SH: Tell me just a bit about your family and, and your family name.

FB: My, my family name is very similar to Borenstein. It's Burstyn. It's B-U-R-S-T-Y-N. It's similar to what I . . .

SH: And what's your first name? I never found . . .

FB: Fanny. Fanny. And I was going with a boy, you know, when I was fourteen years. With my first husband we was going, we was friends, you know, and when Hitler came he was, I was seventeen and he was nineteen. So he had a passport, because he used to go to Hungarian or with . . .

GB: I have to make a phone call. You don't mind?

SH: No.

FB: . . . because he was older than me. Better go. And he knows him very well, [laughs] you know. He used to go to, to Hungarian and outside, so he had a passport and he was legally going to Switzerland right away when, when Hitler marched in, in March. He went I think in May, he went already to Switzerland and he was in a men's home there, and he was sending for me with, with a guide, I don't know, that time they call them also *Führer*, you know, somebody who brought you over the, the, it was a *Führer*. You know, but it was not his *Führer*.

SH: Not the, the other kind of *Führer*.

FB: [laughs] The other *Führer* who brought you over that border. And the first time I was arrested, because he got *farblonzhet*, if you know what *farblonzhet*, because we went by night and instead to go to, to Switzerland, he went to Germany, you know, in, during the night.¹⁵

SH: This was in a car?

FB: No! We were by foot.

SH: By foot. You were walking.

FB: By walking through, through, not to, to the mountains, we went, you know, and I don't remember any more, it was on the German side, you know, where the Rhine is going, you know, the, the border, and over the border.

SH: But how did you get . . .

FB: Through the Rhine.

¹⁵ *Farblonzhet* is Yiddish for "confused".

SH: . . . how did you go from Vienna to the border there?

FB: By, by train. I didn't look Jewish, you know, and I was blonde, not like this blonde [laughs], but I was really blonde. I was blonde and I was not looking Jewish, but I was never ashamed and I didn't have a passport, because my father was very long on the line for me, because I was a minor. He had to go for me to, to sign. I couldn't go for myself to get a passport, because otherwise I would be a runaway. So he didn't, got fed up, you know, stay in line. So what I did, I took out, I have it still here somewhere, I took out, to have a identification, you know, I took out a post, from the post, there also was a picture, it's like a passport, you know, but to get post when you somewhere in another country, you can collect the post when you go with this. It's like a little passport, but it's not a passport, but to, to have, have something, you know, to recog-, and I had my, all my papers, you know, my, my, my, I don't know, if you, you, birth certificate. And I had, and I had not very much on me, you know, only what I had to, have to give the, the guide, you know, to bring me over, you know. I think I gave him a watch, because a lot of money my parents didn't have. My parents were not wealthy. My father was a salesman, you know, with everything and all the, why my parents never went out, I wanted always, they were very young people, I mean to-, today's stand, my father was fifty, my mother was forty-five. And when I wrote to her, I have letters, all the letters here, when I wrote to them we, we used to, he used to say, "What will I do? I'm an old man." When I was in Shanghai, where it was open and when I wrote to them, "Come! Sell everything what you have and come." He says, "What will I do over there? I am an old man and I start from, from the beginning." There were older men like him, but fifty and forty-five was for him old and so, but anyhow I mean . . .

SH: So you went, you went to Switzerland in what month?

FB: I told, first time I got, too bad, they caught me and they sent me back home, because I was a, a minor. Then about in November after the . . .

SH: *Kristallnacht*.

FB: . . . the *Kristallnacht*, he sent me again a, a guide. And I didn't go alone by myself, because my parents didn't want me to go completely alone. I always took a couple with me, you know, they, who wanted also to, to have the chance to go to Switzerland. So I brought, I, I didn't even know those people, but, you know, my parents found somebody, you know, who they was asking around a Jewish couple, "Do you want to go with a young, she has a, a, a guide who will bring you," and he was, and they would pay most of it. But anyhow, the first time or the second time, I don't know what happened to those people, you know, because the guide came back to them right where we stayed, this was anti-Semitic territory, you know, they were . . .

SH: In Switzerland?

FB: No, in, on, on the German side. We were staying in a, in a hotel, in a, in a inn. We didn't even sleep there, because it says, no Jews allowed. I didn't even go on a toilet where it was saying, no Jews allowed. I used to cramp myself, because I wo-, I wouldn't go there. I wouldn't sit on a bench where, where it says and I look, didn't look Jewish. But anyhow, because if somebody would come to me and ask me, I would say, "Yes, I'm Jewish." Because I was very proud to be a Jew. And I was always a Zionist, and [unintelligible] you know, my parents

were Zionists, also. But anyhow, it, it is very, by the se-, second time I was also caught, but that time I know that if I go now home that would be finish, I cannot go back. And this guy on the bridge who, who caught me, the, the, the SS man or SA man, I don't know what, what [unintelligible] he was, he said to me, "If I see you back here, I let you go now." He let me go alone. He showed me the way, it was not so very far this time. To go over, over water, you know, it was November, November was the, the *Kristallnacht*, I think on the thirteenth, I think, on the thirteenth or on the seventeenth,¹⁶ but anyhow around this time was, was cold in Switzerland. I had few things on me, I was a thin girl so I could, on me so I shouldn't have nothing to carry and I had only a little thing where I held my documents with me and [unintelligible]. To go, I don't know how, where my head, I couldn't do this today [laughs].

SH: So you went across the water?

FB: No. [laughs] I see the water. I said, "My God, I'm not going to," and you know, "I'm not going through the water too." I see a little bridge, you know, so he let me go to, over the bridge, because I know this was Switzerland, because they told me that it will be Switzerland and I don't, why I was this time lucky, that one guy was standing and he says, "Out," and you know it was not German anymore, it was Switzerland. And I said to him, you know, "I'm Jewish, you know, I cannot go back," and I couldn't say that a German let me through, because you know they, they told me, "Don't, if somebody catches you, you say you went on your own." So I started to cry, you know, with all the things, it was in the middle of the night, I don't know, maybe twelve, two o'clock in the morning, I don't know, I don't know where I got the guts to do it. Anyhow he let me through and he told me here is a, and I had a, a station where, where the boys were stationed, not girls because families, they were in hotels, but boys and girls were separated in separate locations and I didn't know. I went there where I had the address to my boyfriend, you know, and because I was that time not married yet, and I, I told him and he wrote my name on the boat on that in case I'm, they're looking for me, you know, that he had me there because he told me. So I, but I say to him, you know, how I pay, he says, "Don't open your mouth because they will see that you, you're not from us here," only pay and how much it will cost and he, he gave me all the, how many station I go through where I get up and this street is where the, the, the *Lager* from the, from the men.

GB: Camp.

FB: The *Lager*, he knows what, what I mean. He probably understands a little German.

SH: I can speak German.

FB: Yeah, you see. Anyhow, I, I went off and, and went in, in the, and it was about two or three o'clock in the morning, I, I, I ring the bell and they had watching, you know, boys were on watch there also, because it was very near the German.

SH: Was this a, a camp that was just Jewish refugees?

FB: It was, yes, because it was a casino once and they put all the Jewish boys, the single men in these things and they had their cots there inside.

¹⁶ The so-called *Kristallnacht* occurred in the night between the 9th and 10th of November, 1938.

SH: Were these all from, from Austria? Or other places too?

