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## Schnepf, Otto oral history interview

Steve Hochstadt  
*Bates College*

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**OTTO SCHNEPP**

**LOS ANGELES**

**JUNE 7, 1990**

**Interviewer: Steve Hochstadt**

**Transcription: Jennifer Gibson  
Nancy Masino  
Scott Pugh  
Steve Hochstadt**

**Otto Schnepf:** What do you want me to do? I haven't prepared for this, I haven't thought about it, I must say, because we've been very swamped in recent days. I'm the department chairman now and I've been swamped with administrative problems, financial among others. So I haven't thought about it, let me try to focus. Maybe you can say a few words to help me to focus.

**Steve Hochstadt:** What I'd like you to do first, which will probably take up quite a bit of time, is for you to start at the very beginning of when you or your family first heard about Shanghai. Actually I'd like you to start a little bit earlier, to give me a bit of background about you and your family living in Europe, and then about hearing about Shanghai and making the preparations and going there, and then about your life in Shanghai during the whole time, a narrative sketch until coming to the United States. I may, I will, I'm sure, interrupt and ask you for details and ask other questions. Please feel free to not answer, if I ask something that's too personal, or if you don't feel like answering. And then, if we have time after you've finished the narrative, then maybe we'll ask some, I'll ask some, a few other questions about things that particularly interest me.

**OS:** Okay.

**SH:** And that's all. It's your, really your story that . . .

**OS:** All right.

**SH:** . . . I'm looking for.

**OS:** Okay, yes, a story with awareness, that's the point. (laughs)

**SH:** Yes.

**OS:** Yeah, well, okay, let me see. I was thirteen at the time that we left Vienna for Shanghai, just to put the time perspective in there. Now, I lived in Vienna and, as you know, of course, the Nazis, the Germans, Nazis, baloney, the Germans moved in in March '38. At that time, it was very, the, the information I absorbed from the surrounding environment as a boy of at that time twelve, I guess, was that it was depressing. There was some, there was fear as Jews, and so it slowly, there were, there, people were pulled out to, you know, to, to clean some things that, some inscriptions on the road, on the streets, that had been the result of some patriotic, I guess, Austrian demonstrations before the annexation. And eventually there were arrests, there were fears spread, pressure spread, then of course came the *Kristallnacht* that brought everything very strongly to, brought it in perspective, brought it out that, made it clear that there had to be some move to get out of there. Not everybody tried that hard. Some of the people I knew, my friends' parents, I suppose, clearly said, well, there's no place they have to go to, and it was very difficult to find any place to go to. So eventually the, this idea of Shanghai surfaced somewhere, that the information spread that there was a place one could go to, there was no need for a visa or for permission. We did get a visa, nevertheless, I remember, in our passports, from a Chinese Embassy, but it was completely meaningless. It had nothing to do with any reality, and however the problem was to get money together to buy a ticket. That's really what it amounted to as far as Shanghai was concerned.

My father was a physician in a relatively, well, in, in the twentieth district, Brigittenau, in Vienna, which is sort of not, well, it was a relatively poor district, really, and he was not a good businessman ever. He was interested more in the medicine, and so the conditions were such that money was difficult or had always been difficult in our family, I knew that. However, I had a grandmother living, a grandmother who, my mother's father had been reasonably well to do. And there were savings there and they, and he had, the father, my grandfather had died in '37 of natural causes,<sup>1</sup> and my grandmother then had the money that was left and that was, was also administered in a way by a younger brother of my mother's and so, however, it was, it, partly that she had funds from which our trips to, our fares to Shanghai were, I remember, I get sad because that grandmother played an important part in my life. Of course, she was killed somewhere, she never got out. Anyway, that was part of the, where the fares were paid, partly also they were, I remember that my parents talked about obtaining some money from the Society of Friends, that is, the Quaker society, that gave, that gave money to Jews who wanted to emigrate, and I don't know how much was involved, but that there was something also that happened. Well, eventually there were these, the fares were, were somehow raised that way, raised and then they, we had reservations for January 1939. However, there were circumstances that arose in December of '38 that brought about a switch, in as much as my parents, the fact, I'll give you the fact. My parents left, I think it was early in December, and I was left behind actually and left only with some other people in January at the original date. The thing came about because Lloyd Triestino was the shipping company, where, through which we got these tickets and they, and these, this couple my parents met there, I guess, in the course of making these reservations, and this couple, where he had been arrested and had been in detention following *Kristallnacht*, I believe, and he got out and it was too late for them to get their papers for leaving. And they had a reservation for early December and they, there was a, a lot of maneuvering and reasons. They tried to, the logical, one logical thing would have been for my father, for my father was the most important one to get out, you see, of course, and . . .

**SH:** Why is that?

**OS:** Well, because men were threatened by arrest and detention and so forth, concentration camps, and, but the idea was they couldn't arrange, there were reasons why they couldn't arrange formally for me and my father to be sent out. So the other alternative was only that my mother and father, anyways that was a final . . .

**SH:** So they made a switch with those tickets?

**OS:** They made a switch with those people, and the result was that I had to wait there. It was quite a traumatic experience for me at the time and, but I survived. It was traumatic in the sense that I felt, I suppose, endangered, abandoned. There was, of course, a real fear and real, that had gotten to me, the fear of insecure, of being insecure, physically insecure in the, in the street basically.

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<sup>1</sup> Schnepf later corrected this date to 1935.

**SH:** Had you had incidents in the street?

**OS:** Yes, yes, yes. I was assaulted once by a bunch of guys and just, you know, the, the feeling that, I did have the awareness somewhere at some level that basically somebody could go and just kill me in the street and nobody would lift a finger. There wasn't any defence or any, any resources to draw on. So that, that had gotten deep into me that feeling at that point. Well, okay, so then I arrived in Shanghai, my parents were there. They, they, when they arrived were received by a local committee that was some refugee committee and that was, this committee was, well, was really organized, I gather, by local residents who had been in residence there. Where the money came from at that point, I am not entirely sure. Some of it was local, some of it was probably obtained from the United States, because there was more and more eventually from the United States. But they were received and put in some, some place, the Embankment Building it was called, and there was some dormitory-type arrangements.<sup>2</sup> They eventually then were given some money to rent rooms and we, by the time I came, that was the situation. We lived in rented rooms that were located in the so-called French Concession and International Settlement. We moved around a lot, because I lived in a good number of places in the course of the period. Say I arrived February '39 and, well, then there was, let's say, the period was then, Pearl Harbor eventually came and after that for another year or year and a half, we were still in that, in that sort of place. But we, we lived in a large number of places and, you know, the sort of room where three slept and, and one shared kitchen and shared bathrooms.

**SH:** Why did you move around so much?

**OS:** You know, I'm not entirely sure. It was probably a matter, well, it was probably a matter of trying to find something a little better, something one could afford, you know, that sort of thing, that sort of consideration. I don't remember if there was any case where we had to move because somebody needed the space. I don't remember that. But I remember the places. But I, then there was one place, I think, we lived with, with, other refugees also lived in the house and it was sort of shared and then some other arrangements had to be made, because somebody there needed the space for somebody else. That appears, yes, that's true, I remember that.

**SH:** Could I ask you some questions . . .

**OS:** Sure.

**SH:** . . . about before Shanghai?

**OS:** Sure.

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<sup>2</sup> The nine-story Embankment Building in the International Settlement near the Garden Bridge was owned by Sir Victor Sassoon. Sassoon allowed the refugee committee to use the building to house newcomers upon arrival.

**SH:** Were any preparations made or any thought made to going to Shanghai before *Kristallnacht*, or was that the moment when your family decided you had to leave?

**OS:** I, I do not know that. I don't remember that. I can't say for sure. I always had that, had the feeling that the decision to leave was made in our family by, basically my father pushed for it, and I think it was made before *Kristallnacht*, but I can not be sure of that point. Certainly that gave it a great push and determination, too. But what I do not know is when the reservations actually were made. I do know, I do know that we had passports by then. I say I know, I have a photocopy of a passport of mine, you know, of a, of a German passport of mine. I could look when that was issued. But having passports was not a regular thing, that everybody had passports like nowadays.

**SH:** Yes.

**OS:** And in fact, I, we had passports relatively early on, because I know that we had to go back, or they had to be taken back for inser-, for stamping in the "J", if you're familiar with that. They had this big red "J" on the passports of Jews and I remember that we had the passports, the passports were there before and suddenly my father or my mother or both had to go back to, to get that stamped in. So that I know, but I don't know and I have no way of checking when the reservations were made to, you know, for the ship.

**SH:** Were there any special circumstances that prompted your father to decide to leave when other people were not leaving? Many of the people I've spoken to had a father in that situation sent to Buchenwald or Dachau or arrested after *Kristallnacht*. Was there anything like that?

**OS:** No, my father was never arrested fortunately. It had partly to do with the fact while we lived in, where we lived there was somebody supposedly who was, he wasn't well liked in the area, and there were people who protected him, and then we moved from there. We moved to my grandmother's house and when that was given up, and in that place, nobody knew basically . . .

**SH:** I see.

**OS:** . . . that he was there and there was a point where he didn't go out, he stayed at home. That must have been very hard on him, so except during *Kristallnacht*, we went somewhere to see (unintelligible) I was actually out on the street during, at that time that afternoon. It was not night, no actually, yeah, how was that, I, yeah. Anyway I saw people breaking, breaking windows of shops and so forth and we were lucky as hell, because we were in a taxi going somewhere. Somebody came, a sister of my father's came to warn what was going on. She somehow, she was a very tough woman and she came to warn us of what was going on and that my father should go somewhere, where . . .

**SH:** Away from your grandmother's house to somewhere else?

**OS:** Yeah, to somewhere. There some friends that my parents had, he was an, he was an

Italian, Italian non-Jew, and we went to his house and I didn't want to be left behind and then my mother and I came back, and my father stayed there. But to my knowledge nobody came. So he was not, however, I think he was just very, he was rather, he was perceptive and, and understood, one of the complexities of seeing one's parents in retrospect. It's very difficult to really analyze. In one sense my father, I always thought, was not a, not a realist in many ways, and yet in this case he was clearly a realist who pushed. And he in fact said that my grandmother should, should come to Shanghai, and there were some family circumstances why that never happened.

