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Wollstein, Siegbert and Werner oral history interview

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SIEGBERT AND WERNER WOLLSTEIN

MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

JULY 28, 1989

Interviewer: Steve Hochstadt

**Transcription: Eric Demoudt
Steve Hochstadt**

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Siegbert Wollstein: On the, on transcript from last year's meeting, I know how much more we can . . .

Werner Wollstein: You're going to ask questions, right?

Steve Hochstadt: But I'm really going to ask only one question. What I am doing, what I have done so far and what I did with the people whom I interviewed in Shanghai who came on the trip, was I just asked them to tell me their story of how they found out about Shanghai or how their family found out about Shanghai, how they got to Shanghai . . .

SW: You were in Shanghai?

SH: Yes.

SW: When?

SH: With this trip that I wrote about.

SW: Oh, here in April?

SH: Yes. I went there I went on that trip and that was the first time that I had ever been to China. It was very, very exciting and I got to see my, my grandparents' house. They lived on Seymour Road and Bubbling Well Road.

WW: Well, that's where the classy, classy Jews lived.

SH: Yes, well, I think they were classy Jews.

WW: The people who came from Russia via, what's, in north . . .

SH: Harbin?

WW: Harbin, Harbin, yes. A lot of the Russian came, when they run away in the early twenties, and so on, they went on, do you have that running here now?

SH: Yes, that is fine.

SW: Who were your grandparents?

SH: But my grandparents came from Vienna. Their name was Hochstädt and my grandfather was a doctor, a gynecologist. They came from Vienna in 1939, but they somehow . . .

WW: In other words, they, they left Vienna when we left Berlin.

SH: Yes, but somehow they were able to get money out. And I don't know how they did it. They sent some silver to England and then when they got to Shanghai they got this ...

WW: To give you an idea, an uncle of ours had a business. He was in the greeting card manufacturing business and, and exported all over Europe. And that's the way, that's how he got money out. He eventually settled in London. But when he went also in 1939, he had money sitting in, let's say, in Budapest, I am just, out of the hat, I am just giving you some names, Budapest or Bucharest or even Paris or in various cities around Europe. So he got money out that way. So he came to, went to Shanghai in 1939 the time, we came late in '38. Our parents came in May of '39 and that was, in other words, the same wave. I thought they were that wave that left Russia after the Revolution after 1917.

SH: My grandparents, you mean?

WW: Yeah.

SH: No, they were with this Viennese wave.

SW: In case of your grandfather, the main thing he brought out wasn't the money, was the profession.

SH: Yes, that's right.

SW: That, that . . .

WW: What was he?

SW: Gynecologist.

SH: And so he was able to set up a practice again and do very well, I think, in Shanghai.

WW: I don't even remember what you had to do. I know a doctor that, that, who specialized in, I mean, he was a doctor for, for my son in Berlin. And he set up a practice in Shanghai, too, and I don't, I really don't remember, if you had to go through examinations, tests or something to be certified or anything.

SH: That I don't know.

SW: In other words, he even during the time when they set up the ghetto, he still could live out in the French Concession?

SH: Yes, and I've told some people that and they said that they didn't believe me, that all Jews who were refugees had to go into the, into the ghetto. But he was able, he and his family, my grandmother and my aunt were able to stay. They didn't keep their apartment, they had to give up their apartment. But they were able to stay with an Indian man and they were able to continue, he was able to continue his practice.

SW: Well, he could, perhaps he could continue his practice by way of getting a pass, we have what you call a steady pass. You know, we had to acquire a pass, we got a pass for

three days to get out of the ghetto.

SH: No, they didn't have, they didn't ever have to move into the ghetto. They were able to stay out in the French Concession.

WW: His practice was on Bubbling Well. That is, of course, that was the International Settlement.

SH: The Uptown Cinema. You know the Uptown Cinema, the movie theater?

WW: What was the name of the theater by the racecourse? I think I know where the Uptown Cinema was.

SH: Seymour Road is the same street where, that had Ohel Rachel, the . . .

SW: Seymour Road was a synagogue.¹

SH: . . . the synagogue, and further down the street at the cross-, at the intersection of Bubbling Well Road was the Uptown Cinema and they lived up above it.

WW: Interesting.

SW: I think I have some idea of where that was. There was, there was a movie house on, on Bubbling Well Road.

WW: I even seem to remember the movie that I saw there once, "Heaven Can Wait".

SW: Right. So you were one of the two hundred on that trip? How did you . . . ?

SH: Twenty, there were only twenty on the trip, or fifteen. There were supposed to be two hundred, but it wasn't two hundred. It was only twenty people and only seven were Shanghai Jews.

WW: So you live where now?

SH: I live in Maine.

WW: How did that, how was, what was the connection between Bubbling Well Road . . .

SH: And Maine?

WW: . . . and Maine? What is the . . . ?

¹ The Ohel Rachel synagogue was built in 1920 for the Sephardic community on Seymour Road. On the same grounds was the Shanghai Jewish School.

SH: My father, my father was eighteen in 1939, and he, my grandparents were able to get a visa for him to come to the United States. So he came to the United States in 1939. And by then, later in '39, my grandparents

WW: As a student.

SH: Not as a student, but they had a very distant relative in New York. And he was able to .
..

WW: Oh, I see.

SH: He was able to get a visa to come to the United States.

WW: Just for the young man.

SH: Just for him. So he came to New York and he met my mother in New York and they got married right away and so I was born in New York, in New York City. And my grandparents and my aunt, who was only thirteen then, they went to Shanghai. And then eventually in 1949, they came to the United States also.

WW: On a visa from your dad?

SH: Somehow he helped them get a visa.

WW: Yeah, but they had to have a affidavit of support.

SH: So, but they, my grandparents always talked about Shanghai and so I got very interested in Shanghai and that's how that's why I went on this trip.