FB: They were from, at the most, no, mostly from Austria and from Germany, but they were, the Swiss Jews, they was very rich, the Swiss Jewish committee was holding them out, you know, food and, and giving them, everything we got from them, we got even clothing, because we came on half-naked, you know, we wore what I had on me. They gave me afterwards a, a lot of clothing and even luggages, because we don't, we didn't have nothing. We came in with nothing there. And I ring the bell and the boys came and got, a boy came out, "What you doing here?" you know, a girl alone. I say, I just came from the *Dings* and I came to, to Julius Weisinger, this was my first husband.

SH: Julius Weisinger?

FB: Yeah. And he says, "He's not in this *Lager*. He's somewhere else." I say, but he, I wrote always to him in the, he says, "Oh my God," and goes around with half a head, because he knows that, that the guide came back and said I'm arrested again. Because he got already, the guide could go through because he was Swiss. So he, he was with a half a head that I got arrested again, you know, the second time. But anyhow, they called up the Jewish committee and a guy from that committee came and put me up in a hotel. And he says, "I bring you with a car," and put me up in a hotel, where other girls were living and he says, "You wait till I take you." Because if they would catch me I, police whatever, he would send me right away because I had no documents. I had to sit there and get documents in Basel, you know, in Switzerland. And he came in the morning to pick me up and bring me to the, to the police and to get, no, identification card. But in Switzerland was also not very good. They didn't want us there. They want us, every month we was called to the police, you know, "Go *weiter*, Jew, don't stay here. You can only stay so long till you have something to go further." So we had something and we got married. I came in November and in April we got married with permission from the parents, because we . . .

SH: Had you stayed in these hotels and camp the whole time?

FB: Yeah, yeah, but we, we could be free also, you know. We could be on the street, but also we had a curfew, ten o'clock we had to be home. We was not allowed on the street to be, because otherwise they would send us back to Germany. They were also a little *antisemitisch*, you know, and, and afterwards they put us in a, in a *Pensionat*, they called this, you know, where we was like in the schooling, you know, it had been through all kinds of schooling, you know, house, house schooling and gardening and things, you know, because we were young kids, you know. And, and I liked gardening so she gave me all the whole garden from this little, it was a pen, a little house where we was about thirty girls, I think, and I have a, a, a, my résumé from there. I have a résumé that I was there in this schooling that I made, it's like a *Pensionat*, I don't know how to say, it's not a, a school, but you learned cook and things, was very religious also, you know, very strict kosher and everything, because the Swiss Jews are very, very religious who gave us everything. But anyhow, then I saw, you know, that it's not a big life, you know, to be always in this *Pensionat*. So I saw, we, we saw that they looking for girls, you know, who want to help in a household where kids are, because I wanted to have a few dollars, you know, a few, a few francs. And I went and, you know, what I could get very sick because this kid had *Scharlach*, you know, the very, and, and she needed somebody to help her and, and I was only half a day there and they came and they said, "Fanny, stop because the police is after you. You are not supposed to work there." You're not, and I didn't have, you know, she didn't, whatever she would give me, you know, I would take. I had no made up how

much she give me, you know, something, you know, that we, we made up a, how, how you say that . . .

SH: A wage?

FB: A wage or something, you know. But anyhow I, I didn't get nothing for the half a day and then went back to the home. But I wanted to, to, to make something, you know. I was thinking maybe I can send to my parents something, you know, if I make nice, but nothing came out of it. So about in April I got married there. We married a few couples together, you know, all emigration, all emigration couple in temple there. And about, after the, the marriage we got from England, because he had a sister in England, my first husband, and she gave us and for, for a, a, you know, a servant's pair, you know, he's a, a, how you call this, he, he helps the, the husband and I, I'm for the, for the, you know, and for one thing I'm glad I didn't, it was too late, because we had already Shanghai tickets, because we had to see something to go away, so we got the Shanghai tickets.

SH: So tell me about getting Shanghai tickets.

FB: So we got the Shanghai tickets. This was free, because it was an open thing. I came earlier than him. I came in '39. In '39 I married and '39 in November I came to Shanghai, five weeks on a ship.

SH: When did you, when did you first try to get there, or hear about Shanghai as a place to go?

FB: We heard in, in, in Switzerland. People were talking. We went about from Switzerland from our group was about maybe twenty people.

SH: Who went to Shanghai.

FB: Who went to, to Shanghai on a French beautiful boat.

SH: How did you get the tickets? What did you have to do?

FB: We went to the Jewish comm-, the Jewish community gave us the tickets.

SH: You just went to them and said, "I want to go to Shanghai."

FB: No, we, we told them we, we want to go to Shanghai, because we had another sister there, who had also restaurant there.

SH: He had a sister who was already in Shanghai.

FB: Yes. She had a lot of money, that's why they went out so early from Austria. And they had a restaurant there, I don't know the name already, the name anymore. And he was afterwards there a waiter and I was, first I was by, working as a, by, by a tailor, you know, as a, because I was a young kid, you know, I was seventeen and a half afterwards, when I came there and . . .

SH: So who paid for the tickets to Shanghai?

FB: The, the, the Jewish, the, the Switzer, Switzer Jewish people, the rich one, Hoffmanns, wait a minute, I don't know, if the, the one who make the, the, the . . .

SH: The drugs?

FB: . . . the drugs. I was, we was invited by them. You know, when we was married, we, they invited all those couples. We, they gave us all, you know, we was poor kids and we saw there this silver and this gold on the table, you know, and we was thinking they would give us a big, a big thing, you know. They made us a, a bridal after the wedding, we was invited by the Hoff-, Hoffmanns, I think, yeah. And then also the rich people who are the Rothschilds and those people gave, all people who went away from Shanghai, even if they went to America, they got from them the tickets, because they were glad that they could help them out, to send them away, you know. They sent the emigrants away.

SH: How come, how come all the Jews there in Switzerland didn't try to go to Shanghai? How come just some went to Shanghai?

FB: You know what, some, first of all, us was always, we had speeches, you know, how you call this here when somebody comes and holds a, a . . .

SH: A lecture.

FB: . . . lectures. We had every time lectures, where they say you cannot stay here for always, you have to see, to go . . .

SH: Who was giving the lectures?

FB: Goyim, from the government, from, from, from Switzerland. So we had to see, we had to show them that we do something. So we did. We tried to get a permit to go as a, how you call this, *Ehepaar* servants . . .

SH: Au pair?

FB: . . . servants?

SH: Au pair.

GB: To England.

FB: To England, to England, you know, a, a . . .

GB: Servant.

FB: . . . a, a servants, you know. We, we got it when we was on the ship the tele-, the telegraph was on the ship that came in, but it was too late, we was already half on the way. Maybe we was lucky, because maybe the blitz there was also not so good, you know. But anyhow we came to Shanghai in the end of, of November because for . . .

SH: So tell me about the French ship?

FB: The French ship was, was a very good ship, it was, was, it was . . .

GB: The food.

FB: The food was very good and we, it was a luxury ship really, but we was third class.

SH: How did you get from Switzerland to the, was the ship from Marseilles?

FB: From Marseilles with the, with the train. And then they gave us already luggages and they gave us, I, I know I was brought in, in a, in to the, the, I don't know how to say it, where, where they had a lot of clothing and I could choose, you know, but I didn't . . .

SH: What did you think about going to Shanghai?

FB: I don't . . .

SH: What did you know about Shanghai?

FB: I didn't know nothing. But I was young and dumb, you know and, and, and we was . . .

GB: You wanted to get rid of Europe, you know.

FB: Yeah, yeah, I didn't . . .

GB: Survive, survive.

FB: Survive, you know. When I wrote to my parents, I don't know even what they said to us, because they were still alive, you know, I was still in contact and they say, yeah, my brother even wrote to me and he says, "I, I, I, I envy you, that you go in far out lands," and you know, I was so home, home . . .