**SH:** Did other members of your family, you talked about your mother's brother . . .

**OS:** Yeah.

**SH:** . . . who also had presumably enough money to do this?

**OS:** Yeah, well, he didn't go to Shanghai, he didn't want to do that. He first wanted to go to Australia, this particular person, but he went to England eventually somehow. He survived the war in England. A young, an older brother, my mother also had an older brother, and his family involvement, he stayed there and, well whatever, his wife was quite ill and he didn't want to leave, she was not Jewish, it was complicated, it was a very, it was probably to a great part because my grandmother did not want to leave that son there that she never, she didn't leave. So neither of them ever got out.

**SH:** Do you remember any preparations your parents made for leaving, selling things off or trying to contact . . .

**OS:** Well, you see . . .

**SH:** . . . medical people in Shanghai?

**OS:** Yeah, yes, yes, there was such a thing. For one thing selling off, yes, but that happened already earlier, because we moved, we had to give up this apartment and we moved from there. I remember a piano was sold, probably furniture also, because we didn't take any furniture to my mother's, to my grandmother's house that I remember. So that was one thing that happened earlier. Now, yes, my father did contact somebody who was in Shanghai, it's true. There was a Viennese psychiatrist who, from Vienna, who went to Shanghai, a woman, years before.

**SH:** Do you remember her name?

**OS:** No. I saw her once actually, when I was in, I saw her once when I was in, in college there, I was at St. John's University. Did I send you my, no, I didn't tell you. I thought you might, I might have sent you a résumé. But so she came once to lecture, to give a guest lecture for this psychology course, the one psychology course that I took. But I don't remember her name, but everybody knew her. There were so many physicians going there. It turned out, it was such a enormous, such an over-, unproportion-, disproportionate number

of physicians among the refugee community and, and everybody knew her, you know, so nobody got anything out of that, because she, she made, if I remember right, did not welcome anybody or didn't, didn't, I guess, she was just sort of driven into a corner or against a wall.

**SH:** My grandfather was a physician in Vienna and he also, that's why I knew about writing, because he did the same thing, left in '39.

**OS:** I see.

**SH:** But he had made some connection with someone before. . . .

**OS:** In Shanghai?

**SH:** . . . before he went, so he had some Italian doctor, I think, who was on the Shanghai medical commission to welcome him there . . .

**OS:** I see. Interesting.

**SH:** . . . which smoothed his path in finding work.

**OS:** Yes, yes, well, okay.

**SH:** Well, I actually have one more question. This moment, or maybe a month, when your parents had left and you were left behind . . .

**OS:** Yeah.

**SH:** . . . where did you go and how did you get from Vienna to Italy?

**OS:** Well, I then left with those people . . .

**SH:** I see.

**OS:** . . . who had, you see, who had, with whom my parents had exchanged these tickets, and so I left with them by train and went to, to Genoa. And we stayed a night in Genoa at a hotel and then we left the next day on the "Conte Biancamano", that's the name of the ship.

**SH:** How did you feel about being with these people? They were strangers to you . . .

**OS:** Well . . .

**SH:** . . . you'd never met them before?

**OS:** Well, I had met them, yeah, but I didn't know them. They were strangers, yeah. Well, it was a pretty strange experience, it was a pretty traumatic experience. I didn't deal with that for a, I didn't deal with a hell of a lot for many years until I, starting about 1970, I got into



some therapy here, and so, you know, many of those things then, many of those things I've sort of explored. But, you know, that doesn't mean I've let, I've resolved them completely, I don't think I'll ever resolve them. It was a time of very deep feelings of fear, of abandonment, that were very, very strongly suppressed, repressed, that did a lot to me in my personality. So yes, I suppose, yeah, I was, it was a difficult, certainly difficult experience.

**SH:** So tell me now about arrival in, in Shanghai.

**OS:** Yeah.

**SH:** Your father setting up, presumably setting up a practice, whenever that happened.

**OS:** Right. My father was, yes, he was, he got some subsidy from the Komor Committee.<sup>3</sup> Have you ever come across . . . ?

**SH:** No.

**OS:** No?

**SH:** K-O-M-O-R?

**OS:** Yeah, Komor. Komor was a, well, a Hungarian Jew, I believe, who headed this committee and again I do, I'm not aware where the, where the funds came from for this. And they had an office in the Sassoon House, have you . . .

**SH:** Yes.

**OS:** You're familiar with that. It's still there and I don't know if you know, I've been in Shanghai, I've been in China in 1980 to '82, did I write you?

**SH:** No, but someone told me, somehow with the American Embassy?

**OS:** I was the Science Counselor at the, yeah, Science Advisor of the U.S. Embassy there, which was an interesting experience, certainly a very interesting life experience, and since then I have pursued some studies of science and technology in China and technical manpower and, and some of their, well, I recently, actually I've written a book together with some people on U.S.-China technology transfer, not only written, it was published I should say. Anyway, so I have been in touch and so I've been there at that time for two years and then, since then sort of every other year and so I, when I say Sassoon House, it's the present situation comes to mind. And there, there was a woman there who was sort of an assistant to Komor, whom I afterwards met. Her name doesn't come right now. I'm not very good at

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<sup>3</sup> The International Committee for the Organization of European Immigrants in China, called the IC or the Komor Committee after its leader Paul Komor, was organized in 1938 to assist the early refugees from Austria. It arranged accommodations and medical care for new arrivals.

names, I am surprised that Komor came to me. Okay, so it was some committee that evidently advanced some money or gave some money, so for that and my father opened an office in the Sassoon House, in fact, together with another physician, who was a German-speaking from Prague. Gosh, I can't (laughs) come up with that name either,<sup>4</sup> but so that was the situation and you know there was something, sort of limped along basically, really limped along on a pretty difficult level until this, until Pearl Harbor, when everything sort of broke up.

**SH:** Limped along as a doctor seeing patients?

**OS:** As a doctor, yes, yes, yes, that was what we lived on. I started pretty early earning money by giving lessons, teaching English to refugees and then eventually, well, that comes later, other things. Okay, so meanwhile I went, I myself attended a school called the Shanghai Jewish School, which was on the so-called Seymour Road.

**SH:** And is this how you came to know Boris Katz and . . .

**OS:** That's right.

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<sup>4</sup> Schnepf later remembered this doctor's name as Berg.

**SH:** . . . Joseph Tukaczynski?<sup>5</sup>

**OS:** Right, right. How did you know I knew them?

**SH:** Well, I met them. A year ago there was an attempt to have a reunion of people . . .

**OS:** Right.

**SH:** . . . in Shanghai, by some, organized by some lawyer out here and I went on this reunion.

**OS:** Oh, really. There was a reunion supposed to be in, for Passover in Shanghai?

**SH:** Yes.

**OS:** Is that what you are referring to?

**SH:** So there were only seven Shanghai Jews who went on the reunion, who went on this trip.

**OS:** You were at that time?

**SH:** Yes, I went with, I was hoping there was going to be a hundred.

**OS:** And Yosef Tekoah was there?

**SH:** Tekoah was kind of the leader of this . . .

**OS:** I'm amazed.

**SH:** . . . exhibit-, expedition because he was, he was somehow representing the Israeli government in some effort to improve relationships with the People's Republic.

**OS:** I see, I see. Okay, that makes good sense.

**SH:** And so, so he came and Boris Katz came, I roomed with Boris Katz, and we went for a week in Shanghai and a week in Beijing and we had, I really go to . . .

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<sup>5</sup> See interviews with Boris Katz (Shanghai, April 21, 1989) and Yosef Tekoah (Beijing, April 28, 1989). Katz and Tekoah, who changed his name from Tukaczynski when he later lived in Israel, were emigrants from the Soviet Union in the late 1920s.

**OS:** I only talked to Boris Katz once on the phone.<sup>6</sup> I saw his sister once, here, when there was, I was supposed to give some talk about the Shanghai Jewish community in some circles where there was a, there was a Chinese who claims he is Jewish, I don't know if it's true, he is some Chinese guy, an anthropologist and he, he talked about Chinese Jews at this. I've never figured out if he was for real or fake, but anyway it was that occasion when suddenly there was Reva Katz, her name, her family name is different, she's married, but I, yeah, I saw Boris. I saw him also in Israel, yes, of course, yeah, he was also, he was in Israel when I, well I just saw him a couple of times. Right, that is interesting. Yosef Tekoah was there and Tekoah mentioned me?

**SH:** I'm not sure that Tekoah mentioned you, but Boris did.

**OS:** Yes, I knew Tukaczynski and we, he was the smart guy. He had a brother who was not very smart and, yeah, interesting, yes, okay.

**SH:** So you went to the Shanghai Jewish School?

**OS:** I went to the Shanghai Jewish School. (laughs) I don't know if I met, was Boris Katz? Oh, I met, Joe was there, he was, he was a class below me, I think, eventually they were very distinguished by the fact they were brought by car.

**SH:** Brought to school by car?

**OS:** Yeah, yeah, they were Polish, they came from Poland, but they had other, they had money and they had other relatives there who had money. I know a cousin there of Tekoah's, another Tukaczynski, Mark Tukaczynski, whom I was, well, he had a brother Mark, anyway, that's not very relevant. So, right, I met those people. Now where did I meet Boris? I think, I don't remember, if Boris went to Shanghai Jewish School or not, but I remember his sister, his young-, that's what it was, his younger sister went to Shanghai Jewish School, I think, during the war years and I tutored her. Okay, so I went to Shanghai Jewish School and I learned English and I managed all right, and Shanghai Jewish School at the time stopped at what they call Form Six, that was, we took these overseas examinations of the Cambridge, Oxford and Cambridge Overseas Examination Syndicate, something like that, we called them Camb-, Junior Cambridge. That was, we took those examinations at the end of the Sixth Form, which for me was December 1940, yeah, and then I went, I changed, switched to another school, which was a public, so-called public school, which was Shanghai Municipal Council Schools, they had schools. And this was the P-T-H, so-called Public and Thomas Hanbury School, that's what it was, for boys on, near Edinborough Road and, gosh, I know where these places are, but I don't remember the names now, the present names, I've been there. But then, yeah, so then there was, there were fees to be paid (unintelligible) got to be a complication. I was by then teaching, doing some tutoring, doing some, some things, and I got, I got some money from somebody at the Shanghai Jewish School who helped me and his name Reverend Brown. I don't know if you want to hear about him.

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<sup>6</sup> Schnepf later noted that he refers here and later in the interview to Moses Katz, another refugee.

**SH:** Yes, I do.

**OS:** Are you interested in that kind of situation?

**SH:** Sure.

**OS:** Reverend Brown was an, is, was an Englishman who was a, he was not the head, there was a headmistress, but he was kind of the power behind the, you know, behind the organization. I don't remember his first name. He taught us, he taught us Hebrew and so forth and, and he was somehow impressed by me. And there was Mrs. Solomon, Mrs. Solomon was the headmistress, she seemed, she seemed more of a sort of weaker figure, however. And that was, did you go, you were in Shanghai, then did you go . . .