WW: All of that happened in New York?

SH: Yes.

WW: And then you just got to Maine.

SH: I teach in a small college in Maine. I teach European history.

SW: Bates College, in Lewiston, Maine.

SH: Yes.

SW: So how does it look in Shanghai now?

SH: Well, I think it looks much the same. There are still many, there are a few new buildings, a few high rise buildings, that could be anywhere in the world. But they're, most of the old buildings, I think, are still there.

WW: What does the Bund look like?

SH: The Bund, I think, looks exactly the same as it looked before.

WW: The Shanghai Bank with the lions and everything?

SH: Yes, the buildings, I am sure, look exactly the same. The streets are filled with traffic, mostly bicycles. People look, the Chinese people look healthy and well-dressed and well-fed. It's a bustling city.

WW: Well, it was bustling fifty, forty years ago.

SH: But there don't seem to be any slums or beggars. That seems to all be gone.

SW: And how, and how did you get there? There was a group of twenty people. How did you get into that, into that group?

SH: I had just heard about it by accident from, my parents saw a newspaper clipping announcing the trip. And I wrote to them, thinking there were going to be two hundred people on this trip, and said I'd really like to go. I want to meet all these Shanghai Jews, and so I got on the trip. And when I got to Hong Kong, that's when I realized that there were only seven Jews from Shanghai and a few Israeli journalists and myself.

SW: Was it you who sent to me that, here from the China Institute, you know, Pat Needle is the director. She sent me a clipping from the "Jerusalem Post". There it definitely says two hundred people.

SH: That must have been before the trip went. That was the plan that there were going to be two hundred people. But they couldn't find two hundred people who wanted to pay that much money to go. It was \$4000. And they couldn't find very many people who wanted to make the trip.

WW: On the other hand there were reporters and things like that. They paid for it by, by writing about it.

SH: That's right, that's right. And my university paid my way. I couldn't have paid for that.

WW: What did they, did they charge for it?

SH: \$4000 was the . . .

WW: A lot of money.

SH: . . . very, very expensive.

WW: But who collected these \$4000? The Chinese government?

SH: No, a group of, well, that's another complicated story. It started out being sponsored by an Orthodox congregation in Beverly Hills, California. And organized by one of their members, who's a Jewish lawyer in Santa Monica, California, and a businessman with China. But the, I think, that this Jewish lawyer fellow was a bit of shady character, and I am not so sure, I'm trying to find this out, but the Orthodox congregation and their rabbi dropped out of the, of the trip. And so this Jewish lawyer or entrepreneur, he's the one who organized it and he is the one who acted like the travel agent and whom we paid the money. But he has all these, had all these plans, two hundred people and it was going to be on Chinese television and there was going to be a . . .

WW: You mentioned the Orthodox synagogue. There were, they had a yeshiva there and everything. Well, you, you were in Hongkew, right where all the . . .

SH: We saw Hongkew. But we stayed in, actually we stayed in a hotel that's out near the airport now, that's a bit outside of town. And we drove around a lot in the International Settlement and only one day did we drive a little in Hongkew.

WW: The real Jews, I mean, where everything happened . . .

SW: That was in Hongkew.

WW: . . . that was in Hongkew after all. I mean, most of, your family was, your grandparents were lucky for one reason or another. In my opinion, I'm sure there was money involved. Somebody was paid off to . . .

SH: I wouldn't be surprised.

WW: . . . to finagle it. That's another way that Jews from Vienna or from even Berlin, in Austria, the civil servants were even more venal than in, in Germany proper. But in Berlin, you could find storm troopers who supervised the customs checks and all that stuff, who could be bought. So even in the, in the Teutonic race there is the same thing. That's the way, [laughs] that's the way the world is run. So there are all kinds of ways.

SW: You know I tried to find that article from the "Jerusalem Post". You familiar with this?

SH: No, I haven't seen it.

WW: So what did you actually see in Hongkew that sticks in your mind?

SH: We saw only one thing. We went to the Ward Road, the place where the Ward Road *Heim* was.

WW: Oh yeah?

SH: And it looks now like an apartment block, many apartment blocks. And . . .

SW: It used to be a school before we came there.

SH: There in Ward Road?

SW: Ward Road Home, yeah.

WW: Then it was a Ward Road *Heim* and then it became a hospital.

SH: And now I think it's apartments. But, and that was really all we saw in Hongkew, because the Jews on this trip, there were two German-speaking Jews, a woman from Vienna and a man from Berlin, both of whom live in California now.

SW: But they used to live in the '40's, in the '30s, in the '40s there?

SH: Yes, and there were three Russian and two Sephardic Jews. And the people who were really in charge of the trip were interested in these Russians and Sephardic Jews. And so the German-speaking Jews on this trip were sort of pushed off to the side. So the people who were organizing the trip weren't interested in Hongkew. They were interested in the International Settlement and the temples there. So I didn't get to see very much of the German side.

WW: We were talking about the *schul* on Seymour Road, but there was a school, the Kadoorie School, you know, did you . . . ?

SH: The Shanghai Jewish School on Seymour Road?

WW: No, no.

SH: Oh, a different one?

WW: The Kadoorie School was in the, in Hongkew.

SH: No, we did not see that.

SW: It was set up by a Mr. Kadoorie.²

SH: We didn't see that. All we saw in Hongkew was this Ward Road *Heim* and then we left.

WW: Right almost across the street was the jail.

SH: Yes, that was pointed out to us, that was pointed out to us.

² The Shanghai Jewish Youth Association School, usually called the Kadoorie School after the generosity of Sir Horace Kadoorie, was set up in 1939 in Hongkew on Kinchow Road. In 1942, the school had to move to East Yuhang Road.

WW: Okay, okay, and across the street kitty-corner from the jail was the police station. That wasn't pointed out to you either? See, that played, that police station played a big role, because that's where the . . .