GB: Sick.

SH: Homesick.

FB: . . . sick terrible. I used to cry all the time.

SH: In Switzerland?

FB: In Switzerland also. In Switzerland I want to go home, back to, to Vienna. They was holding me with all the things, say, "You crazy." At that time I didn't know that there was ovens, you know, when I was in Switzerland, because I had no idea. I was always thinking, my parents would come after me, you know, because I was a kid. I was not a, not a grown-up, you know, with seventeen years you have, but also, you know, you're in love and nothing exists, you know, for him or for me. He was also probably not thinking, so we going, you know, we going in a new world, and no, he has his sister, his sister was also, she, she was always writing, she's taking, she would take her life if not one of them. She knows what, what Shanghai was, but for him, he was for her right away, you know, in, in the, a waiter and he was not a waiter. He was a, he was like, like he was doing with, with the piece goods and things, this what he did in, in

Vienna. But for her he was like a manager, because they had, their . . .

GB: Did shopping and buying.

FB: Yeah, their, their restaurant was, they had no key for this restaurant. This was day and night open. So they were sleeping by day and, and he was the manager by day and sometimes by night. So you know to give them, I was mostly alone really. I was alone like living, still I found friends, you know, friends from Vienna.

SH: So tell me about landing in Shanghai.

FB: Landing in Shanghai, they, Alex came to, to, my, my brother-in-law came to pick us up. It was, at least I saw a, a . . .

GB: She had it nice. They already . . .

FB: Yes, they had some . . .

GB: . . . already made, made to go to a family.

FB: . . . they had some, they had for us a, a room in, in the French Concession. We didn't go to this home. But also like he says with the, with the *Wanzen*, you know, with, with, with the bed bugs. I went, we was living by a Russian woman, was also, I was full with, with, with a, with rash from the, from those things, so I say to her, "Do me a favor, I pay you, every day I want you to put, to, to . . ."

GB: Spray.

FB: ". . . to spray." [laughs] That's all she say to me. I will never forget it. "You brought it from, from Germany," or from where I came, you know. I brought it from the ship. I brought the bed bugs. Was terrible. You know there was a time, they told us that they had problem with bed bugs and then they died out, you know, no more. We had never afterwards, you know, later we did not have to spray something.

GB: How many people you interviewed already?

SH: About fifteen.

FB: Yeah? You know, we know, we know the German acts, you know . . .

SH: Well, but you both have different stories.

GB: Sure.

SH: I hadn't interviewed anyone who was from Poland yet.

GB: No.

FB: No.

SH: And the people, the Austrians I've interviewed, none of them went to Switzerland, none of them had, none of them as young as you went alone.

GB: Yeah.

FB: Yeah.

SH: So quite different stories.

FB: No, also I'm one of those people, who meet and know a lot and he didn't know a lot. I know a lot, because I lost somebody there, you know, when, when the bombardment, when we had only one bombardment and, and everybody know, know me, you know, because it was very tragic that time, you know, when, when this happened and, but . . .

SH: So tell me how when you, how you and your husband lived in Shanghai.

FB: Oh, don't ask. Don't ask.

SH: But I want to ask.

FB: Yeah, yeah. I lived in a hole, where water came from, from, from, from all sides up and my mother, you know, with, with, in, I got very sick in Switzerland. She sent me beddings, you know. I think this was the last to arrive what she sent me, and this was stolen from me in, in Shanghai from my window, because, you know, I was like a, how, how should I explain, I had two windows, cross ventilation [laughs] . It was a hole, a very small room.

SH: Is this in Hongkew or in the French . . . ?

FB: In Hongkew, in Hongkew, this is in Hongkew already, because where, where I came to, because I was never in, in a home, in again, but we had to move afterwards in, in . . .

SH: Had to move away from your sister, from your sister and brother-in-law?

FB: No, no, no, they all had to move in, in, in Hongkew when, when the war . . .

SH: Oh, in the ghetto.

FB: . . . in the ghetto, we had to move in. So we, we got this buyer, he was alone, a refugee, but it belonged to him. So next to the, where the toilet was was my room with one window. I think . . .

SH: You and your husband.

FB: Yeah. We had there.

GB: It's not, it's not, it's not a room.

FB: It's not a room, really.

GB: About four room, four, four, four by four closet.

FB: Yeah. It's a, and it was water coming down from the walls and it, it was, you know, I cannot, people ask me why I didn't have children. To, to have there children, you know, would be, I would be a murder to them, you know, I mean it's, it's crazy. Because I was six and half years married and *keyn eyn-ore*, I'm married with my husband forty-three years, forty-four years married.¹⁷ So I mean, so that's why people ask me, you know, who know me, you know, how come I had no children, you know. I had children, now I have two gorgeous one, I don't know they . . .

GB: California.

FB: Cali-, California. A daughter and a son, and I have grandchildren, but they had also late, so we have babies. [laughs]

SH: How did you, what did you do, you landed in Shanghai in 1940.

GB: '39.

FB: No, 1939.

SH: 1939. 1939.

FB: I was under the first one there.

SH: So what did you do between 1939 and when you had to go into the ghetto? That's a few years.

FB: I was always working. I was working.

SH: What kind of jobs?

FB: I was in the fur line. I was by Renée. This was a very big firm in, in Sassoon House.

SH: How do you spell that?

FB: Renée.

SH: Oh, Renée. By Renée, I see.

FB: Renée. By Renée, Renée. Everybody knows this. Renée's was a big outfit. We worked for exclusive people, you know, for princes, and I came in through, also I, one of the *Wieners*, I don't know, one of the Viennese guy, he saw me in the street, and I was working all the time either by tailor or by, I was never without a job. And he says, "You, you working, you making nothing with nothing."

GB: Peanuts.

¹⁷ *Keyn eyn-ore* literally means "no evil eye"; as used here the expression means the same as "knock on wood".

FB: Peanuts. "Maybe you start, because you know how to sew, come I will, we will learn you." And then I was like a floor lady in, in, by Renée because I was by very, very good stuff I worked, and when I came here they wanted to, to put me by garbage, till I went in the union. I was here in the union, but I didn't work very much because I, I waited till my son was Bar Mitzvahed. I was home with the kids. I wanted to, to have my kids and, and see them growing up, not, because thanks God my husband made enough for us.

SH: What did your first husband do for work?

FB: He was . . .

SH: He was a waiter, you said.

FB: He was a waiter there. He was a waiter, he was by his sister. . .

GB: He wasn't a waiter.

FB: . . . a waiter. He was a manager, really, really . . .

GB: Manager.

FB: . . . for, for his sister. They, they had a restaurant.

GB: He was daytime, they was nighttime.

FB: Yeah, yeah. He was a, he knows it, he knows he was making it in business, also.

SH: So did you live a fairly comfortable life? Did you make enough money?

GB: With me?

FB: With him I did, yeah.

SH: No before, before the ghetto when you . . .

FB: Before the, no.

SH: No?

FB: No, was always, [laughs] I don't know . . .

GB: Tough. Tough.

FB: . . . a tough time, because you know, I don't know, I was dumb and young. I never know how much he made, because they held it, they was holding the money, you know. And when he died they gave me two hundred dollars and so they said, "This is from him," and this was, was two hundred dollars, no, that was all. So I don't, I never know, because I was working so I paid for, for the rent and I paid for myself. And he was working in the restaurant, so he had his food and everything. So, I mean, he was under the, the, his sister and his brother-in-law was holding the things. Afterwards the, the guy who, who was making the, not taxes . . .