**SH:** Yes . . .

**OS:** . . . to these sites at all?

**SH:** Yes, I went to the Jewish School.

**OS:** Yeah. There in the courtyard is the, is where the synagogue was, that's sort of a storehouse now, I went by there, and it was used as a storeroom, and the Shanghai Jewish School is very much there the way it was and, of course, everything is there the way it was, only more neglected, and it was, if I remember right, the Department of Higher Education for the . . .

**SH:** Yes.

**OS:** . . . city of Shanghai.

**SH:** We couldn't get into the Jewish School, but some the people on our trip got into the Ohel Rachel Synagogue.

**OS:** Was that the one? That was the Sephardic synagogue?

**SH:** Yeah, the big synagogue.

**OS:** That was, and there that Reverend Brown was the Rabbi at that, that was really a Sephardic synagogue. There was a Ashkenazi synagogue also over there, these were the Russian Jews.

**SH:** Yeah, we went to that one, too.

**OS:** I don't remember where, I don't know where that was. I think I must have been there, but I don't remember even where that was.

**SH:** Reverend Brown is not an Anglican Reverend, but he's Jewish?

**OS:** Yeah, he was Jewish. He was a Jewish Rabbi, but he was called Reverend Brown. (laughs)

**SH:** I see. I've heard Reverend Brown and I've assumed he wasn't Jewish.

**OS:** I see, no, no, he was the Jewish Rabbi for that Sephardic synagogue. He himself, I don't know if he was Sephardic or not, he didn't seem, you know, nothing outwardly about him seemed Sephardic, what I understood at the time. There was a large community there, you see, of Iraqi Jews and some of those Iraqi Jews, you know, had become British subjects by being, having lived in India. There was one big family, Abraham, there that was very far-reaching, one branch of it had eleven children and were very poor. Two of the girls in that family went to school with me, Julie and Sheila, and, and they, well, we interacted with them, but not on a very, that community, you know, there was, the refugees were not that well, my impression was, not that well integrated, Jewish refugee children were not that well integrated really.

**SH:** With the children of the other groups?

**OS:** Yeah. Yeah, it was very much a community sort of life. The Russian Jewish children, you know, had, their parents belonged to the Jewish Club, so-called, that was in the French Concession. I have been there and they had their social life around there and at the synagogue. And there was a Rabbi Ashkenazi, that was the Rabbi, Ashkenazi, and his daughter went to school with me also and they lived in the French Concession and he was the rabbi in that, of that community.<sup>7</sup> And, and the Sephardic kids lived a lot around the school in that area and used the school as a kind of a place to meet and playground and what have you. And the refugee children, some of them also participated in that, but there, there was also a feeling that, there was a realization there were cultural differences, of course, and there were also levels of education, if you like, that were quite different in the background, was my sense.

**SH:** Could you explain that a little more?

**OS:** Yeah, the Sephardic community was, that I knew many of, were poor and were, were not, the parents obviously didn't come from professional educated background. Some of their parents were very religious and lived on charity, many of them lived on Jewish charity. There were others who were very vigorous. I knew, for example, a Jacob family, which was also many branches, and some of them were very professional, very serious people and entirely Sephardic. Joe Jacob went to live in Israel and was, I think, was on the radio there, Voice of Israel, and I was good friends with him and he was obviously a very energetic and very active and motivated person. And I don't know his parental background, I didn't get in

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<sup>7</sup> Rabbi Meir Ashkenazi, of the Lubavitcher Hasidim, was brought to Shanghai by the Russian Jewish community in the late 1920s to head their congregation.

touch with that. I knew his sister, also, she was somewhere here in this area in fact.

**SH:** Rose?

**OS:** Rose, yeah, do you know, how the hell do you know that?

**SH:** Because she, well, everybody, many people who . . .

**OS:** She married a refugee.

**SH:** Horowitz.

**OS:** Horowitz, yes, he was a classmate of mine.

**SH:** I've tried to go see her. She has jury duty this week. I had an appointment with her a couple of days ago, but she has jury duty.<sup>8</sup>

**OS:** Where is she?

**SH:** She's in, I always forget the name, she's near Pasadena. I could give you her address, I have it right here.

**OS:** Yeah, Horowitz. What's his first name?

**SH:** George.

**OS:** Yeah, George.

**SH:** She's actually distantly related to me. She's married some cousin, George Horowitz is somehow related to cousins of mine in Australia.

**OS:** I see. He was a classmate of mine at the Shanghai Jewish School. He and those two Abraham girls, we were sort of the, among the top students in that class.

**SH:** She does research about Shanghai Jews as a lay person . . .

**OS:** Does she really? Is that right?

**SH:** . . . and is somehow connected to the Skirball Museum and she knows about, about I think maybe the Sephardic community.

**OS:** The Skirball Museum is right here.

**SH:** Yeah.

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<sup>8</sup> See interview with Rose Horowitz (Pasadena, CA, June 28, 1991).

**OS:** This is very, very, yeah, I see, yeah, amazing. I saw her once, I've had no contact with, somehow, with all this community. Many people seek this community and seek out people who have come. I guess I haven't, I haven't done that. I have sort of gone off and, well, primarily, I think I know why, because when I came from Shanghai, you see, I did not come, I was not U.S.-oriented. I came, well, we'll get to that.

**SH:** You can continue, it doesn't matter if it's in order.

**OS:** Yeah, I know, we can mesh it up. You see, I came from Shanghai on a student's visa to the United States, to Berkeley to do graduate studies and, and I was at that point already very decided on going to Israel. So my orientations were more Zionist-orientation than, when I was at Berkeley, than trying to look for people from, from Shanghai. The other thing, the other factor that, that sort of set me apart from many of these other communities was that I lived for a long, I did not live in Hongkew for a long time. You know Hongkew?

**SH:** Yeah.

**OS:** (unintelligible) but anyway. And I, I lived longer than others, first of all, outside the District because my father as a physician got extensions.

**SH:** To stay?

**OS:** To stay outside the District until a certain point, when we had to move after all. But by then I had started attending St. John's University and so my life was, I, I did that and at the same time I tutored a great deal. I gave many lessons. So my life was, I had no life really inside the District ever. I came home to sleep and I got up in the morning and I left and I worked on weekends also. Sunday mornings was the time I was at home and by noon I left to do some more tutoring in the afternoons. So I had very little connection, if any, with the people inside the District. The only way, the only connection I had was with others who went to St. John's University, who studied, who all attended school there. That was really my only connection. And then through one of those who attended there, whom you certainly should go and see, I think, is Robert Sokal. Do you know about him?

**SH:** No.

**OS:** Robert Sokal is a, Robert Sokal is a professor . . .

**SH:** S-O-K-O-L?

**OS:** S-O-K-A-L.

**SH:** A-L.

**OS:** He's a professor of biology at Stonybrook.

**SH:** Oh.



**OS:** And he has a Chinese wife. He married a Chinese woman. As his mother says, "Is he again out with a *shikse*?" (laughs) I thought that was so funny when I first heard that.

END TAPE 1, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B

**SH:** Actually I, yeah, I had a question about your school.

**OS:** Okay.

**SH:** Why did you pick this PTH school, or why did your parents pick it?

**OS:** Oh, rather than what? Another branch of the Municipal Council schools? I wanted to go and finish school. And I had not, that was not a school finishing. That was, I had another year or two, depending on how you took it, to go, and I was bright enough to do it in one year. And so there was a choice, really, of schools, which was equivalent, and that, of two branches. And one of them was closer to where I lived.

**SH:** But there were other, there were other schools in Shanghai. People have told me that there were many different, the German school and French school.

**OS:** Sure, the French school, yeah. Well, I didn't speak, I spoke English. I started in Shanghai Jewish School, right? I learned English. And I went to school according to the English system there. And then the others, the only schools, really, open to me were these Municipal Council schools.

**SH:** I see.

**OS:** And there were two branches, basically, and they were not that far apart, actually. They were both, they're both close to Yu Yuan Road. I don't know, did you go to a place called Bubbling Well . . .

**SH:** Yes.

**OS:** Bubbling Well, *Jingansi*, and, well, the bubbling well has been paved over, so one doesn't have it. And very close to there there was one branch. In fact, that's where we took our, our examinations in that school. It's still there, the school buildings, all the buildings are there. It's very close to there on Yu Yuan Road. Yu Yuan Road goes from that, from Bubbling Well, which is that square, straight east, I guess, to the park. Do you know?

**SH:** Yes.

**OS:** What used to be called Jessfield Park. Now it's called Zhongshan Park, Zhongshan Gongyuan, which is the, which is Sun Yat-sen Park. But they called it differently, the Chinese called it Tsao Fung. I don't know what Tsao Fung means, actually. That was the Shanghai di-, you know Shanghai dialect is different from, from Mandarin. Anyway it, I was further up. Actually I lived near that park, and that other school was near there. So there was all there was to that. You see, there was of course the French school, but there were a very few who had, who were in that, you know, in that group of refugees that went to French school, very few, because French was not the language of, it was clear to most people that English was the language that one should learn. And, in addition to that, the French school was, is very difficult. You know, the French curriculum is like, is a more rigorous kind of thing and goes to a higher level. Any, so, then I went to that school, and I finished that year, and then I went to that, I took those examinations, beginning first of December, actually in the other school building. And then, of course, one day there was, there were the barricades, and the Japanese soldiers were there with barbed wire barricades, and I, from where I came, did not have to pass these barricades to get to that school. And that's, so it's, it was sort of a big shock, this whole thing. I didn't know what was going on. But the others, other people came in, and they had made some arrangements, they could, they could pass through the barricades, by showing basically a ruler and so . . .

**SH:** Where were, I don't understand where these barricades were.

**OS:** Well, they did that all over the city. They just had sort of check points, if you like.

**SH:** I see, so they weren't preventing people from coming? Just checking . . .

**OS:** They were, yeah, they were preventing people from going and from vehicles passing, yes. And why were they there? Because the major part of the city was there and that was, I guess, so one could enter the city from that direction, it was, it was, the other part was considered more outlying. But there were certain points, where when something happened, all through that period of occupation, they put up barricades suddenly. And sometimes these barricades were there, oh, there had been, actually, barricades before then. Now why were there barricades before then? Because I remember where they, being there at some barricades, waiting, not being able to pass, once with a certain teacher from that, from that school I went to that last year, an Englishman, a Scot. And that, so that must have been before Pearl Harbor. And yet we weren't able to pass through. I don't remember how that all worked. But there were some, no, it must have been after Pearl Harbor. No, I take that back, it must have been after Pearl Harbor. Yes, it was after Pearl Harbor. Okay, so, we took those examinations, and they were sent away somehow by, by repatriation, you know, ships, there were some exchanges after that. And we, I got my certificate after the war. So that was my school career. After . . .