SH: Is that where Ghoya was?

WW: . . . where the Japanese dictator who, who . . .

SH: Ghoya, Mr. Ghoya.

WW: Ghoya, okay.

SW: Yeah, where they set up the Stateless Refugees Bureau.³

WW: Yeah, Ghoya. I am really sorry. There is a sketch book that one of the refugees sketched and I should have brought it. I am sure it would have been of interest to you. You know that sketch book, Siegbert?⁴

SW: Yes.

WW: I still have that and I think you would have been interested.

SW: All right, so who guided you, who drove you around in Shanghai?

SH: A Chinese driver, we had a Chinese driver. We had an interpreter. And then, and we had this little minibus that fit all twenty of us and various people would say, "I think that we should go over here." They were trying to find Seymour Road and they were trying to find, because the names of the streets have all been changed, so they had some difficulty finding these things.

WW: Did they have English, street names in English?

SH: No. They had the street names transliterated into English, the new street names, but not the old ones. So it was, but some people had maps in which the streets showed both streets and so we eventually found our way around.

³ Kanoh Ghoya was a Japanese official in the Bureau of Stateless Refugee Affairs. Ghoya was charged with issuing passes for refugees who wished to leave the ghetto for business purposes during the day. His capriciousness and occasional brutality are remembered by all who came into contact with him.

⁴ After the war was over, Fritz Melchior published a book of cartoons lampooning Ghoya, which many refugees purchased. See interview with his wife, Ursula Melchior, Laguna Hills, CA, June 10, 1990.

SW: Well, I have a list of, I don't have it here, I cannot find it at the moment, a list of all the changed names of Jewish interest.

SH: Oh, I see, that would be.

SW: The old names and the new, and the new names.

SH: Oh, that would be useful for me. I am trying to figure out now, because I can get a modern map of Shanghai, but to get, to figure out where the old things were is . . .

WW: Does the racetrack still exist?

SH: It's a park now.

WW: Oh, okay. And across from the racetrack there was a Park Hotel.

SH: And a YMCA.

SW: And the YMCA, that's right, I sometimes went there for lectures, at the old YMCA.

WW: And there was also in that same, also in that complex there was a theater, where we saw "Gone With The Wind", that was the new thing at that time.

SH: I think the theater is still there. We drove by that quickly, but I think the theater is still there.

SW: How long did you stay there?

SH: A week. It wasn't enough time. It wasn't enough time.

WW: And the French Concession. You went to Avenue Joffre?

SH: Yes, and you can still, the sycamore trees are still, were there sycamore trees lining the streets there?

WW: That I don't remember.

SH: Do you remember that? The streets, many of the streets in the French Concession are beautiful. There are all these sycamore trees that line the streets.

WW: I don't remember.

SH: The buildings look as if they had been there a hundred years or fifty years, so I think that most of the buildings are the same.

WW: I'm sure they were. Listen, they were old houses when we were there, and that was

fifty years ago.

SH: So it still looks very, very nice.

SW: So what made the Chinese all of a sudden to welcome that group there?

SH: I think that they are interested in business with Jews, American and Israeli Jews. And I think that they hoped that by welcoming this group, they would be able, they would make new contacts with Jews and would be able to encourage Jewish investment.

WW: Monied Jews.

SH: This is a guess on my part, because nothing was made clear about why the Chinese were doing this, but that's what I think.

SW: All right.

WW: Now, I am trying to think, on the basis of what you told us, to try to say something to you that you don't know.

SH: What I don't know is about your lives, and that's really what I am interested in. The, really the details of when your family found out about going to Shanghai, why they decided to go to Shanghai, and what the trip was like.

WW: If you, let's take our family. I mean, each family had different history, different reasons and different origins, and still the overwhelming fact is that there were a bunch of Jews who suddenly realized, a people who till 1937, 1938, never thought they would go. They just didn't take it serious. And suddenly they are confronted with a need to find a place. The International Settlement in Shanghai was the only place where you could get off the boat and say, "Here I am," and without anybody asking what nationality they are, where do you come from, where is your visa, and so on.

SH: Now, but what was it that made your family decide suddenly in 1939 that it was time to go?

SW: We run for our lives.

WW: Right, right. Well, I was in Buchenwald for three months and that was, Buchenwald at that time was not a death camp, a camp of general murder, it was just individual killings. In other words, if you stepped out of line or something, did something that they didn't like, you could lose your life just like that. But at that time, what they told the families, if you can show that you have transportation out of the country, you can go.

SH: How did you get to Buchenwald? That is, why, when were you arrested and why were you arrested?

WW: The, this particular action in Buchenwald took place, everybody who had a police record of any sort, and that could be petty thievery or . . .

SW: Or traffic violation.

WW: . . . or traffic violation. I know a guy who lost his life, his life that way. Or high treason, whatever it was. Whoever had a police record was picked up on that particular action on June 13, 1938, and . . .

SH: So this is before *Kristallnacht*?

WW: Oh yeah, that was, the *Kristallnacht* happened while me and my family were on the way to Shanghai. So my family, my, and my brother mainly, and with my dad's money, saw to it that we had the transportation to go to Shanghai and at that time, as I said, there was, that was the place where you could go. If you, unless you had an affidavit of support from the United States or various shady visa, also depending on a lot of money, you could go to certain Central and South American countries and so on. Friends of my brother's, a friend of my brother's went to Rhodesia and things like that. So that's where one could go. And so I was discharged after three months and I got a deadline, by such and such date, you have to be out of the country.

SH: Did you, were you able to go back home when you were discharged, and then you had to leave?

WW: Oh yeah. And two months later, my brother and a younger brother, who in the meantime passed away, went two months later, and our dad learned or came to the, was late in the situation, that he realized that he just had to go.

SW: He was, he was arrested in the . . .

WW: *Kristallnacht*.