GB: Estimate . . .

FB: Not, not taxes, who make . . .

SH: The accountant?

FB: . . . the accountant, he says, "Fanny, they give you only two hundred dollars?" I say, "Yes, that's what I got." Because he know what he made, but he didn't want to have to, he also passed away, this guy. He was very sick then and I had no help from nobody, you know, so then the heck with him.

SH: So who did you meet as friends?

FB: I, I had friends a lot there. I had we, the Eisingers were my good friends, they live in Australia. And then I had Tia Balkin, she is, where is she? She is in . . .

GB: In New Jersey.

FB: In New Jersey. She is now married with a, a . . .

GB: Sephardic Jew.

FB: . . . Sephardic Jew.

SH: Were these other Viennese Jews that you . . . ?

FB: No. Balkin is, is a German Jew.

GB: Czech. Czech.

FB: No.

GB: Czech.

FB: *Sie haben gewohnt in* Czech but [unintelligible] in Germany. They were Germany's. The Eisingers are, are . . .

GB: Austrian.

FB: . . . Austrian. They were . . .

SH: So other German-speaking Jews were with the people that you knew?

FB: Yeah, yeah, they, no, I was only with the German. I was very good with, with, with this Herb, with . . .

GB: Jellinek.

FB: With Jellinek and then with the mother from . . .

SH: Peter Max.

FB: Peter Max. And, you know, my niece . . .

GB: Went to school with him.

FB: . . . went to school with him. She's still in, in, in . . .

GB: Germany.

FB: . . . in, in Germany in München. She is with him in . . .

GB: Touch.

FB: . . . in touch. She tell, told me. I want a picture from him, you know, to have because then I would be maybe rich. [laughs] You know that my daughter is also a very, very good in, in painting but she didn't . . .

GB: Don't worry, she's doing all right.

FB: Yeah, she's doing all right, but . . .

GB: You did know your grandparents or you didn't?

SH: Yes.

GB: They came down . . .

SH: They came to the United States in 1949.

FB: Yeah.

GB: '49. Oh.

FB: So your parents were with them?

SH: No. My, my grandparents went from Vienna to Shanghai.

FB: You know . . .

GB: Shhh. Wait a . . .

FB: Wait a minute, he, he says the grandfather was a doctor, Dr. Hoffman.

SH: Hochstädt.

FB: Hochstädt. You know the name is very, is . . .

GB: But you say he came to United States . . .

SH: His, his wife's name was Mela and I'm sure, I'm sure she came to your shop, because they had a lot of money in Shanghai and I'm sure she went to that fur shop.

GB: She didn't know the customers.

FB: Yeah.

GB: But he came to United States in '49? So he didn't know much about our life in Shanghai. So he was there probably a short while.

SH: No, no. My grandparents were there from '39 to '49.

FB: Yes, so they . . .

GB: Oh, to '49.

SH: From '39 to '49. But my father didn't go to Shanghai. He came to the United States.

GB: '49 was already the Communists.

FB: Yeah.

GB: Because I run away. Because if the Communists would catch me . . .

FB: They were . . .

GB: . . . I would be, you know . . .

FB: You know what they . . .

GB: . . . they would call me . . .

FB: We, we went away when the Communists, we feel them coming close in.

GB: Was close.

SH: So what did you think about the Communists? That was something you had to get away?

GB: Oh yeah.

FB: Yeah.

GB: For me that time, not only that time, all the time, because for me I'd rather be dead than red. Because I, I hate the Communists from the beginning. When, when I was in Lithuania was the same story. When I saw the Communists, I had to be friendly with them, because I was afraid of them, but I hated them. As a matter of fact, from Warsaw I had one friend that I met, he was a Communist in Warsaw. I was always against Communists. So I met him, and he was very bad treated by the Poles, because he was a Communist. When I met him in Vilna after already, so I said to him, "You see what the Communists are doing. Come with me, I'm going to try to get out of here." He says, "It's in my blood already. I'm going to start all over." He

went back to Russia, to Donbass to work in the coal mines and came back afterwards to Poland. He came back commissioner of police in Warsaw.

FB: You no want to ask it.

GB: And my father went to see him. He says, "Sender, this the last time you see me. You never knew me. You never know me," because he didn't want to know that they was Jewish.

FB: You make the things sound . . .

GB: [unintelligible]

FB: It's hot. It's windy, but it's hot.

GB: For me to Communists was . . .

SH: So did you already think in 1946 about the Communists coming in China?

GB: Yeah, because they was close. They was already about five hundred miles away, I mean, this was, otherwise I wouldn't be repatriated to Poland. I would wait to get to the United States.

SH: You would've waited except for that?

GB: Sure.

FB: We was waiting ten years of the quota.

GB: I told him that.

FB: Yeah.

GB: Because when . . .

FB: Ten years we was waiting.

GB: Because I tried to get out, because I, I, I, for me to come to the United States was original idea. From '37 I tried to, tried to get, right whenever I finished my duty, because the United States was my destination. In my life this, this was my, my ideal life is the United States.

SH: Why? Where did you, why did you have the idea in 1937?

GB: From the movies and from the shows and from all the . . .

FB: Not only this . . .

GB: . . . and I used . . .

FB: . . . he has here the family a lot who, who are born here.

GB: Yeah. And I learned already the language in Poland when I came to United States

afterwards. In China, of course we spoke English, but when I came here after the war, I mean my uncle here says, "*Oh, Du hast englisch,*" so we start talking Yiddish again.

FB: You know something, also they, if, if your father was not in Shanghai, so how come that he came . . .

SH: To the United States?

FB: Yeah.

SH: He had a very distant relative who wrote out the affidavit . . .

GB: Affidavit.

SH: . . . for him to come and he was young, he was eighteen and so . . .

FB: So he was . . .

SH: . . . but his parents couldn't come.

FB: No.

SH: One affidavit for him, so they sent him out.

GB: No, I tell you why, I tell, probably because your grandparents came from Poland, they was under Polish quota and the Polish quota stopped.

SH: No, they were, no, they were, they weren't on the Polish quota, but they just wanted to send away their son . . .

FB: Your, your parents . . .

SH: . . . who was eighteen years old and . . .

FB: . . . wait a minute . . .

SH: . . . it was dangerous in Vienna at that time.

FB: . . . your, your, your parents ever, were on the Po-, the, the, because my father came from Poland, you know . . .

SH: No they were from . . .

FB: . . . but he went when he was eight years old.

SH: They were Viennese.

FB: But we kids were born in Vienna.

GB: There's no such a thing as a Viennese-born Austrian. They, they must come from

Hungary or . . .

FB: No.

GB: No, wait a minute, his grandparents.

SH: No, they were really Viennese.

FB: Yeah.

GB: Yeah?

FB: Why not?

GB: Because most they came from Poland.

SH: Yeah, they . . .

FB: My, my, my, my grandmother came . . .

GB: They all immigrants.

FB: . . . my grandmother came from Poland with my father.

GB: Okay, that was it.

FB: Wait a minute. Came with my father. She's buried in, in, in Vienna.

GB: Yeah, but you're talking about mostly Austrian Jews came from Poland.

SH: Yeah, before that they came from . . .

FB: Poland. From Czechoslovakia . . .

SH: . . . from the, I can't think of the place, it's Romania now.

GB: Romania yeah.

FB: Yeah.

SH: That's where they're . . .

GB: Bessarabia.

SH: Yeah, that's not the, the little area, Czernowitz.

FB: But . . .