**SH:** So that ended in December '41.

**OS:** Yeah, right. Actually, yeah. I had then one more week, there were then some examinations and that was it. And then I had nothing to do. It was impossible, I didn't, I

couldn't find a job, I couldn't find, I didn't have money to go, I would have liked to go with some people I knew who went to St. John's University, and so forth. I had an idea that I wanted to study, to be a pre-med and study medicine as a career objective, but there was no way of doing that. I had to earn money. That was, but then I was also flat on that, because there was nothing, nothing really I could do for a while, until March, I think, then I found a job through somebody with a, and these were very difficult times also financially. Everything sort of shut down. My father didn't have any income. We sort of scraped along, and some days we sold some books of my father's. It was a very difficult time, really.

**SH:** Hard enough that you worried about whether you would have enough to eat?

**OS:** Yes. Yes. And some days we didn't, that's true. (unintelligible) So . . .

**SH:** Can you say how that affected your parents or yourself, the insecurity?

**OS:** My mother was a very nervous person and a rather pessimistic sort of person. And she eventually, eventually after some, I think after my father had died, she committed suicide some time in 1956. And I'll just give some character to characterize her. And she was, I think, very frightened and very upset. And now, you know, with some perspective and, and therapy and so forth, I understand that I was, I probably felt very badly somehow. I felt guilty and I felt responsible and I felt, you know, I should do something, but you know, didn't know what to do. My, how it affected my father is difficult to say. He was, he suffered, I'm sure, but he suffered with, he suffered more quietly, and he had more of a, he was sort of more stable. He had, he had an internal stability. But when it came to, say, "Okay, why don't we sell this?" you know, it was, was something that was put to me to do.

**SH:** Really?

**OS:** That was interesting. Yeah. I mean, just thinking in retrospect, interesting. Yeah, I was at the time how old? Well, in '41, of course, I was 16.

**SH:** When were you born? Could you tell me?

**OS:** 1925.

**SH:** 1925?

**OS:** Yeah. You see, so, in '41 I was 16 years old. And July, you see. So during that period I was 16 years old. And that's amazing really, in a sense. It was sort of, yeah, I, and I had a, I mean, that goes, to understand that relationship, of course, is complex, but I was very dominated by my father in Vienna, I got many, many negative messages about my being stupid, and my not being capable, and so forth, which many, many fathers do. I was not the type of son that my father wanted. He was a broad-shouldered, stocky sort of person, and to him I was always narrow and sometimes more sensitive perhaps, there was lots of judgmental messages and all that. And so I accepted that I was stupid, I guess, for awhile, because I, fact is, I almost failed my entrance examination to the gymnasium in Vienna, and I

was very poor at mathematics, and you know, which was sort of dumb! And, well, you know, there are many interpretations one can put on those things, in no way absolute, but my, but my sen-, my one interpretation is that through this breakdown and through this emigration, my father simply lost power. And he was no longer a figure of power. So I got out from under that, and I suddenly was very good in school, you know, so that may have been ugly truth. But, so, it's interesting in this context that by that time, and I was considered a very strong, an important element, a strong element. And I, I eventually, I continued that line, I, you see, that, that dynamic continued further, because I then in, well, as I said, in March I got a job for a few months. Altura, Altura, that was her name, was the assistant of Komor. And she, yeah, then this, that was with a British firm, British accounting firm, who was doing some job for the rice office, so-called, there was rice rationing. And then that job stopped, because the company was basically closed down. And then I again didn't work for awhile. And then I got a job through my father. He, with this woman Altura, who opened a store, it was all, that's why I know about Komor, you see. And I was supposed to be a, a salesman basically in that store, because I knew some languages. Well, first of all I knew English, of course. Well, I also, by then I knew some French. I knew eventually, oh, I also knew, I'd started studying Chinese. So there were some things, you know, these aspects were . . .

**SH:** What kind of a store was it? What was being sold?

**OS:** It was a men's store. It was on Avenue Joffre, right near Saizoong. Joffre now is called, I haven't been there for a while, Huai Hai. The, the American consulate is on that.

**SH:** We drove by the American consulate and saw lines of people trying to leave.

**OS:** Yeah, you know that road.

**SH:** Yes, a beautiful street.

**OS:** It was further west, further towards the Bund, if you remember the name Bund. By the way, I should give you my dissertation on the Bund, for a moment, because I have been doing, (laughs) I have made it, I've found that most people want to say, you know the word, Bund.

**SH:** Yeah, mostly my tendency also.

**OS:** Which is absolutely wrong, because it has nothing to do with German, that word. The, the word Bund comes from a Hindi word, and it is, in fact it is in the Oxford dictionary, believe it or not. It is there. And it says absolutely the right thing, which I've checked out. It is based on a Hindi word that means some kind of a closure or an embankment. And it says in the Oxford dictionary, I have the small version, I have to look with a magnifying glass, and it says there that it is used, was used in China as, in British settlements there, for waterfront.

**SH:** I see. Well, that's a good explanation. I'd never heard that.

**OS:** *Bund* is absolutely wrong. But everybody said Bund. I kept wondering, why don't all

these people say *Bund*, and I know everybody always said Bund, there was no question about it being Bund. It was English. And so I inquired, and found some information, but then I found, it is in the Oxford dictionary, and then I checked it out with an Indian friend of mine. (laughs) And all that hangs together. Okay, that's Bund. Actually, the Chinese word has nothing to do with that. *Ngateh* they call it. Okay, so then af-, I worked in this store for about a year altogether. And I didn't feel good about that. I didn't feel good about that at all. I, I felt that somehow I was being dimi-, I was, I felt diminished by that, by doing, first of all I was enthusiastic about doing anything. So that was good that I did that, but eventually I, but then I, I never felt that that was something to be proud of, and to be, you know. I was, I had my insecurities at the time of course. And so . . .

**SH:** Were your wages important, though, for your family?

**OS:** Very important. Very important. And I was very underpaid, too, by those people. And eventually I told them that I'd like to get a raise. And they (unintelligible) you know. And the guy who owned the, who gave, actually who was the financing person, was a brother-in-law of that Komor, it turns out, was not Jewish, I think, was Russian. And I think Komor's wife was Russian. I never met her. He came by once in a while, and there was some talk that between Komor and that woman, that in some relationship, who knows? But Altura was her name. And so she was my boss there, and she wasn't a particularly pleasant person either. And eventually, yeah, they were kind of, you know, dismissed that, and the guy who was the money man, or the boss, he basically said, "Well, you know, better yourself if you can," you know. So okay, that was that. So they, then what happened was that there was a man called Kahan. I don't remember his, I don't know his first name.<sup>9</sup> Oh, that's where it, yes, Kahan was a teacher in the Shanghai Jewish School, a very impressive man, I thought. He was really the guy who held that school together, in terms of giving it some stature and some standards. He taught mathematics and physics, and did very well with the means he had at his disposal, a very energetic man. He, his father, I think, was of, I understand, was a rather well-to-do man in the Russian Jewish community, a, a merchant. And, whereas he was of, the son who had gone astray as far as the father was concerned. He wanted to become an engineer, and then he did the, he was in this, did that, you see.

**SH:** Could you spell that name?

**OS:** Kahan? K-A-H-A-N. And I don't remember his first name, but he then became the principal during the war, he became the principal of that school, you see. And he carried that school along during the war. And he, it turned out I went to visit him one day, because I was studying Chinese and he was interested in that. He had kept up, I had kept up some loose connection with him. And I went to visit him and he told me, basically, that I was doing the wrong thing. He said, it's very touching really, because it was so important in my life, it was a complete switch. He said that I was just wasting my time. And of course I knew that. And he said that he could, you know, but I told him, financially, that was the problem. And he said, well, he had, there was quite a bit of, a lot of demand for private lessons, because there

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<sup>9</sup> Later Schnepf remembered the man's name as Boris Kahan.

were things, people were switching schools and children were switching schools from public schools to the Jewish school, and there were dislocations and there was a great demand for that, and he said that he could refer to me, you know, students and I could tutor, and I could, I should do that, and go to university (unintelligible) . And I, and that was very important, you see, a very important switch in thought. Well, I, I did that, basically, and in addition to that, somebody else also, a guy called Lowy, Lowy, Löwy was his name. He was a teacher, and he taught during the war in the Jewish School, and he taught also in, somewhere else. Anyway, he, I knew him also. I taught him Chinese, which was the craziest thing to happen. But I basically repeated to him some things that I had learned. But anyway, I knew him socially, and he referred some Chinese to me, which was quite a good basic chunk of income. A group of Chinese who wanted English lessons, and he said he wasn't, he had done that, but he didn't want to do that for some reason anymore. And he thought I should do that. So that was another, that was on a Sunday, on Sunday, that was my Sunday afternoon.

**SH:** So you would teach a group?

**OS:** I taught a group, yeah, of Chinese.

**SH:** Who were they? Why did . . . ?

**OS:** They were, who were they? They were, they were sort of profess-, you know, professionals, some of them were professionals, some of them were merchants. And they made up a group, and they wanted somebody to, they, to read, and to conversation, and so forth. And that was a very great, very important thing for me. It was very, it was a good basis, you know. And I saw them on, I worked with them on Sunday afternoons and one evening during the, during the, and then through them I also then eventually taught in a, I taught in a, some school. But that was after the war. A school, I don't know, some school where they taught English, a Chinese establishment. Anyway, I did that, and then quit there. When I quit there, they, at that point they were offering me a lot more money, you see. And then they were very angry at me.

**SH:** For quitting the store.

**OS:** For quitting the store, you see. And, and one of my, one of my personal difficulties was, at that time, to understand something, that my father, I was very, very upset by the fact that my father was not supportive of my doing that, because he was worried about the loss of income. These people offered me a good amount of money. As it turned out, I earned quite a lot, and I, I overdid it completely way beyond what was necessary, I'm sure. And I just took on this responsibility, basically. And then, so I was, I became the money, main money-earner, you see, of the family.