SW: . . . at *Kristallnacht* time and so the first thing I did, booked passage to Shanghai to go to, for him and our stepmother. They followed.

SH: Where were you at that moment?

SW: In Berlin.

SH: You were still in Berlin. I just want to try to get the dates straightened out. You were arrested in June.

WW: June. I was discharged in September and . . .

SH: But in the meantime you had made arrangements.

WW: For me and my family to leave the country.

SW: I suppose I did.

WW: Well, who else could have done it?

SW: Yeah.

SH: Could I go back even a step further? If you could just tell me when you were born and your full name, just so I could get this down, so I know how old you were and everything and if you got married before, you got married before . . .

WW: I was married at the time. I divorced that lady while we were in Shanghai. I have, I had two children, my son lives in Chicago, has children and grandchildren, and my daughter, when, we had an affidavit of support that comprised my father, stepmother, my brother Siegbert, and me and my son. My daughter lived at the time with her mother, who in the meantime had remarried in Shanghai, remarried a gentleman from Vienna. And they went. He was a civil servant of some sort and he had claims to whatever it was, a pension, or what have you. So they went, they went back very late, early in the game, when the Communists already were very close. And they went back to Vienna and my daughter still lives in Vienna, and is married and has a son. So that's my story.

SH: Now when were you born?

WW: In 1908.

SH: In Berlin.

WW: In Berlin, yes.

SH: Could you say something about how you managed to get these papers for, the proper papers for your brother or for your parents. Do you remember the process for doing that?

SW: All we needed were a few thousand marks.

WW: I, I missed something there. I started to explain that when you asked me about, about how I got to be picked up in June of '38, and I explained to you that you had to have some kind of record.

SH: Yes, what was your record?

WW: My record was that I was, had problems with the Nazis. I was, besides being in Buchenwald, I also was in prison for that earlier, from 1933 to 1935.

SH: For what crime?

SW: Political.

WW: Being against Nazis. [laughs] But as I said, for one case what I know, the guy had a traffic violation and when he was in Buchenwald, he went down and down and down. See, the life in Buchenwald was, there was a chance every day that you didn't, that you made it or you didn't make it, but besides taking a chance and hoping for the best, you also, there were ways to keep body and soul together or give, give way to despair. Now, to the degree that it was possible beyond the chance that you took of getting up every morning, I think I had a good attitude. And some people had a poor attitude and they didn't think they would make it, and that guy I am thinking of, he had that poor attitude, and he got sick and got pneumonia and died. And I know another guy also, who also had that attitude that I don't have anybody and I am not going to walk out here anyway and I am just going to cross the line of the guards wherever people, the inmates were working. There were always guards lined up and if you crossed that line, they automatically shot you in the back. And so that guy was telling me every day, "That's what I am going to do." And one night we came back from work to get our food and he had done just that.

SH: Could I just get back to your, to your answer? You said you had to pay several thousand marks. Was that a fee or a bribe or . . . ?

SW: No, that was the cost of the passage.

SH: Oh, I see.

SW: No, no, the passages were available for money. We went by way of Lloyd Triestino, which was the Italian shipping line.

SH: So you went to, how did you get the passage? Did you go to the, where did you buy a ticket? Do you remember these things? Where did you even find out that Shanghai was the, was the place to go?

WW: One knew, one knew. I mean that . . .

SW: I had a friend who worked for the, you know what Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden was? Fritz Marcuse's wife worked for Hilfsverein. That was general information. There is nothing individual of what I can tell you here. And that was the only way of doing it. And then came *Kristallnacht*. My father was arrested and so that's, at that point, I even, as it turned out, against his wishes, instead of paying suppliers, instead I, I went to the shipping line and booked passage for them. They followed to Shanghai in June or July of 1939.

WW: May.

SW: No, I think June or July, I think it was.

SH: So first you went to Shanghai and then, then you had booked . . .

SW: And my late brother and his wife.

SH: And then your parents.

SW: They came a few months later.

SH: And did you all go on these Trieste to Shanghai lines?

SW: We all went by way of Lloyd Triestino, yes.

WW: The overwhelming majority people went, they probably made it their business. There were some that actually went on German boats.

SW: And there also was an uncle, my father's brother, he didn't follow until 1940, after, after the outbreak of the war. And he went via Siberia and Manchuria.

SH: How did he do that? How did he get to, how did he get across?

SW: That I don't know.

WW: Here again, I mean, one knew, I mean, that's the organizations, the Jewish assistance organizations knew that's the way. See, until there was the cutoff in September 1939, after the war broke out in Europe. But Russia had that famous Stalin-Hitler Pact and they were neutral, quote unquote.

SH: So one could go to Russia?

WW: One could go to Russia and travel through Russia to Harbin to Shanghai.

SW: I forgot now if he went by way of Vladivostok or Harbin.

WW: Or Vladivostok.

SW: I really don't. This I don't know.

SH: Now I have been told that you were allowed normally to take 10 marks out of the country when you went to, when you went . . .

WW: No, I don't remember.

SW: Which is correct, though the only thing what, by which the way a lot people survived, was that they bought whatever they could and then year, month after month after month sold some of the belongings, including my parents. It was a fate of a lot of people.

SH: Could you say something about how you, could you, is that the way you got some of your resources out of the country? What did you do with your businesses or, or your belongings before you left?

WW: In our particular case, my brother and I, we didn't have resources in that sense. And not even, not even things that you could sell. I am thinking of cameras and things like that. And cameras were a greater value than they are today, see? Cameras, but also household linen and art, pieces of art. Of course, rings and things like that, jewelry, that was already a no-no. Provided that you didn't pay under the table and bribed an official. We had, the uncle that I told you about, he, he got help. My father, our mother died many years ago when we were still teenagers, so my father married a lady who was a cousin of our mother. And that lady for many years was married to a Prussian colonel. It was a big, big love match, even though the guy was a Nazi, this particular Jew, namely his wife, was different, okay. And he, they got divorced only because she did not want him to get in trouble with his co-Nazis. So she divorced him or he divorced her and she married our father. Now the Nazi married another lady. And the love for her, even then, was so great that he made his wife take stuff on airplanes to . . .