SH: That's where my grandfather's family came from, from Czernowitz.

GB: All right, that's why he probably, that's why, you see at that time when I applied to the

visa, the Polish quota was bad, the German quota was good.

FB: You see . . .

GB: The German quota, you go into the American Consulate and two weeks later you got your visa.

FB: I, I will show you.

GB: But the Poles the, the, the Romanians the, the, those countries was very bad. You had to wait years and years.

SH: So tell me about, finish the story of coming to the United States. You left Shanghai and you went to France . . .

GB: Yeah.

SH: And then?

GB: Oh, oh, that's the whole story. When I went to France I was doing business in France too, was making, I was doing nice everywhere, wherever I came.

FB: You see what I have?

SH: This is your *deutsches Reisepaß*. This is from your first husband.

FB: Yeah. This is our in, in, in Switzerland.

SH: I see.

FB: This is in Switzerland and look at it in my name. Here this is the, no, here in front what they did.

GB: *Jude*.

FB: *Jude*. And here my name . . .

SH: Julius Weisinger.

END TAPE 1, SIDE B

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A

SH: . . . Israel and Sarah, the man is Israel and the woman is Sarah.

GB: That's right.

FB: Yeah.

SH: Fanny Weisinger.

FB: Don't, I wanted to show you this what I have, what I had this other. I, I keep this, because you know what, they all get money and I don't get, you know, I was really at that time Deutschland, you know, when we, it, the other one they are without, you know, sta-, stateless. I was not stateless. They didn't make me stateless. They made me Germany. [laughs]

SH: So you were doing business in, in France.

GB: Yeah. Then we went to, oh, my, my parents used to live there in Paris, so I came there. And my, you imagine my parents saw me after seven years and then the story was with Israel, so I said, "Let's go to Israel," so we went to Israel.

SH: What year, what year was that?

GB: '48.

FB: A year after Israel was . . .

SH: You and your whole family?

GB: Yeah.

FB: Yeah.

SH: Your parents too?

GB: Yeah, and my sister and my brother from Germany, we all, we went to Israel.

FB: Only Hannah.

GB: And that was a tough time. Hannah was already in United States.

FB: He's a . . .

GB: But this was a very tough time. I came to Israel, I didn't know what to do. You know I, I went in, I saw the Hotel King David, I didn't know what to do, so I went into King David's Hotel. I said, "Can I see the manager?" They said, "What do you want the manager?" I said, "I want to talk to the manager." They say, "It will be two o'clock." So two o'clock I come in talk to the manager. He says, "What can I do for you?" I say, "You need a waiter?" He say, "Are you a waiter?" I say, "No, but I had a restaurant in China, and I was born in a restaurant in Warsaw, and I speak six languages." He says, "You're hired." And I worked a couple of weeks. At that time it was just right after the war and was only diplomats there, was no tips nothing. And I said, there's no living for me and I quit. And then I went back to my trade as

electrician. I worked for the army, was making bet-, better than the doctors out there . . .

FB: Yeah.

GB: . . . but it wasn't a living. It was so tough, was so tough.

FB: You worked on the university . . .

GB: And I worked at the university as an electrician.

FB: . . . as an electrician.

GB: Foreman. And then . . .

FB: Hebrew University in [laughs] , we were there [unintelligible] . . .

GB: Then, then we tried and I got a visa to United States, and she was pregnant already.

FB: I came with my, my son pregnant here. My son was born here.

GB: And here when I joined electric union . . .

SH: So you've been an electrician here in America.

GB: That's right.

FB: Yeah.

GB: My kids got a scholarship, my son, my daughter. My son finished polytech. Where did you live in Brooklyn?

SH: I lived on Long Island.

GB: Where?

SH: In Carle Place, in the middle of Nassau County on Long Island.

GB: My daughter went to pre-med in NYU. My son finished polytech institute. They did all right, kids. And that's life.

FB: And we, we are happy we are here.

GB: Oh, this was all my life, all the time, to come to United States.

FB: We was waiting ten years, you know, that's why we went to five years to Israel also waiting the quota. Why did I take the Austrian pass, he took the Israel pass, because he was in the Israel army, because they was bothering me.

GB: They wanted you to go in the army.

FB: A soldier, yeah, because I had no children . . .

GB: She was pregnant!

FB: . . . and till thirty, thirty-five years you have to be in the army. So I was always faking I'm, I'm pregnant, till . . .

GB: When she was pregnant, they didn't believe her.

FB: . . . [laughs] till I was really pregnant, they didn't believe me any more. So I said, you know what, I'm going back to my Austr-, Austrian pass, told them, don't bother me any more. Because it, it wouldn't bother me, I'm not going to shoot, to shoot, you know, it, but they used to send him on, on, on the border somewhere and they used to send me on the other side somewhere on the border, not that we was together. So I say, "I don't want. I have enough war in my head. I don't want to, I didn't want my son, he also to go to war." I made him a yeshiva *bokher* because no, I'm not ashamed. You mean it comes down . . .

SH: You won't get arrested for anything you say.

FB: Yeah.

GB: No.

SH: Can you tell me about, tell me, tell me about whether you had any dealings, either one of you, with, with the Jewish, the community leaders in Shanghai, the Jewish community leaders.

FB: No, a friend.

GB: I, I, I was not direct. We had the [unintelligible] as a leader.

FB: [unintelligible]

GB: He was a leader in the conservative movement and was friends of ours. I wasn't so much involved in Judaism, like I'm here now. Now, since my, my parents came back to United States and my father passed away in '76, rest in peace, and I was living already in Florida, I retired in '62. So I started saying Kaddish every day and I got so involved that we built a schul now here we have, when we started we were schlepping every week from one house to another, to *daven* every day and I got so involved that we have now a congregation of 2,200 members which I'm in charge. I'm the chairman of the planning committee, the chairman of the house. So I'm involved now, but before, when we was in China, I was far away, you know, I, I, I wasn't so in touch with the religion. I was a Jew, I held the holidays, but I didn't belong to anything. That's what it was. Now, it's a different story, you see I have big, big responsibilities, but thank God.

SH: Did it, did it matter to you at all that there were these community leaders, that there were important, that there was a Jewish community or, I mean, did that have anything to do with your life?

GB: Of course, it's a good feeling that you come, you have Jews around you.

SH: But I mean, I guess I mean, there were some important Jews who were making decisions for the whole Jewish community in Shanghai.

FB: No.

GB: No. No.

SH: Did that matter to you at all?

GB: No. It, it, it would matter but there wasn't. Only when it started in '47, it started, with the state of Israel, then we had some leaders coming in from Paris and from Europe, who was talking about making money for the State of Israel and then we got involved. We, we, we donated, you know, but not physically, understand, morally we was involved in it. Because as a Jew, a spark came up to be attached to it and that's why we went to Israel. Then we had, we hit the hard times like hitting stone wall. Everything was rationed and . . .

FB: Rationed, the, the money was . . .

GB: You, you couldn't, you couldn't afford nothing. You, you, you got a was a pound of meat for a week right, right?

FB: And when I was pregnant, I used to get rations for pregnant women, you know . . .

GB: For eggs and everything.

FB: . . . a few, a piece of that buttered like this for a whole month and a chicken for a whole month, and, and eggs . . .

GB: It was very bad, very bad.

FB: So I gave his mother, she was an old woman, you know, she, she needed too maybe more, but, you know, it was, it was nothing. First of all, you know, we, we, we, we suffered too much in the war, both of us.

GB: You know that we lost a child in Israel?

FB: We lost this child . . .