**SH:** So you could make more by teaching lessons, by teaching English than working in the store.

**OS:** Oh yeah, certainly by what they had paid me, and as much as they had offered me.

The only thing is, I, I spent a lot of time, it was a lot of time. Transportation was very difficult. I walked all over Shanghai basically. And, well you know, I was young. There was a lot of energy, I had an enormous amount of energy obviously. And I, so that I studied, well, it's true though that my studies were not, you know, the kind of, the way one would think. I didn't study much at home. I just had relatively little time, for one. And then there were also difficult circumstances and eventually we moved to that District. So I went to school at the other end of town. You have been there, so you know.

**SH:** Yes.

**OS:** You have seen, you know where this District was. And to get to that, you, St. John's University was behind that park. Did you know about St. John's University when you were there visiting?

**SH:** We didn't see it there, but my aunt went there.

**OS:** Yeah, I see.

**SH:** Mia Hochstädt.<sup>10</sup>

**OS:** Oh God, Mia Hochstädt? I thought that name was familiar, Hochstadt. Oh, I remember her very well.

**SH:** Yeah, she's my aunt.

**OS:** Really?! Where is she?

**SH:** She's in Albuquerque.

**OS:** You're kidding!

**SH:** But she was here in Pasadena for many, many years.

**OS:** Really! I went, Mia Hochstädt. Yes, her father was a physician.

**SH:** Yes.

**OS:** That's the uncle you were talking about.

**SH:** The grandfather, no, my grandfather.

**OS:** Oh, your grandfather. I see. Because he, they were, they came to Shanghai, I think, earlier, a lot earlier. They, I remember where they lived. When did they get to Shanghai?

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<sup>10</sup> See interview with Mia Blocker, Albuquerque, New Mexico, June 28, 1989.

**SH:** They came in 1939.

**OS:** Really? Only? Because they . . .

**SH:** They lived above the cinema there.

**OS:** Right! They lived above the cinema, and they were much better situated, much better situated than most, I mean, they had an apartment. I was at that apartment.

**SH:** Can you tell me, nobody, you're the first person from Shanghai who's, who knew my family.

**OS:** Really? Mia, goodness. Now I knew her very well. After the war then, I knew her, and I think I sort of went out with her some, I was, I invited at her house, no, I was at her house for, not really, but I remember visiting her, going to the house, and meeting her mother. Her father I don't remember, I have a shadowy memory of her mother coming in to say hello and to talk to me. And I remember Mia extremely well. Oh God, yeah. The moment you said Mia Hochstadt . . .

**SH:** Can you say something about her, as . . .

**OS:** Yeah, she seemed sort of a little rigid, a somewhat rigid person. Very friendly, very, she had, I remember a smiling face, is the first thing that comes to mind, a smiling face with a somewhat rigid posture. Sort of straight, but some, I have a sense of rigidity. And what else? I don't know. She was clearly a very intelligent person. What else do I remember?

**SH:** The apartment that they had was unusual in its size and . . .

**OS:** Yeah. Well, it was unusual for refugees. It was, it's just, well, to have an apartment was a big thing. They had a very nice, I remember it as a nice, spacious, what seemed to me at the time, a very nice, spacious apartment. How, they somehow stayed out of the District all through, didn't they?

**SH:** Yes.

**OS:** Because I remember visiting them, in their apartment after they, after the war was over. I don't know any of the circumstances . . .

**SH:** They stayed with . . .

**OS:** . . . she was, always was well-dressed and, you know.

**SH:** They stayed with an Indian patient of my grandfather's, whose name was Lalkaka. A very wealthy stock broker, who gave them a place to stay. And he got, presumably, similar kinds of extensions or . . .



**OS:** Yeah, as a physician.

**SH:** . . . as your father did.

**OS:** But only for a while. Yeah, I see.

**SH:** But he got a permanent . . .

**OS:** Yeah.

**SH:** . . . permanent . . .

**OS:** Well, it was also financially for us important to, to move anyway. I don't think we could have sustained the living outside. That's in, goodness, that's hard to get out, get away from, Mia, I thought Hochstadt sounded a little familiar, but I couldn't place it. Mia, yeah, very clear. Gosh, I don't, I think, I think I could recognize her, because there are certain persons of, she seemed like a person who, in retrospect, who probably doesn't change much.

**SH:** I don't have a picture of her with me, I'm afraid.

**OS:** Yeah, that would be really interesting. Yeah. Do say hello to her from me.

**SH:** I will certainly do that.

**OS:** Yeah. I don't know if she remembered, but I think she . . .

**SH:** She suggested, she's one of the people who suggested your name.

**OS:** Is that right! So she remembers me.

**SH:** She knew you were here.

**OS:** Really? That's interesting. Well, I had no idea. Well, okay. We moved to the District, and we lived then at the, I commuted far away.

**SH:** When did you move?

**OS:** I don't remember when the deadline was, but we moved probably there about, something like half a year after that. We, I had, it must have been, let's see, if I put the times together, '41, then through '42 I worked at that store. I started school, gosh, I only started university, there's something wrong, I know in '44, in February '44. And there's something wrong. Either I'm wrong in that date or, or what. But I, maybe I started in '43. That's strange, but I know I graduated in '47. So I really should consider that, you know. I, there's something missing, because sort of a year, that I don't understand right now. Because really I started that store still, it was still '41, sort of mid-year '41, or maybe fall of '41, and went into '42. And then I, I, there wasn't, unless I was, I worked there for longer than I . . .

**SH:** So you started in the store before Pearl Harbor.

**OS:** No, '42.

**SH:** Oh, I see.

**OS:** Pearl Harbor was '41. December '41.

**SH:** So you started in the store in '42.

**OS:** Yeah, about fall of '42.

**SH:** Until '43.

**OS:** Until '43. I think only one year. Oh, wait a minute! So that's all right then! Yeah, that works out all right. Yes. No, that's exactly right. So I'm okay. So I started in fall of '42, 'til the fall of '43. Then I started teaching. And I then started the university in February '44. That's right, because I, I then did this teaching. And fortunately at that time we were still outside the District. And I, so, I moved into the District, I believe, soon after I started university. But I'm not sure about that. It started about half a year after everybody had to move.

**SH:** And how did these extensions come about? Do you know anything about that?

**OS:** No. I don't, I really just don't. I really don't know how, what the mechanics of that was. Even-, of course, so I commuted a long way, and I went by street car, you see, there and it was a long ride. And so I, that's where I studied Chinese. And I got into studying Chinese more when I went to St. John's. I attended their classes. There was a, there were courses, of course, they were, you know, the official language of the University was English. But Chinese for whom the school, of course, was made, was designed, they had Chinese, they studied Chinese as well, as courses, as required, requirements. And then there were, but there were a group of Chinese, so-called Overseas Chinese. I don't know if you're familiar with that term. Overseas Chinese are Chinese, basically, who have not had their education in China. Overseas Chinese are any Chinese who are not in China, you know, they live somewhere else, like in Hong Kong, or they went to English schools, or they've lived in Indonesia or in Thailand, you know. And some of them, they go to English, to Chinese schools in those places, some don't. And also here they refer to them as Overseas, it's the same, *Huaqiao*, Overseas Chinese. And they, they were, so there were courses for Chinese who had not had a good Chinese education. And they came on many different levels. And there were Overseas Chinese courses, language courses. And I was able to join the lowest one that was offered, which was "Three". "One" and "Two" never existed, I guess, from the beginning. And so I went to, with that for five semesters actually, for, with those courses. And that was, the Chinese, the requirement was four semesters of regular Chinese for Chinese students, or six semesters of Overseas Chinese. So I was close to actually doing that. And then eventually they put in a requirement that every foreign student, before he

could graduate, had to pass some examination in Chinese. And so I had, I had satisfied with it much more than there was required. They just passed it somehow.

**SH:** Before that requirement, was it unusual for Jews to be, to take Chinese?

**OS:** Yes. There were, well, I was the only one who attended, of foreign, of any foreigner that I know of, who attended Overseas Chinese classes. Yes.

**SH:** And why did you do that?

**OS:** It's a good question. I don't know! (laughs) Curiosity, I don't know, intellectual curiosity. I was never, I didn't, I spoke Shanghai dialect sort of to get on on the street. But I never got to be good at Shanghai dialect, actually. I concentrated more on Mandarin. Why? Oh! I must tell why. I must give credit here. My father motivated me to start studying Chinese, and to, you know, to read and write, to write and so on, seriously, Chinese studies. And that was with a, with a teacher who was also a refugee, and he had a method. He had studied Chinese, I guess, and he had a method of, of teaching characters that was relating it to pictures. As I know now, some of it was completely untrue, (laughs) but it helped, you know. They were sort of memory aids. And, anyway, I started with that, with, there were somehow three of us. My father knew this guy, I guess, and he organized this, that he and I, he had great curiosity evidently for that, he and I and another man, who was, I don't know how that connection came about, another refugee who lived in the neighborhood, and this guy taught the three of us. And there were always problems getting him paid, that I remember. But it was his initiative that got me really started. And then I just went on. And I, when I started there, and when I started then at St. John's, I knew enough, and that was already after Pearl Harbor, this whole thing, because, I know, because this one guy then was arrested by the Japanese. This other guy was arrested and, and was in Bridge House, I don't know if you ever heard that term, Bridge House.

**SH:** That was a prison?

**OS:** That was a prison, yeah. The Chinese or, I forget, I don't, it was in a certain building. It was close, you know where the Suchow Creek is, where you cross that bridge that we used to call Garden Bridge, when you went over there. It was on that street then, a continuation of that Bridge close to there. It was a prison and, and the Chinese, many Chinese were executed there, it was a, not a good place. So I know from there, then he ca-, got, came, got out, and he, it seems that he had had some connection with an American before then, and somehow that came from that. That's what he said. So I remember that the timing was in that period, that in between period, when I was working at this, and all those jobs, in between. Okay, what, what else can we say?

**SH:** Well, did this ability, your ability with Chinese enable you to have a different kind of contact with Chinese people than most refugees?

**OS:** Yes. I, well, for one, I was in, at St. John's I was more integrated with the Chinese, my Chinese co-students because of that. I attended social functions, I remember, and I could

get on with them. I sort of, they spoke Shanghai dialect mostly, but there were some who were from North China who spoke Mandarin. But I could get on with some Shanghai dialect, and I, and Mandarin, yes, I think it put me on a somewhat different footing. Like, yes, I also remember one of my classmates, and I never, I haven't seen him again. I don't know who he was, what his name was, but he invited me to his house. His father was a principal in a school. So yes, there was an interaction, and there was more, well, I understood more of what was going on, for one. I think that made a difference. Yeah, it also made a difference to me, once I was, I was stopped by a mob in Shanghai. What happened was that I took some, I had a, that was actually after the war, must have been, because I had a bicycle by then. So that must have been after the war. Also after the war, you see, there was great animosity on the part of Chinese towards foreigners, great animosity, deep seated animosity.