SW: She, that Nazi's wife made a trip to Italy to get some valuables, real valuables, that she wore on her body, but she was a German, so she . . .

SH: To get these valuables to your parents, to your father and stepmother, on their way out.

WW: What we were saying is, when you were, when you were made unbelievable that when you said that some people got money out and so on. It's true in the sense that there were ways if you had the right connections, okay? The average person came with what you could take. Naturally, you would refurbish all your clothing, new suits and underwear, I mean, that's nothing that is of any real, real value. And then we started to live from hand to mouth. There was a committee of, that first started with the Sephardic Jews, Persian Jews, and so on. I am not sure now if the Seymour Road *Schul*, was that a Sephardic *Schul*?

SH: I have talked to both Russian and Sephardic Jews who went there. So it was mixed, I think, although it was right next to the Sephardic temple.

WW: The temple was Sephardic, oh, okay.

SW: Well, there was also next to that Ward Road *Heim*, there was also a little *Schul*.

WW: Yeah, but that, that was a yeshiva, wasn't it?

SW: That was a *Schul*. In order to get things out, for instance, in the case of my parents, they went out, they only had on their bodies, they only had these, I forget, ten or twenty marks, but they still were allowed at the time to take what was called a *Lift*, big containers of household goods. Something eventually and over the years they sold . . .

WW: Sold them?

SW: Sold. They were beautiful bedroom sets. Well, here they put, for instance, boats are loaded like this, put in big containers, and this they still, at that late, even in 1939, they still could take out.

SH: I see.

SW: And so over the years . . .

WW: Persian rugs.

SH: I see.

SW: I don't say Persian rugs, but anyway they were, I remember a beautiful bedroom sets.

WW: Yeah, but I know, but I am talking just generally, I don't know, I am sure there were a couple of rugs from the, from the dining room and from the . . .

SW: Well, don't know if they could take them out. This, in this detail I would not know. Suffice it to say, there were some household goods or vases, something that had some kind of value. It was not a fortune by any means. It just to help to survive from day to day.

WW: And after that, as far as just plain welfare, welfare, by in one way or the other, at first by the Sephardic community and then, of course, it was the Joint Distribution Committee and other organizations who took over when it was, became a big, big job. I mean, when I came I was pretty much at the start of that role that, that, ship one after another after another. Eventually 20,000 people. Then it became a subject that international Jewry to take care of it. That went on all through the war years, via Switzerland, from the United States via Switzerland to Japan, and needless to say that for every dollar that was handed to the Jewish organizations were probably two or three got stuck with the Japanese war effort. But whatever it was, it was lifesaver. It was, they had a soup kitchen that was based on home food . . .

END TAPE 1, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B

WW: . . . what an average American would call gross.

SH: Did you go to the soup kitchen?

WW: Yes.

SH: Yes. Both of you?

WW: And often times . . .

SH: Every day, or how often?

WW: I mean there was a meal every day and then you had to provide for yourself, with whatever finances you could manage. Either a job. I mean, maybe we should stop to tell you a little bit about, about the . . .

SW: How we supplemented . . .

SH: Yes, I would like to know that.

SW: . . . the soup kitchen. By the way, I know if Pat Needle would let you have a transcript of what I said.

SH: Yes, I'm sure she would let me have that. Did you describe that . . .

SW: By the way, wait a minute. This I do have.

SH: Tell me about, how you got, what happened after you landed in Shanghai, about getting a job or finding housing, how did that all work?

WW: Job. My, my [unintelligible] he knew that we will have to emigrate. My wife was a milliner. She was able to, to make hats. I mean, you know, maybe you are not aware of it, but there was a time when you went in to a millinery store, there was somebody would make a hat just for you. Not like you go to any store and you buy a hat. They would make a hat for you. So she had done that when she was a young girl and she went to, went to freshen up on that in a millinery store in Berlin in 1937 or so, during that time, and when we came to Shanghai, she was able to do some work in a, well it was a dress shop. She was a milliner.

SH: In a European-owned dress shop? Who owned the dress shop?

WW: The owner of the dress shop was also a Jewish fellow, that I had met in Buchenwald.

SW: Was he a Berliner? Was he a Berliner?

WW: I am not sure. I am not sure. Anyway, so, so for a while she brought some, some money in the family. We . . .

SH: Thank you.

WW: . . . our dad's business was picture postcards of various cities, like Minneapolis or New York or whatever, and we tried something in that order. We had something printed. We had, our younger brother was a photographer. He took the pictures and we went to have them printed and so on.

SH: Did you all work in this venture?

SW: Kind of. He took the picture. Well, we can talk about him, too, because he went actually, he was a photographer and had a little photo studio.

WW: And then it was catch as you can to make a buck someplace. My brother and I were selling printing, like letterheads or various, various kinds of printing. And we, just to give you an idea of the precariousness of it, we would have Chinese printers, that we somehow got hold of, who would do the work for us and we would buy the paper. Well, the paper in regular trade, let's say, just to use a number, was worth \$50, but then we had, and you only get that knowledge by experience, by listening, by going around and, and trying various things. And if you, how do you say, the mother of need is necessity. We found out that in the Japanese section, where the Japanese lived, there were, they were for some reason, they were under supervision that they couldn't raise prices with inflation, and of course inflation was rampant and we would know that you get such and such paper in such and such a place, instead of \$50 you could get for \$30 or even \$35 or even \$40, you made, you earned \$10, okay? Even I remember cases, where you just sold paper that you picked up in one place and carried it to another place and got a tip for that, if you want to, if you want to call it that way.