GB: Our first baby . . .

FB: Our first baby was, we, we lost there, and we, first of all, we came to Israel to wait out our quota, because we couldn't stay, he couldn't work in, in, in Paris.

GB: I could've stayed in France. I didn't want, I was . . .

FB: No, you could not stay! You couldn't work!

GB: They give you permission, I could've worked . . .

FB: Yeah, you couldn't have worked. I don't think so.

GB: I could've. I could've. But we went to Israel, we want to see how to build up the country.

We tried to help out, you know, it's our, it's our home and we came in. The intention was good, but you see, you feel, I tell you why, when I went to Israel, I was well off, you know, like you know, my, my stature of life was nice, I, I lived nice all the time. So we went to Israel, I bought a Frigidaire, I bought a stove, I bought a motorcycle, when we came to Israel the envy was so big, when they took it down from the ship . . .

FB: They was throwing it.

GB: . . . they was throwing it.

FB: You know, that it was only . . .

GB: They broke the Frigidaire. They broke the stove. It's, you know . . .

FB: New things.

GB: . . . right away you feel the, the, the resentment towards you, because you are little more with, with, with the money, they're not. This, this, this was a lot of the factor.

FB: I sold, everything I had to sell because it, it, was not good any more for me.

GB: You know, you, you come in a country, you want to bring your own, you want to live nice and they envy it. Why should you have more than I have?

FB: I bought, we bought an, an apartment. It cost us two thousand dollar, on the fifth floor without an elevator. And I think this helped me to lose the baby really, because I had to schlepp up those, those buckets of kerosene . . .

GB: Canisters of kerosene and ice.

FB: . . . I used to schlepp up on the fifth floor.

GB: Ice.

FB: Ice, ice pieces, because the Frigidaire was not working, so I sold it, you know.

GB: Nobody had Frigidaires at that time.

FB: Yes.

GB: Here comes, here comes a refugee, he brings a Frigidaire, brings a stove . . .

FB: It was terrible envy.

GB: . . . brings a motorcycle. The envy was . . .

FB: Everything we sold there. We, we, we bought this from, from, from, we bought this all in, in . . .

GB: In Paris.

FB: . . . in Paris we bought this. We had a Frigidaire and an electric stove.

GB: When, not only this, when we came to the United States, oh, to Paris, when we came from China I was well dressed. I had about five suits and about ten pairs of shoes, because I, I was doing very nice and I had some relatives there, they thought millionaires are coming here.

FB: Yes, because we . . .

GB: When we came to Paris that time, was right after the war, and in Saigon I bought coffee, in Columbia, in Saigon I brought . . .

FB: Rice, rice, we brought rice over.

GB: . . . tea. In every country we were, we brought everything to Paris, because the people was hungry and I give it to my rel-, relatives, so they figured, there comes a millionaire.

FB: We were, millionaires we was not, but you know what, in China was cheap a, a, a suit for him was not costing him very much . . .

GB: I told them, I said, one U.S. dollar was twelve million Chinese and you . . .

FB: Yes. So he made, made a few suits before . . .

GB: . . . you look, you went, we used to go to the movies in Shanghai. You asked the taxi to pick you up. So he took you to the show and come back two hours later pick you home, cost you twenty American cents. You, you, you, we lived like kings there. Those, those people who made money. Those who didn't, you know, like the Chinese they, they was dying every day on Foch Avenue like, like garbage. It was every day when there was a cold winter.

FB: First of all China . . .

GB: Once they was coming by the trucks and picking the dead bodies up like, like garbage.

FB: We, first of all they had no, no toilets, you know, and, and, and . . .

GB: Oh, this is another story.

FB: Oh, this was . . .

GB: They had the buckets in every house.

FB: Yeah.

GB: Every morning they used to come with the wagon and empty the buckets.

FB: And I used to go to work, because I couldn't afford really to, the, and it was good for me also, I wish I would have now something to walk. I used to walk about two miles to work to, from, from Hongkew to, over the bridge to go to . . .

GB: Sassoon building.

FB: . . . Sassoon building. This was about two miles, no?

GB: Settlement. Nanking Road.

FB: Nanking Road. This was in, in Shanghai, but it was only over the bridge.

SH: I've been in that building. It's the Peace Hotel now.

FB: Yeah.

GB: You were there?

FB: There was always in the first floor . . .

GB: You, you know, when I came . . .

FB: . . . with the big windows . . .

GB: . . . when I came to United . . .

FB: . . . this was, everything belonged to him. He's a very, he was a rich man, this Renée. He, his name was Stern and Renée was his wife, but he, the, the name Renée, he is very rich also in, in, in Australia, he was a *Wiener*, Viennese.

GB: You know when . . .

FB: He was very rich . . .

GB: . . . when I came . . .

FB: . . . and he brought everything out . . .

GB: . . . when I came . . .

FB: . . . from there before he left.

GB: . . . when I came to United States, my brother took me out to Time Square and say, "Now, how you like it here?" I said, "Let me tell you, Shanghai was nicer than New York," I said to him. He looked at me. In our time Shanghai was one of the nicest cities, I don't know if you saw it . . .

FB: Yes, it was beautiful.

GB: You, you, we had the movie houses nicer than here, all air conditioned.

FB: Air conditioned and . . .

GB: And it was for peanuts.

SH: So what did you do for fun at night or for entertainment?

GB: I told you.

FB: Movies?

GB: We used to go to movies. We had a lot of night clubs. We was dancing three, four nights a week.

FB: Would you go to night clubs that were European night clubs?

GB: All European. Oh no, all . . .

FB: All European.

GB: German.

SH: Jewish, Jewish night clubs?

GB: Yeah.

FB: Yeah. We had a Jewish . . .

GB: Germans. Austrian.

FB: . . . wait a minute! We had a Jewish club also, we had a Jewish club . . .

GB: Yeah.

FB: . . . where we, we could be every day there.

SH: Which Jews went to this club?

FB: Oh, everybody.

GB: Oh, all the refugees.

FB: All the refugees.

SH: But not the Russians and the Sephardics?

GB: No. No. No.

FB: No. No. No. No.

SH: Just the Germans, the German, Poles, maybe.

FB: German, Poland, and, and, and . . .

GB: Czechs.

FB: Czechs.

GB: The Russians was, was different. They wasn't there.

FB: They, they, they were . . .

GB: No, there was a couple of marriages with [unintelligible] Russian Jews.

FB: One . . .

GB: A few.

FB: . . . a, a, a good friend of mine married from, from the rabbi, from the, the, the . . .

GB: Ashkenazi.¹⁸ He was the . . .

FB: Ashkenazi. He married, married his daughter. I don't know what his name was. I forgot.

GB: What's the difference?

FB: He was . . .

SH: But otherwise not much, not much relationship with the Russian Jews?

FB: No.

GB: Business, yes.

SH: Business relationships.

FB: But nothing . . .

GB: There, there, there was a few, they that wanted me that time to go with one of their daughters, they, they tried to get me. It wasn't my cup of tea.

SH: Why not? What was different about it?

GB: Not my liking. You know, I like women, and this wasn't . . .

SH: Oh, it was just individual.

GB: That's right, the Russian women are beautiful.

FB: Yeah, we had, you know, we had, I don't know the . . .

GB: Not the Jewish, the Russian.

FB: Ah, come on! Come on!

¹⁸ Meir Ashkenazi was the rabbi for the Russian Jewish community.

GB: The Jewish woman wasn't so hot.

FB: Yeah, yeah, but you know what?

GB: We had Austrian and German Jewish girls, beautiful women.