**SH:** But that, that only came out after the war? Or that, you'd felt that . . .

**OS:** Well, that was there, I think, all the time, but it came out, during the war, well, you know, there was the Japanese to oppose, so they were the enemies, if you like. But then once they disappeared, then it, there was more animosity towards foreigners. That was, that had, it was deep seated in China and has been, of course. And only now in Communist China, it basically wasn't really there, particularly because they had pride, and they have now, you know. Well, now it's a mess. But they have developed a pride, and, you know, Mao gave them that. The Communist state. And at that time, so it was useful, what happened often was, when you pass, pass some poor neighborhoods there by the Suchow Creek, when you went along the Suchow Creek, there was a way to go to that park to the University. The University was on the Suchow Creek. It went, you know, there's, it goes in that direction, it turns out, if you look at the map. And the, and what happened often was that, that Chinese women would push a child either to a, in front of a foreigner or a bicycle or whatever it was, and then accuse them, you see, of hurting their child, and that would bring a mob, and then, I don't know what they wanted exactly, money I guess. And I was in such a situation there and the fact that I could speak Chinese made a lot of difference.

**SH:** This was after the war that this happened?

**OS:** Yeah, I was surrounded by a mob of, of Chinese, who were all very, very hostile.

**SH:** And what did they want from you? I mean, did they, was it clear at all?

**OS:** Well, I don't know. No. Anger, anger one, maybe money, also. That woman wanted money, I'm sure. But what the mob wanted is difficult to know. Anger, express anger, beat me up, I don't know what. It was very, goodness, oh well, 11:30 already. It was, it was useful for me at that point to be able to speak Chinese and to defend myself. I remember that scene very clearly. It was probably pretty scary. Okay. So then, you know, yes, now where we lived in Hongkew there, then eventually, was in a small room. I, I slept on a camp bed that was set up for the night and, you know, then folded up. And my, my mother cooked on a little hibachi stove, you know, one of those kind of things. And there was, it was a project, we got that place really from the, by then, from, from a committee that had been set up to organize and to support the refugees. You see, the life there was very, very limited for most

people, and very few were fortunate like I was to basically to live outside. And there were camps where people really deteriorated, and it was very bad. And this was one of my deep impressions, was how harmful, how difficult, you know, things are for people. And we lived in this, in this house, there was a house. How my father got the room I don't know. And there was a washroom somewhere. It was cold, and it was, heating was kind of nonexistent. And my difficulties were also that, of course, there was blackout at night, and I was only allowed to use kerosene lamp, electricity was forbidden. Eventually I got some arrangement. There was a, the "Shanghai Jewish Chronicle" was the name of a newspaper there. And I forget the name of the man who was the editor of that.<sup>11</sup> I knew him, also through this woman, Altura, was a friend of his. And, but also, otherwise, but the fact was that I was allowed, he allowed me to come there, it was very close to where I lived, and they had permission to use electricity and work at night. You know, there were typesetters, Chinese typesetters, and there was a Jewish, a refugee proofreader there at night. And I was allowed to go there and, and study and work and so on. What turned out was that this proofreader had also a day job, and he fell asleep (laughs) half the time and I did the proofreading, I learned how to do proofreading. I didn't do much, but you know. The scene was very, very much in my mind (unintelligible) and he taught me how to do this, and I did some of that. It's strange.

**SH:** You had to leave the District every day to go to school.

**OS:** Yes.

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<sup>11</sup> The Shanghai Jewish Chronicle was founded by Ossi Lewin in the spring of 1939 and published throughout the war, unlike most refugee periodicals.

**SH:** Did you have to deal with Ghoya in order to do that?<sup>12</sup>

**OS:** Yes, yes, yes. I had to deal with Ghoya. I had to get permission from Ghoya, and once I came, a number of times I was late returning. And I couldn't let go by streetcar. And I walked from the Bund down there, when I saw that it, I wasn't going to get there on time. And I walked, and I walked, could get into the District, it's by some ways that . . .

END TAPE 1, SIDE B

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A

**OS:** . . . but they, but of course Chinese were all over the place, and Chinese language was all over the place, and the writing was everywhere, you know. That was the thing. And yet the refugees kept completely apart from China. It was just a, too, too far to go, they had so many problems. English was bad enough, you know, to deal with, I guess. Pao Chia means "guarding the home." Actually it should be Pao Hu Chia, but you know. It's an old Chinese institution, it seems, and the Chinese, the Japanese just picked that up and organized the Chinese, actually. They had these, this armband, Pao Chia. And then they organized the refugees, that way. And it was like ghettos, you see. That scared the hell out of me afterwards, when I, when I read about the ghettos in Europe, you see, under the Nazi regime. This was very similar. And then, one day . . .

**SH:** So you were able to evade them somehow, by . . .

**OS:** I did. But one day I was caught, and I was caught by, I came, it was just a very little late, I think, maybe I was fifteen minutes late. And because I had a pass to stay out 'til nine o'clock or something, you know, because I was a student and so on. And I was allowed to go all over the city. We had these badges, *Tong*, you know, it says on it, which means "pass." They gave us, you know, you had to wear this badge, that were supposed to, we were supposed to wear everywhere outside, and that time I came by street car, and a Russian, there were Russian policemen there, and the Russian policeman took away my pass. And then I had to go to that police station. You know, of course, I had, I'd been scared silly of this, of these Japanese, I must say. And I had to go there to get issued a pass, and so forth, and it was always a very traumatic experience (unintelligible) . And then that time I was very frightened, for one I was frightened (unintelligible) . I don't think it's specifics. The important thing is when you face, I had had that, of course, in Vienna, and then again here. You see, when you face sort of a power, where you're completely powerless, you're completely in their hands, you know, that is something that goes very deep, and I have great trouble with that,

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<sup>12</sup> Kanoh Ghoya was a Japanese official in the Bureau of Stateless Refugee Affairs who 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.

just great trouble, accepting that. And so I, that's a lot, I have very deep impressions from that. Now, of course, one says that these things are so important, depending on what happened in my early childhood and so on, you know, who knows. But this is a big thing. And I felt that very, very strongly again there. At that time, already, of course, I was no longer a child, I was already, you know, reasonably grown up. And so I really felt very, very upset about that, very frightened also. And so, you know, an aside, you know that there was, it was really dangerous there. Because not many people died, but some did, from being put in jail there. There was typhus that they, that they contracted in that jail. Typhus is transferred by lice or fleas, one of those. I had a dispute once with Reva about that, because she's a biologist, Reva Katz, that is, Boris Katz's sister. But I am pretty sure that it's fleas that transmit the typhus and that's how many people in that jail, there were fleas, and it was typhus, got typhus. And they died after that, they came out and they died. I know one man here, who in, whom I, by chance I encountered, who knew my father and knew me. I don't have a good recollection of him, Solomon was his name. And he, for some reason, decided to stay outside, illegally, and they caught him, and they put him in jail. And he says he contracted typhus, which he survived. I don't know, it must, maybe a few who did, a very few. Well, anyway it was very frightening, and then I, he made a big fuss, and, you know, St. John's University, small university, I don't know, he screamed and shouted. And . . .

**SH:** Who was this who was screaming and shouting?

**OS:** Ghoya.

**SH:** Oh, this was Ghoya. So you came to him from . . .

**OS:** Yeah. And then, yeah, then they published a list of names, they do that, evidently they did that. They published a list of names on the notice board to come, who, to, to come in whose pass had been taken away in some connections. I was told that that's how it works, and so then I came there, and I was very frightened. And he gave me back my pass, but he curtailed where I could go, because I was allowed to go all over, because I also was teaching, I said, you know, but then he wouldn't let me go to the French Concession to teach, only just back and forth to the University. Well, he couldn't control where I went, you know, on the way, because that, I had to pass through there anyway. But I, at the time, you know, there was this resistance to being so controlled. I said, "Piss on them." And I went to the French Concession, and I continued tutoring, teaching. And I, it was interesting, I actually took off that badge when I went to the French Concession. So I compounded, but that way I wouldn't be obvious. I thought if I had a badge, somebody could ask me for my pass, you see, some way. But this way, anyway nothing ever happened. I got away with it. But it was an important thing for me to have a, you know, to rebel, and not to, where I, within the frame of where that I could, where not to conform to their rules, more than a certain. So, okay, that was the only time I got, I got my pass taken away. So . . .

**SH:** How often did you have to renew the pass?

**OS:** I think every three months.

**SH:** And at those . . .

**OS:** It just comes to mind that way. I can't say I'm sure.

**SH:** Those times you had to appear before Ghoya?

**OS:** Yeah.

**SH:** Did he give you any particular trouble because you're a tall man?

**OS:** No, no, no. I didn't have that encounter. Yeah, yeah, I've heard . . .

**SH:** Other people have talked about it.

**OS:** . . . about his jumping up on chairs, yeah, and he, of course, hit people, and so on. Well, I never underst-, got the lowdown on this. There was some rumor after the war that he actually was a spy, an agent.

**SH:** I've never heard that. For whom? For the Americans?

**OS:** Yeah, yeah, something crazy like that.<sup>13</sup>

**SH:** I've never heard that.

**OS:** Well, I don't know, I don't know what. There were war crimes trials held in Tokyo and I do not know the facts of them. I do know that it was established, well, "I know," I heard, I don't know this, I was, I was told it was established that the Jap-, that the Germans had tried to influence the Japanese to kill the Jews in Shanghai.

**SH:** Everybody says that.

**OS:** Everybody says that.

**SH:** The same, the same thing, that you . . .

**OS:** I do not, I have not seen anything, any documentation of that ever. There is a book, did I, I told you that once, on the phone, there is a book out, that I have seen, about the refugee community in Shanghai.

**SH:** By a man named Kranzler.

**OS:** Is it?

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<sup>13</sup> There is no documentation showing Ghoya as an agent of the Allies, but this rumor was widespread in the refugee community.



**SH:** A big thick book about . . .

**OS:** A book at UCLA, published at UCLA.

**SH:** Well, I don't know about, this book that I've seen was by a man named David Kranzler, called "Jews", "Jews, Chinese and Japanese" or something like that. And it's about that, the Jewish Community, but it's published in New York by some Jewish press.<sup>14</sup> This must, this may be different.