SW: But mind you, I don't know, the whole thing, the way we tell it here, this doesn't amount to, just to supplement the soup kitchen, just to get an additional meal.

WW: There were days, noon when we got our soup-kitchen meal, we didn't know whether we were going to have a supper. And we had to go out and do something to get some money for the supper.

SH: So you were hustling, hustling money in any way?

SW: Selling, selling, selling printing jobs, meaning picking up paper from the Chinese paper wholesaler and went around, both refugee businesses and also other businesses, to sell them, sell them envelopes or whatever it is, commercial printing to small businesses and made some, and there, I must say, we had good experiences with Chinese people. The Chinese were, over these last hundred years, they all used to be exploited by all the foreigners who were in here with their colony of Jewish refugees. They knew they were not, they knew they would not be exploited by us, and once a Chinese knew that, he was your friend. In this respect, we had various good experiences with Chinese people. That, we had one, among other things, also I must say, I had one in some way a fairly regular customer, a German, by the name of Wilhelm Eckert. He had a kind of a variety store and among other things, he had the contract to supply the, by the way the German school was never, had never changed their name from Kaiser Wilhelm Schule to Adolf Hitler School, and he had that contract with that school. And this in turn fell into our field. So here again, I picked up the paper from the wholesaler. We found a Chinese bookbinder, who would, because the Germans, they needed a different ruling for the, because that was all done, the Chinese do that differently. They write from top to bottom, same like the Jews, Hebrew, write from right to left. So they had a certain ruling, and we supplied that. So here, I picked up the paper from the wholesaler, and had the place that did the ruling, the special ruling, and the binding done and this German fellow was, was enough a pain, he must have been an anti-Nazi, that he turned the job over to me. And that was, until he left town, but somehow later on the place was taken over by somebody else. I think . . .

WW: I didn't know that. I don't remember that.

SH: How did you communicate with Chinese people with whom you were doing business?

WW: Most Chinese that we had contact with spoke pidgin English. There was no problem. Listen, don't forget, there was that history of the International Settlement for many, many decades.

SH: So you could do business in English?

WW: Yeah, oh yeah.

SW: Yeah. No, but talking about that particular bookbinder. Then there came a time, like I said, my brother just mentioned, there was rampant inflation, in other words, money lost value from week to week or month to month, at least, it was not like the inflation in Germany in 1923, not of that kind, but this was. And then all of a sudden we were locked in the ghetto and that man waited even though the money would depreciate all the time, he wait and waited you know, he actually lost part of the money. So that is what I say and what I mean, we found that some of the Chinese said so, they feel sorry for the Jews, some of them. I wouldn't say, there were other ones too, that we had some, some good experiences with them. When I left, I thought I had a personally affinity for, for Chinese people. I still like Oriental way in some way. And I thought some back, some time to go back, get some because I knew some of the Chinese paper wholesalers there. I thought, go to the, the States and then, and I thought that I could go as a representative of some, maybe some big American paper mill and sell that to them, using the old acquaintances. Things came otherwise as you know, so I mean just to describe my attitude to what, so I did not leave in any way in bitterness. We appreciated the things that we were accepted, to, so at least we could make, not a living, what we called a living just to supplement the soup kitchens.

SH: Where did you live during this time?

SW: On Ward Road, what, a mile, a mile, was it south, west, east or north?

WW: The very, very first, lived on 19, Lane 19. That was almost, that was half a block from the Ward Road *Heim*.

SH: In an apartment?

WW: [laughs] If you want to call it that.

SH: Or in a room?

SW: A room you called an apartment. You would say, if somebody had two rooms, "Oh, that guy has two apartments." [laughs]

SH: I see.

SW: As a matter of fact, then by pooling resources, we had friends, I knew them from the old country, and we became close friends in Duluth, they live in Long Beach, California, now, and somehow we pooled with him and his brother-in-law, we pooled our few little resources to lease, you could not even buy, to lease a house which consisted of . . .

WW: It was ours to dispose of whichever way we wanted, but the ground on which it stands, that was, that belonged to the real estate company, the house you could live in it, you could rent it to somebody else, it was yours.

SW: I don't even know that belongs to the real estate. I thought any private person could not own property. That was my impression.

SH: Somebody said to me, in describing that, that the land belonged to the city.

SW: It belonged to the public. That was public.

WW: That was what my brother says. I thought it belonged to the real estate.

SH: So how many, you both did this with this friend?

WW: At that time my brother and I and my son, we were a family unit in a sense.

SW: And then my . . .

WW: You never had a chance to go into a house in Hongkew.

SH: No.

SW: That really was a standard house. It's too bad that you didn't, because you are, it automatically would give you a good picture of living meant, I mean, a home would consist of, what kind of a house these, all these, these lanes where they had . . .

SH: Can you do that for me in words? Can you describe what a house . . . ?

WW: Yeah, okay, all right. The house, we would walk in. There was a hallway.

SW: First you must describe how you get to that house. You walked . . .

WW: A lane consisted of what would be here a housing settlement. There was a main entrance, I mean, just a driveway of some sort, and then there were a row of houses here, a row of houses here, and, depending on how large these settlements were, on the back side . . .

SW: There also were intersections.

WW: Right. Now there was a main driveway to the very end, and then there were houses

here, houses here and so on. Okay. Then the house, each house had a big, a big door and immediately after that big door was a courtyard. From the courtyard you walk into a large room. You walk through that large room at the very end, and you came to a narrow hallway and at the other end, in other words, opposite of that large door, there was a small door. Where you had the large room, the large room ended at a inner, what you could call, I don't know, what can you call this. It was a space where the water connection was, concrete well, and where the hallway that led to the real door, there was another room, and then there was a, then you walk up to the second floor and halfway to the second floor, was another small room and then you were upstairs. The whole thing was one big room, the whole area. Now to give you measurements even approximate, I just hate to.