FB: You know what? I tell you something, we had, we had manikins, you know, the, the . . .

GB: Models.

FB: . . . who was, she was the, the beauty . . .

GB: But not Jewish.

FB: No, she was not Jewish.

GB: That's right, what I said. Russian.

FB: Beauty queen from Shanghai, she was our model in, in Renée. She was something, you know. I don't see here on those models with, blond, a figure she had like . . .

GB: Those are the Russian women. And you know who was beautiful also?

FB: . . . beautiful with blonde hair . . .

GB: . . . the mixture Japanese . . .

FB: . . . blonde hair . . .

GB: . . . Japanese, British, Euroasian, and American and European, mixed marriages, those women are beautiful.

FB: Yeah, they are beautiful.

SH: Now I wanted to ask you something.

GB: Shoot.

SH: Oh yeah, so, so the night clubs that you went to, these were all refugee Jews in the clubs?

GB: Yeah, yeah.

FB: They was . . .

GB: One was called the White Rose.

FB: White Rose.

GB: And it was called, a few places . . .

FB: The White Rose was, was a, a . . .

GB: Viennese.

FB: . . . a Viennese.

GB: The White Rose. The White Rose.

FB: Yeah, the White Rose.

GB: Not the White House. White Rose.

FB: Who said White House?

SH: Was there one called the Mandarin Club?

GB: No.

FB: No.

SH: You don't know.

FB: We had no man- . . .

GB: We had only European . . .

FB: European.

GB: . . . and European entertainer. Everything was our own.

FB: Like his was a European restaurant . . .

GB: Café Europe.

FB: . . . and then there was Imperial, Imperial was from his, he was also Viennese, who had the Imperial. Also Splendid . . .

GB: Yeah.

FB: . . . Splendid was my brother-in-law's restaurant.

GB: No, this was a bar.

FB: This was a bar.

GB: They had those girls, you know, those girls . . .

FB: Yeah. But it was mostly German girls, *was nicht* [unintelligible]. You didn't see a, a, a Austrian girl.

GB: And those, you know, those German girls mostly was women married. And the husband didn't mind, because she brought . . .

FB: She brought a lot of money home.

GB: . . . she brought the bacon.

FB: They went with the Japanese, with Chinese, with rich guys . . .

GB: Mostly Japanese.

FB: . . . you know. I have a friend, you know, she is now married and has kids and she is also married with a Polish guy like I, and she, she made a lot of money and her parents looked away. She was a kid, she's younger than me. So if I was seventeen, she was maybe fifteen when she was in the Bund.

GB: She had a good, she had a good figure.

FB: She was beautiful, she looked beautiful. She made a lot of money for the parents. They looked away, they had blindfolds, they didn't mind. And there were a lot of people like this and they didn't . . .

GB: Your parent . . .

FB: . . . live in those homes. You see . . .

GB: Your parents, your parents live here now, or . . . ?

SH: In California.

FB: Where they live?

SH: In Laguna Beach.

FB: Oh, Laguna Beach. We was by Laguna Beach with, with Susi when we was last time there. No! When we went to Mexico from the . . .

GB: Oh, yeah, right, we took a cruise to Mexico.

FB: We went a cruise from there, from the ship . . .

GB: Yeah.

FB: . . . from the Love Boat was there, we went there.

BREAK IN RECORDING

FB: . . . my daughter with the kids.

FB: So let me ask you what you think now about this time in Shanghai? How . . .

GB: That time?

FB: It was a good time, with all the *tsuris*, it was a good time.

SH: What was good about it?

FB: Because we was young! [laughs]

GB: No, for me, for me especially . . .

FB: We was young.

GB: . . . for me especially, I had the life of Riley.

FB: When I was with him together, we had a good time.

GB: I, I had women. It was like, like Hollywood, for me it was Hollywood. If I were going with a girl more than a week, they said, "He's hooked already." Had to get rid of her. It, it, it was a good life.

FB: My brother-in-law didn't want me to marry him.

SH: Why? Because he was too much of a playboy?

GB: Yeah.

FB: He was against him. Very much. He says, "You're crazy." He gave me all my, "What are you doing?" But thanks God. [laughs] After that he was our best friend, no? He came and he loved him and everything, because he saw he was good to me, because, but if he would be bad, I think he would shoot him.

SH: So, so it was a good, a good time for you?

GB: A good time. It's, it's like I told you, it was good time and bad time. In the beginning, I would rather die what I went through with, with the hunger, with the miseries and all the stuff. But then . . .

FB: He was also sick very often from, with the dy-, dysen-, dysentery . . .

SH: Dysentery.

FB: Dys-, dysentery. Yes.

GB: Yeah, dysentery. This comes with the territory.

FB: Thanks God, I didn't have. You know what? I didn't have it, because I didn't eat so much.

GB: We had the, the worms. You know the worms?

FB: Yeah.

GB: Every six months, you start feeling, you get skinnier and skinnier, and you have the worms. So they give you some kind of medicine and you go on toilet and comes out a big one like . . .

FB: Ah! George, do me a favor.

GB: We didn't know about it, from the, you don't know from what it comes.

FB: No. You are not allowed to eat, you know, raw, rare . . .

GB: We didn't eat any raw stuff at all.

FB: Also, you know, water was cooked. Everything . . .

GB: And you know, there was, there was a time at the beginning, when I couldn't afford to eat, so what I did? The money I used to buy a pound of . . .

FB: *Schmalz*.

GB: Yeah, what do you call it? From pig, fat, like, not bacon but . . .

SH: Lard.

GB: Yeah.

FB: Lard, lard, lard.

GB: And I used to take two pounds onions and cook it up and make a spread and every day I would have that for breakfast and for dinner and for lunch with the tea. Tea, you take a Thermos bottle down to the Chinaman, for two pennies you got a full Thermos bottle of water and this was your eating in the beginning.

FB: I don't think, you know, how he bathed. They came those, with those, when you see the Chinaman with those buckets, this is bathing water. You know, you, you . . .

GB: Hot water.

FB: . . . hot water, a bathtub they had it all the houses, you know, toilets they don't have, but a bathtub they had. So you ordered water and he came with those two buckets . . .

GB: Cost you five cents.

FB: Five cents. I don't know how much it costed.

GB: In American money, five cents.

FB: But you couldn't bathe every day, because first of all, where we was living there was a

few families. And you couldn't use it in the back, so you had to wash. We had it good, we had water in our room.

GB: I paid twenty dollars a month, everybody says, "He must be rich." Twenty dollars a month, people thought I had that for a year.

FB: I, I had a girl and I had one room and I had a girl for, for cleaning and for everything.

GB: Thank God, I was the fortunate one to have a nice place.

FB: Yes, but there was hunger, it was hunger.

SH: So why, why do you think you were able to do so well and other people not?

GB: Listen, the same all over. Some got it . . .

FB: You have to have . . .

GB: . . . some got it and some don't. You have the lucky break all the time and some people are shy. I used to, when I first started, a guy, he lived in the same room, so two guys, this guy was a *shmegege*.¹⁹ And he always said, "Why don't you take me as a partner?" I say, "You have to be a little pushy. If you want be in life, you have to open doors, not to wait till they come to you. You have to go look for it."

FB: He had a . . .

GB: When I came, the same to the United States, in the beginning I was making fifty dollars a week. And my son was born in '54, they give me five, in Roosevelt Hospital in New York, they give me five dollar raise. I say, I cannot make a living on it. I was paying hundred seventy-eight dollars on Riverside Drive for an apartment. So I come home and I say, I quit. He said, "What are you going to live on?" I said, "Don't worry." I was doing work for a friend, concrete work, and I was roofing and I was doing electrical help and I was, I was doing everything.