**OS:** Well, is it written by a man who was from UCLA? There is a store, I tell you what, there is a store, I could call her up if I could remember what the hell the name is, of the store is. I know where to go, it's in Westchester, which is near the airport, where I lived at one point. And there is a store, a man's store, there. And I, the parents who owned the store were from Shanghai. And they had had a store just opposite where that store was where I worked, although I don't think I ever knew them. I remember the store, once they described it to me. I never knew them. And their daughter now runs the store. The father died, and the mother, I don't think is in good shape, she told me. I go by there once in a while (unintelligible) . And I can't remember the name of the store, otherwise I could call her up for you, but I should do that to find out, because she once, the daughter once gave me, lent me this book. And I read it with great interest. And it seemed very, very much like I experienced it. I didn't find any argument with that. And it also talked about Ghoya, but I don't think it said, and I don't know if it talked about that thing, but that should be something that one can verify.

**SH:** Yes.

**OS:** How I don't know. (laughs) But there must be somewhere documentation. Of course, a historian knows how to go about such things, a chemist does not. Okay, so I need to go to the toilet.

**SH:** Oh, please . . .

**OS:** Will you excuse me?

**SH:** . . . let's stop for a moment.

BREAK IN TAPE

**SH:** No, he visited, he visited Shanghai in '46.

**OS:** He must be my, pretty close to my age, I would think.

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<sup>14</sup> David Kranzler, Japanese, Nazis, and Jews: The Jewish Refugee Community of Shanghai 1938-1945 (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1976).

**SH:** He's about to be seventy. He's just turned seventy.

**OS:** Your father.

**SH:** Yes. But you mean Mia.

**OS:** Mia is younger though. Mia must be my age, or a little younger.

**SH:** Mia, I think, is sixty-one or -two or -three, something like that.

**OS:** Maybe a little younger than I, yeah, that's, that's reasonable. I am going to be sixty-five next month, so, maybe sixty-three, she couldn't be much younger older than that, I think, yeah. Amazing.

**SH:** Well, it's amazing, all these connections, that I've met Boris, and that he spoke of you, and Mia.

**OS:** Well, okay, where do we want to go from here? So, we survived the war.

**SH:** As you were, yes . . .

**OS:** Of course, one interesting thing was, eventually, the latter part of the war, I think, the latter part of the war, when, when finally Americans came to bomb us, that's the way I put it at least, I felt a great elation to be bombed. (laughs) Because we felt so isolated there, you see. The main, the tremendous feeling of isolation in the world is, is a very deep thing, it was feeling you're out of touch, nobody knows. And there are some things going on, and all around you sort of an alien culture, alien things going on. And, and then being dominated that way, so powerless. And then all of a sudden there was this, there's a connection to the outside world. Also, you see, we didn't really know what was going on in the Pacific. There was, we did know what was going on in Europe, because there was a Russian radio station that broadcast throughout the war in Shanghai. And so everybody was pretty well informed about, you know, they had this *prikaz*, well, you don't know, but the Russians had all these orders of the day, you know, they've conquered this, they've conquered that, and so forth, well, eventually they really got going. But we had no information about (unintelligible) about, it was all lies. They were Japanese sources. And we knew that.

**SH:** So, but you could find out accurate things about the war in Europe from this Russian station.

**OS:** Yeah.

**SH:** The Japanese didn't care about that?

**OS:** The Japanese did not interfere with that. Also, yes, and there were some people who in the dark of night listened to BBC. I had a friend, one of those, a Jacob in fact, Joe Jacob,

told me that he had heard, that it was risky and dangerous to do this, forbidden to do that. So we knew very little. So we didn't really know, you know, about the, what was happening, and if we, if this was going to go on forever or what. And so then, you know, when then the planes appeared, and we could see how the Japanese could not reach those planes either by anti-aircraft or by their, by planes, then, you know, it was a very reassuring symbol, in spite of the fact that then one felt danger. But, you know, I was at an age, at that age people don't feel danger, they don't feel that they, that, you know, much. I felt, sort of, that I was in no danger whatsoever. You know, in the middle of whatever. And then, of course, there came one day when there was a bombing of the District, that these bombs fell in that District.<sup>15</sup> And that was a serious problem, a serious thing that happened. First of all, people then became hysterical there. There was a, there was, there still is that building of course, there's the jail. Did you see that? Your, did you see the jail?

**SH:** No. But everyone has said that the jail was reputed to be the place that was safest from a bomb attack.

**OS:** Well, it had a basement, a shelter. And people camped out there, I'm told. I saw that once, but, because I wasn't there during the day. But people camped out there in fear. But some people were brave. And then, of course, I know some people, I've met some people, who lived in that one building, that was particularly, it was a big building that was full of refugees that was particularly hit. And I went that night, it was one of the interesting experiences of my life, I went that night and I went to that place which had been bombed. And, of course, many Chinese were killed there. And I saw heaps of bodies there. I myself, you know, have not been in a battlefield, but that was the one time that I really was completely, and I wanted, you see, I sought that exposure there. I wanted to see what was happening. I saw that, piling up bodies, very serious. And that, and that, after all, you must take also on top of, well, I was not that ex-, I was not that sensitive and that exposed at the time. Because I feel now, in, in retrospect, I was, I was pretty dehumanized in many ways, for years, because the life there was so dehumanizing. You know, the thing is, you had on the streets beggars. You had people diseased, starving in the streets of Shanghai, Chinese. Elephantiasis, this disease, you know. And people died in the streets. And I guess one way to deal with that is to just kind of retreat and to defend yourself from that. And I was pretty much that, quite a bit in that place. But I, you know, I went to do, see that, and I, the impression has stayed great.

**SH:** Do you think that other people, I mean, you, you relate this dehumanization to things that were in the public, do you think that other people also were affected in that way? Do you have any sense of that?

**OS:** I don't know. I haven't, that's an interesting point. I haven't really discussed that with people I do know from there, you know? I had, one reason is, I found that the people I know

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<sup>15</sup> American planes dropped bombs in the District on July 17, 1945. Virtually every Shanghai survivor remembers this day vividly. Fifty years later most can say exactly where they were and what they were doing when the bombers struck, the only time that American bombs caused casualties in the ghetto. About thirty Jewish refugees were killed, along with many hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Japanese and Chinese.

are not people who, who have ever taken that path afterwards, when you would, you know, find your, it's not necessarily a good way to, to, it doesn't sound justified to say that. I just feel that, on one hand I have, because of, you know, having gone through some therapy and things, I have sort of tried, I worked hard at getting back to, to humanity. But I have no justification. I haven't talked about it with anybody. I don't know. I don't see how people could not. I mean, you literally step over bodies, you know, and, well, I was interested, well, that's something we can discuss over lunch, without, to say now, that has nothing to do with what happened in Shanghai. I would, I can't see how people would not be affected by the surroundings of, by seeing poverty and starvation and disease and death as an everyday occurrence on the streets of Shanghai. Shanghai does not get cold, but I remember from somewhere I got a statistic that in the streets of Shanghai on a cold winter, so-called cold winter night, it rarely gets below freezing, but it does get below freezing, about a hundred people a, a day would just die in the streets of Shanghai. They were, it was mainly because it was wartime, there were many refugees from the countryside from the Japanese, that had gathered, that came to Shanghai, and it was just a terrible life. That, also, look, it's dehumaniz-, it was terribly dehumanizing to take a rickshaw, which was an everyday occurrence, that's a dehumanizing experience. You must say to yourself, "This man is not human." Otherwise how can you do it?

**SH:** Yes, but certainly most, or many, people who do that, don't feel the . . .

**OS:** Well, but that means they are dehumanized.

**SH:** Yes, oh, yes, of course.

**OS:** That's the point, I think.

**SH:** But they're not likely to reflect on . . .

**OS:** Well, not likely to reflect on that, no. They may reflect eventually, you see. But most people, when they go, oh, the reason why I stopped myself arguing at that point was, because most people, when they grow older, do have some, reflect a lot more, than they do while they are out, you know, there going and fighting in the life-battle. But it's true, I have not met what would be, I have never met somebody who has gone through this experience, and then has taken a major step to, to seek feelings and human contact and so forth, which has become very important in my, in my life. So I don't know. But I can't see how it can not be. I mean, I just say that as a judgment that, it isn't reasonable, to, and then, of course, the other part is, as I've said, these people who lived in that District, people who lived in camps, that's, if that isn't dehumanizing, how people can't only survive without retreating there.

**SH:** Is there some social or age difference, or some difference would explain why, I've talked to a number of people who were in Shanghai, and I've never talked to anyone who lived in the camps.

**OS:** Yeah.

**SH:** Were they older people, who would be dead now?

**OS:** I would think that they're probably, they were probably people who were the less, less vital, the less active elements. And so, I think, they just went by the wayside. Now, which means they probably didn't survive much, with any significance anyway. However, I, at the occasion, when I was, I told you the, when I first, when I suddenly met Reva, Boris Katz's sister, there was somebody in the audience who piped up, and said what I, and I was describing things, and I said you know what I did, and who I was. And then, I thought I described how, how the situation really was kind of desperate and difficult and bad and then that, I pointed out that, you know, then the bombing, and that like I told you, that was, like in the beginning of life. Then eventually with the end of the war, it was like, you know, a new opening to a new life that would start. Of course, for me, I was at an age where that was appropriate, you know. I don't know how older people felt. But I said all those things, and then a woman from the audience spoke. And she was hostile to me, but that was, that is a minor point. The main point was that she, she had a lot of anger in her obviously, about the fact that she said, that many people suffered much more than I did, which I'm sure is true. And she said that she lived in a camp, and it was very, a terrible life and terrible suffering. So there was somebody that I, it was, should've, you know, if I had had any sense, I should have gone, tried to get to know who she was, but I didn't. But she was in that group, and that's interesting, that group might be able to trace her, because I know the guy who organized that. Also Reva might be able to, she lives somewhere here, but I never got . . .

**SH:** I don't know. Boris hasn't told me where she is.<sup>16</sup>

**OS:** . . . together with her. We were going to, I was there with my wife at the time, she was not, you know, was not in Shanghai. And then we were going to, after that we were going somewhere else to have coffee together. But then we missed where we were going, and never got, we never got together, so. To tell you the truth, I'm not really, as I said, you know, I'm not that, it's not my primary, I'm so busy with many things. It's not my primary thing. I've found, in the course of things, the few times that I have got together, that really I don't have all that much in common with like, well, like Horowitz. You know, I don't know. He's a funny guy, a bit of a, do you know him? Have you met him?