SH: Then how many people would live in a house like this?

WW: Okay, now here, see here comes what my brother was explaining. We pooled our resources, right? There was my brother and I and my son. There was, there were friends, who was couple with a young child approximately the age of my son. Then there was that third couple, the brother-in-law of that friend of ours, with his wife and that only, that was the space on the ground floor and on the landing halfway up. The top floor, when we had to, we had to rent out, because there were payments to be made, so we had to rent that out so to break even on that. So in the space that I described to you, there were three, six, eight, ten, twelve people. Okay.

SW: Three, six, eight, ten, twelve, yeah. Wait a minute, there was that little room on the ground floor, too, that we rented out.

WW: Oh, that's right. Rosencrantz or whatever. That's right. So that's thirteen.

SW: Actually we, with these friends from California, actually we shared one room, which was divided by . . .

WW: That's what I described to you as the big room on the ground floor. We had to build a partition wall. But the wall was not all the way up to the ceiling, it was maybe where the top of the window here, or something like that. So privacy, who wants privacy?

SW: There was more privacy than to live in a *Heim*.

WW: In a *Heim*, sheets separated one family from the other.

SH: Now did you live the way you've described, with your jobs and this house, was that all the way through the war from when you arrived to . . .

WW: No. I mean, first there were resources that you just, one way or the other, you still had. And not everybody lived that way. My folks never lived in that condition. They, when they first came, they went to the place in the . . .

SW: French Concession.

WW: . . . French Concession.

SW: No, no, not right away.

WW: Well, we rented a room for them and Elli fainted, not literally, but pretty much so, when she saw what she thought they were supposed to live in. So they went out and rented a place that had, that was, not maybe American amenities, like we are used to here, but don't forget that was also fifty years ago, I mean, and people lived . . .

SW: How they managed it, how they actually managed it money-wise, I do not know really. Like I say, they brought back some big containers with furniture and gradually they sold all that and just to keep up, to, to live from hand to mouth. And eventually, I know they, I don't think they ever went to the soup kitchen, I don't think.

WW: No, no.

SH: Was your father able to work?

SW: No. Well, he also with, how they managed to, also together with a few other people, bought a little coffee shop.

WW: Yeah, there they took care of a coffee shop. That is . . .

SW: This also sounds big and it was just, here again, just to stay alive.

WW: But they didn't go to the soup kitchen.

SH: How did the decree which forced refugees into Hongkew, how did that affect you both?⁵

WW: Well, it affected us personally, that we, every time we had these sort of customers [unintelligible] we had, they were mostly in the International Settlement. And so we, to the degree that we would get, that we had to get into contact with them, we would have to go through that . . .

SW: Mr. Ghoya's office.

WW: Mr. Ghoya's office.

SH: There must have been many, many people who had to go to his office every day.

⁵ On February 18, 1943, the Japanese authorities in Shanghai issued an edict forcing all "stateless refugees", meaning Jewish refugees who had arrived since 1938, to move residences and businesses into a bombed-out square mile in Hongkew, the so-called Designated Area. The move had to be accomplished by May 18.

SW: Well sure, there was always a line, before you got . . .

WW: Long lines, long lines like you, they tell you, people stand in line for soap or potatoes in Moscow, so that's how we stood in line for, to get that passport and that took a long time.

SW: And sometimes you got it and sometimes you didn't get it, depending on the whim of Mr. Ghoya or Mr. Okura was the other guy's name. In that sketch book, remember the few things, you know, Mr. Ghoya comes to his office there, and say if you have to, let's say you applied for some, for that and that business. You bring the list of your customers and there was one kind of a cartoon in it. A man stands there. "You are a grave digger. Well, it's very honorable profession. First you bring me a list of your customers." It said in that little sketch book. Another one it said, there was a very, well I'll say, a not, a very not good looking woman, some ugly woman, and she said, "I am a masseuse." "I know what a masseuse is, you give dirty sex for dirty men," or something and she was really very, another word for ugly . . .

WW: Homely.

SW: A really, homely, a homely old woman and he suspects she runs a massage parlor. So what does that leave us now, what are you actually driving at now?

SH: Well, I was wondering how, at the point when Jews were all supposed to move into the Designated Area, you were already living in Hongkew, so you didn't have to move, is that right?

SW: Yes.

WW: Yes, we had to move.

SW: Yes, we had to move.

WW: In Hongkew, not all of Hongkew.

SW: Not all of Hongkew.

SH: And you were living in the wrong part of Hongkew?

SW: In the wrong place in Hongkew, that's right.

SH: So you had to sell your house or your apartment?

WW: That's when we bought, that's when we bought. No, we owned that place on . . .

SW: Baikal Road?

WW: Not Baikal Road.

SW: That's where we lived with the Bengers on Baikal Road.

WW: Okay.

SW: Did we own that?

WW: I think so. I think. But there we lived by ourselves. There we didn't have the people upstairs.

SW: Right, but in order to be able to afford to get into some kind of living quarters, we had to, a great sacrifice for our convenience, we had to rent out an upper room.

SH: And your parents had to move from the International Settlement to the Designated Area also?

SW: Yeah, but when did they live, they lived on Ward Road, that same house, remember where Dr. Damm lived. 381 Ward Road was a big intersection there, there they lived for a while.

WW: Yeah, that was after they moved out of the French Concession.

SW: No, why they moved out from there, I don't know. Well, it is kind of, it is really, it is hard to, like I say it is also individual, you know, people lived in different situations.

WW: And, I mean, there are, there are always businessmen who know how to turn a dime in a dollar. There were businessmen who were able, and I don't mean that in a dishonorable way, but who were able to turn the misfortune of the majority, that they had to move into the Hongkew district, to their advantage. They had stores of some sort and things like that, where the needs, the resources that were there were concentrated towards them and some people are better at that than others.