FB: And you did really everything.

GB: I, I went, you have to have it, because nothing comes to you on a silver platter. This is life. When I, I have so many stories.

FB: He had a chicken business also here.

GB: That when I was making afterwards as electrician, seventy-five dollars a week was a lot of money already. But they say, "You are not an electrician," because I came from the other country, from Israel, which I was a good electrician. The material was different, different names. If you don't know the names, you, you, you cannot get a job. And I got a job. I say, "What's a jam box?" The guy said, "You are not an electrician, get out of here." I didn't know the materials. I, I, I went, then I went as a job to a foundry. You know, my time, I don't know if you remember, you had, got a job from an agency, you had to pay them a week's salary. So I

¹⁹ Yiddish for "fool".

went to the guy who gave me a job and he sent me to the foundry. I come to the foundry and say, "Hire me." I said, "Do me a favor. Say they didn't hire me. I will start next week." I went back with the letter, I say, "He don't hire me." I went back to the job and I worked and I didn't lose the week's pay. So beside this, I worked about twenty weeks, I said to the guy, "Fire me." He said, "You must be crazy. First you want the job, now you don't want it." I wanted to have the unemployment to get. It is all things, nothing, nothing comes easy. That's what the life . . .

FB: You know, you say that, I was going, when my boy was already after the Bar Mitzvah, you know, old enough to stay alone, you know. I went maybe two years, because, two years to the union, because my boss is here and working with me in Shanghai and know what I can do, you know, and he wanted to employ me. And the union didn't allow me to work for him, because I had no union card, because the furrier union is also closed here. So I went and was sitting every day in the union to get a union card. And they, why didn't they give me a union card? Because I was in my forties already, you know, was too old. But I didn't let that, oh, I have still my union card here. I went there and so they say, they saw that I will not go away.

GB: That is not your story, he needs your Shanghai story.

SH: No, that's all right. This is, this is the end, the end of the story.

FB: So, so anyhow, I was sitting there and they gave me, but they say that I cannot work by this guy, because he knows me. They will give me, so I say, I, I, whatever it is, I know I could, I was making the same thing what he makes as an electrician. It's a good wages for a woman, come up in a very fancy store, because I was working only in a fancy store. You know, how much, how long I was working there by Renée? I don't know, maybe ten years I was working for him. And I had, I had resumé's from Renée. But they was saying, "This is not a résumé." So I say, you know, "This is my résumé. Sit me down and then I will show you what I can do." At that time, today I wouldn't know my, I am not working any more. But anyhow, the foreman saw that I am better than him. He was making me miserable, you know, because he know that I know my work. He made me miserable and, you know, I had to go from there. So they gave me, they gave me the worst thing, you know, to the worst fur what you can work, where I was blooding my hands in it. And, but then I stayed, so I stayed my twenty weeks, like him, made my things and made my twenty weeks, you know, to get unemployment. But I stayed only three years, because I saw it is not good.

SH: Are there, are there any other things you want to say about Shanghai, about your life in Shanghai, either one of you?

GB: I tell you one thing. I, I have mixed feelings. Shanghai is a, it's a dull country, all in all, because . . .

FB: I would like to go.

GB: No.

FB: . . . go back to see . . .

GB: There's nothing, nothing to see. Shanghai, maybe I would like to see, but China is not interesting. When we used to live there, in summer we used to go up in the mountain there, what they called it? It was so primitive. We had like a shed . . .

FB: Yeah.

GB: . . . with a bamboo roof and this was our summer vacation. But there's nothing . . .

FB: And you know what?

GB: I don't know if maybe the Chinese have any history. Japan is a different story.

FB: In Japan you was, I wasn't.

GB: Japan, I love Japan. The cleanness and, and every town is so picturesque and the people are so friendly. That's why when I came right after the war, I said to the Japanese people, I was in Japan a couple of times, I said, "How come that here you so nice and polite, and when you are in Shanghai, you are like animals, wild people?" He says, "They're mostly Koreans," which they say they're Japanese, because Korea used to be occupied by Japanese. And they are different people, but they figured themselves as Japanese. But they ain't, they only Korean and they acted like Korean, not like Japanese.²⁰

FB: And you know what also was terrible? When the war was on and we had to go for, for, for the . . .

GB: The pass.

FB: . . . the passes, was terrible. We had to stay in line.

GB: Every month you had to renew.

FB: Every month we had to renew it, you know. My boss got fed up, you know, so he moved in, in District and, you know, the customers came in to . . .

GB: Hongkew.

FB: . . . to Hongkew. Because first of all, he got slapped from him, from Ghoya a few times. You know, he was really, he was such a fine man, he was one of the, he was paying first of all, he was paying very good . . .

GB: I don't know. I don't know. All right. But people dying for, went to jail.

FB: Yeah. You know I saw something . . .

²⁰ There were Koreans employed by the Japanese in Shanghai, but the brutality of the Japanese against the Chinese population cannot be blamed on Koreans.

GB: I don't know if you know the story. People went in for, they, they was arresting people, I don't know for what, and they put them to jail and the people was drinking the water. Ninety percent got typhoid from the water.²¹

FB: You know . . .

GB: You know, every couple of days, you see people are dying. They didn't know from what. They found out, because the water is probably the, I don't know what . . .

FB: The water was not clean. You would never drink it . . .

GB: That's right. Yeah, all right, now but this . . .

FB: . . . you were supposed to cook it.

GB: . . . you know, you couldn't ever eat any raw food, even for tea. You have to buy a Thermos bottle, you have to buy a hot water. You never can drink anything. And the fruit, everything had to be boiled.

FB: Also they was telling us, like watermelon, you should never eat . . .

GB: You don't eat. No. Any fruit.

FB: . . . because, you know, they inject it with water to have it get heavier. So they don't take clean water, they take dirty water, you know, they inject it.

GB: Any fruit. They didn't let, only, you can . . .

FB: And people got very, very sick from the . . .

GB: . . . like an apple or so, you have to cook it. Nothing . . .

FB: Not only cook it, you have to peel it. Like tomatoes, they used to tell us to put in hot water and then you take the first skin out, yeah . . .

GB: It was a tough life.

FB: It was, I mean, like here, you know, you want to eat all vitamins, you know. You couldn't have this, because you had to boil everything. It was very strange. I was not a big . . .

GB: I had a good time, I had a good couple years there. My life was at times good and at times was . . .

END TAPE 2, SIDE A

²¹ The number of Jewish and Allied prisoners who died from typhus contracted in Japanese jails is not known, but the disease was apparently feared more than the stay in jail.

END OF INTERVIEW

George Borenstein was born in Warsaw and was a Polish soldier when the Germans invaded in 1939. He fled to Vilna in Lithuania and was able to get a transit visa through the Soviet Union from Sugihara, the Japanese Consul in Kovno, along with more than one thousand other Jewish refugees. After a brief stay in Japan, Borenstein and the others were sent to Shanghai.

Fanny Burstyn fled Vienna at age 17 with her boyfriend to Switzerland, where they were married. In late 1939 they took a French ship to Shanghai. Her husband was killed in the American bombing of Shanghai on July 17, 1945. Later she married George Borenstein and they went to France, Israel, and eventually the United States. They now live in Florida.

This transcript is part of the Shanghai Jewish Community Oral History Project, directed by Steve Hochstadt at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine. It was prepared with support from Bates College and the Lucius N. Littauer Foundation.