**SH:** No.

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<sup>16</sup> The confusion between Boris Katz and Moses Katz, to whom Schnepf refers, continues here.

**OS:** A bit of a funny guy. He's always been, but very smart, very intelligent. And then I saw him again in Berkeley. He got an engineering degree at the, at Berkeley. And then I've, I don't remember how, but one day there was a gathering of people, I met all these people, one day out of the blue. And they were there, Rose and George, George, and one of the Abraham girls too, Sheila. Well, okay, that's all I know about that. So it was, you know, it was pretty tough, because also materially things were very bad. One important thing for me, in my personal experience, where eventually I didn't have any clothes to wear. You know, there was just, I couldn't afford to buy anything, too expensive, in spite of the fact that I worked so hard, and all that. And then they, this Jewish committee, there was a Joint, you know, all this was sponsored by the Joint,<sup>17</sup> through Switzerland, money came, and they had shoes and shoes, and a friend of mine, I got some there, and a friend of mine, a very good friend of mine, a Russian, a Russian Jew, he collected some clothes for me. (unintelligible) It was really desperate, in that sense. Food, during that time, I always had that food, because of, you know, not particularly great food, you know, quality, there was, I was always very happy when some, I tutored eventually also some Chinese, and I, and some of them invited me for lunch, I was very grateful. I remember that. So I survived, and I graduated from the University in 1947, actually. And then came to Berkeley, and then went to Israel. But that's a part that doesn't interest you.

**SH:** Well, it does a little bit, but could you tell me just about the end of the war, and how that affected things?

**OS:** Yeah, well, the end of the war came about, of course, first, the rumor of an atomic bomb, and so forth. And I guess you don't mean that. But, you know all about that. But first the rumor spread, and then the rumor spread that the war was over. And I know that people of the, of the Jewish community, then these people, you know, with a lot of stored up anger, of course, came out and chased away the, chased away the Japanese from the police station, took over the police stations (unintelligible) and then the Japanese came back. These are, I did not participate in that. But then, actually, came a, the time when it was actually over. We knew it was over, and it was, as I said, it was, well, for me it was like a tremendous liberation, opening. We spent the whole night just celebrating basically. And then, of course, the major effect was that one was free. One great disappointment, just an aside, was to see the, Chiang Kai-shek's army come in. (laughs) They were just as, as torn, and just as poorly dressed as the, as the soldiers of the puppet government of Wang Ching-wei, I don't know if you know about that, that the Chinese set up a puppet government. And, but then, yeah, so I was free. So then, I, together with some others, we moved out to, lived in, at St. John's University. And of course I taught, and eventually I taught at the Shanghai Jewish School, when, for a year or two, until I left.

**SH:** While you were going to the University still?

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<sup>17</sup> The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee was a major provider of welfare funds for Shanghai refugees before, during, and after the war. Laura Margolis was sent by the Joint to help organize assistance in Shanghai from 1941 to 1943.

**OS:** Well, partly while I was going. Then I, then I was there for a half a year after that, from June 'til, I was there 'til February, January, I think, I left again in January. And I came then to Berkeley. So all that made an enormous difference to me in fact, you know, and also, of course, to what I could afford, it turned out, because then I worked and I worked at the school part time, earned money, and it was worth a lot more, and I could buy clothes, and I did. And then eventually, yeah, then I graduated, you know.<sup>18</sup> Well, my parents then left in '47. They must have left around in '47, and went to join my sister, I had a sister, who had, that's another story, to Africa.

**SH:** You said she had gotten to England, and then she, is this the one . . . ?

**OS:** No. She went to East Africa, to Kenya, to Nairobi, where my, where an uncle of ours, a brother of my father's, he had gone early on from Vienna somehow out into the world, and wound up over there. And she went there and . . .

**SH:** This hadn't been an opportunity for you, or a possibility for you, or something interesting?

**OS:** No, no, not really. It was, my father, well, you see, they had restrictions. My father couldn't work there, and my br-, and somehow this uncle didn't want him to come anyway. I don't know what. There was, there was something about that, I don't know. There were some interactions, and he said (unintelligible) a lot of money, if I remember right, to dispose of, and that wasn't available, nothing worked. And he was afraid, my father then, eventually, went there, they went there after the war. And Kenya, although it was a crown colony at that time, where my father could not practice medicine. But he went to Dar es Salaam, to Tanganyika, my father and mother, and lived there, where he could practice. That was a, that was a mandated territory, first mandate of the United Nations, of, of, what was it called?

**SH:** The League of Nations.

**OS:** The League of Nations. Interesting, at such moments, the German word pops in. The League of Nations and then the United Nations, and so there he was allowed to practice somehow medicine until he died. So, you know that, and I came here.

**SH:** Was it difficult at all for you to get a visa to come to the United States?

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<sup>18</sup> Schnepf graduated in June 1947.

**OS:** Oh yeah, that was quite difficult actually. I was of, well, in Austria, people who were born in Germany, who were German could come to the U.S. at that time, came in huge numbers. Because the United States had passed a law that allowed organizations to sponsor, to issue affidavits, rather than only individuals. And so the Jewish community here issued those, and all the Ger-, all those born in Germany came here. The Austrian quota was not, was very small and oversubscribed, of course, with refugees. And so I did get, eventually, a student's visa to come here, which was very difficult to get, because I had to show that I disposed of lots of money, which was difficult to get together. I disposed of some money, eventually, but not as much as they wanted, so I could get some, got some guarantee from some (unintelligible) . So I got here, yes . . .<sup>19</sup>

**SH:** Just tell me briefly about your life here in the United States since then, or just the basic things that you've done.

**OS:** Well, I haven't lived since then, you know, in the United States. I've lived for thirteen years in Israel. I, well, briefly, I came and I got a doctorate in '51 at Berkeley, stayed there an additional year of post-doctoral work, then went to Israel, got a job in Israel, and then was for thirteen years in Israel at the Technion, the Israel Institute of Technology in Haifa. And then I, there was something personal happened there, and I got fed up, and came to the United States because I was offered a job here at USC, and so I came here in '65. And I have been here since. My personal life has undergone lots of changes, but I've lived here ever since then.

**SH:** You mentioned that being Zionist and, was obviously an important reason for going to Israel. Did you, were you involved in any of the Zionist organizations in Shanghai?

**OS:** Yes, I got involved myself in that. I simply became a Zionist out of conviction. I read what had happened in Europe. It was very traumatic for me . . .

**SH:** After the war?

**OS:** . . . to face what had happened there. Of course, the traumatic part was that I sort of, you know, escaped by, by no, no act of my own, you know. I was powerless, as it were, a youngster there. So, so that identification was very strong. And probably also, I'd say, guilt of, so on, it was closely connected. So that was one thing, that was an important thing there for me, and important for, for pushing me in this direction of becoming, of becoming a Zionist and wanting to go to Israel, because I felt that's the place where I, you know, at that time, it seemed like that was worth a good try. And I, so I wanted to do that. As it happens, now in retrospect, and eventually when I got to be more aware, I understand now that I did an enormous amount for myself in going to Israel, because, well, I'll give you an example. You know who Mike Blumenthal is?<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Schnepf received a guarantee from a former patient of his father in Shanghai.

<sup>20</sup> W. Michael Blumenthal, a refugee from Berlin, became U.S. Secretary of the Treasury under President Jimmy Carter in 1976. Schnepf refers here to 1981-82, when Blumenthal was President of Burroughs Corporation and on the board of Chemical Bank. See interview with Blumenthal (Berlin, February 23, 1995).



**SH:** Yes.

**OS:** Well, Mike Blumenthal I knew in Shanghai very well. We went to movies together, in fact. And he was a neighbor of a good friend of mine. And so I've known him since then. And of course I haven't met him much. But when I was in Shang-, not Shanghai, when I was in China in Peking at the Embassy, he came by one day with a delegation, I think, was, well, it had to do with a The Chemical Bank. He's on the board of Burroughs, you know. And, of course, he had been, it turns out, he was the cabinet officer who really opened the embassy there, you know, Woodcock. Of course, when, he came when Woodcock was no longer there. So he came, and I met him then again, you know, at the time, we took tea, and we talked. And I'm saying all this because this man, of course, is a person of, of stature, and as he said to me, you know, "After all, I've got as far as an economist can go," he became Secretary of the Treasury. He lasted for two years, okay, he didn't last long, but nevertheless. And he told me that he felt this enormous difference, you know how, it was so important to him, that he then came to China as a, as a cabinet, you know, officer, member of the cabinet, and, and he opened the embassy in, in China. After all, he had been just a poor refugee there. And it was very important that that feeling of being a refugee seemed to be still with him, is what I gathered from this, even he. Somebody else whom I mentioned before, this woman, when she heard that I was going to China, she said, "Yes, well, that's wonderful, you're going there as a diplomat, when you were just a poor refugee." And you know, to me, that hadn't occurred. It hadn't been there. And I wondered why that was, why that is, that difference, and it's clear to me that I just stopped being a refugee in Israel. It's a very deep experience, I lived there, I felt that I was at home there, I had a right to be there, and all that. And by the time I came to the United States, I didn't come as a refugee, you see. I came not as, I was invited to come and to be a professor here, you see. So I had, I had, I did a lot for myself in Israel. I put aside the, my refugee status or that part of my personality. I was no longer, you know, frightened, well, because in Israel very primitive things happened to me. I remember very clearly that the first time I came to Israel, and there was the Independence Day, in those days they still had military parades on Independence Day. And I went to see that. It was very, a very great, something of great importance to me, you know. The idea of being defenseless was so much with me. And then when I was, I was in the reserves, and I was doing something with the artillery. But they had guns there, firing guns, and boom boom, felt damn good. Very primitive things, but very important, if you've lived through this feeling, of course, you know of being so completely overwhelmed and no defense. So there it is. Let's go for lunch.

**SH:** Certainly. Thank you.

END TAPE 2, SIDE A

END OF INTERVIEW

Otto Schnepf was born in 1925 in Austria. In January 1939, at age 13, he left Vienna, and met his parents in Shanghai where they had arrived a month earlier. Schnepf attended the Shanghai Jewish School, then the Public and Thomas Hanbury School, and finally graduated from St. John's University in 1947. He received the doctorate from Berkeley in 1951 and taught at the Technion in Haifa for thirteen years. In 1965 Schnepf took a position in the Chemistry Department at the University of Southern California, where he eventually became Chair.

Schnepf returned to China as science advisor to the United States Embassy in Beijing in 1980. He retired from the USC Chemistry Department in 1992, and since 1994 has been Director of the USC East Asian Study Center.

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