SW: Well, there were also people who would, who did business with Americans, with English, or with Chinese or even with the Japanese.

SH: Then tell me how the end of the war affected you. Did that change . . . ?

WW: [laughs] Are you talking about economically, you mean?

SH: Economically, yeah, where you lived.

WW: You could go out again more freely and we, I remember, we had some, we had some of these picture postcards that I told you we had printed and after a while couldn't get rid of. Nobody wanted them. We still had some of them left when the war ended and the flood of Americans came. And we, there were, I remember one in particular, a guy who had rented,

who had the concession in PX stores and we sold, suddenly we couldn't get enough of these cards. If we would have had hundred thousand of them, we could made a lot of money. Suddenly that, we got rid of that, and whatever we had, we sold to that guy in the PX store. And it was just, it was looser. And you could . . .

SW: All I can say, I think between our parents and ourselves, I think we left there, in cash in American dollars, I think if it was \$500 all together between all of us.

WW: Yes, [laughs] we, when we knew that we were going to the United States, of course, by hook or by crook, whatever money somehow we could accumulate, there was a certain amount in Chinese money and we would go and exchange it.

SW: Let's say 10,000 yuan made, made one. Each one, you know, "Oh, have another dollar." One dollar or two dollars.

WW: Five dollars. You had another five dollars towards the kitty to go to America.

SH: When did you decide that you wanted to leave Shanghai?

WW: [laughs]

SH: Or did you always want to leave Shanghai?

WW: What kind of a question is that? [laughs]

SH: Well, because it maybe sounds silly to you, but there were some people that I have talked to, who would not have left except for the Communists coming, who were happy, not happy, maybe they were happy, who saw this as a permanent thing. But you didn't, you assumed you would leave?

SW: Let's talk about our brother, Kurt, who unfortunately we lost about a year and a half, almost two years ago. He had a, he also worked in this country, always in camera, in a camera shop, darkroom work, and he, among other things did, have you heard of Mr. Sassoon, here? He, every evening, he went to, he went to, you saw the, how they call the Cathay Hotel now?

SH: The Palace, Palace Hotel.

SW: No, that's across from there.

SH: No, I am trying to think of what they called the Cathay Hotel now.⁶

SW: It is another name for it.

⁶ The former Cathay Hotel is now the Peace Hotel.

SH: Yes, I've forgotten the name, I'm sorry.

SW: I think it's mentioned in that article you sent me.

SH: Yes, I am sure it is, because we ate there, we ate in the Cathay Hotel.

SW: Anyhow, he went every evening, he went to that nightclub in that, and he would go around tables taking pictures. That was also one way of making a living. And how he did actually during the war, I don't know. Then after the war and he said, actually after the war, he had a business there, what you real legitimately called a, not a big business, not just a supplement to a soup kitchen. He made a living there, specializing in photocopying, what you call xeroxing things and that was one way. What he was in, what at that time was called the Hamilton House. Was that pointed out to you?

SH: No.

SW: Also has a different, by the way, I have a, I got that here from Pat Needle, the old and new names of these various, of these various . . .

SH: Maybe she can send me that.

SW: Beg pardon?

SH: You got it from her, maybe she could sent me a copy of that.

SW: Yeah. What should we do? With this you want, this is actual, she, this what went on tape at that meeting.

SH: If I could have a copy of this, I would like that.

SW: I have to make one. That is the only copy I have here now. I can mail it to you.

SH: That would be very nice.

SW: I can mail you copy of these pages, because this actually repeats some of the things that, that we discussed here today. That was my presentation at that meeting.

SH: So you were talking about your brother, Kurt, who had a business after the war.

SW: Well, he had it before the war, too. Like I say, also among other things, he took the pictures from, which were used for, for postcards.

SH: But were you about to say that he was not interested in leaving Shanghai, is that why you were . . .

SW: No, not interested, but he was not in a big hurry, he had a, no, sure they would want to leave, they lived primitive, I know how, actually where they lived afterwards.

WW: They were bombed out.

SW: They were bombed out.

WW: Was there any mention of the bombing raids where Americans, where Jews were killed?

SH: Yes. So his house was one of the places that was . . .

WW: Yes, he was bombed out.

SW: I was, after I had an appendectomy in, I was in the hospital in that Ward Road *Heim* that was converted into a hospital, and I was just recuperating from the appendectomy, when on July 17 the bombs fell on Hongkew, which killed, I think, two thousand Chinese and forty of our Jewish refugees.⁷

WW: I was on my way, do you know where the Garden Bridge was?

SH: No.

WW: What was the name of that big hotel there by the Garden Bridge?

SW: The Broadway Mansion.

WW: Yeah, do you know here the post office was? I know I have seen the pictures.

SH: What is that bridge over? Is that the bridge over Soochow Creek?

SW: Right.

WW: That's the Garden Bridge. And there was a . . .

SW: There are more bridges.

SH: I think we traveled over that bridge, though.

WW: On the way to Hongkew, you have to.

⁷ Nearly every refugee remembers vividly the terrifying day, July 17, 1945, when American planes dropped bombs in the heavily settled area of Hongkew. Most can say exactly where they were and what they were doing when the bombers struck. About thirty refugees were killed, and hundreds, perhaps thousands of Chinese and Japanese.

SW: Well, you can go over the Szechuen Bridge, too, and eventually get into Hongkew, too.

WW: Didn't you get more into the Japanese district when you cross there at Szechuen Bridge?

SW: Did they point out the kind of ill-famous, it was originally, later on it was kind of Japanese, like Japanese Gestapo headquarters, where they tortured Allied . . .

WW: Prisoners.

SW: . . . Allied prisoners. Did they point that out to you? It was about a block from the post office. It was North Szechuen Road. It was across the . . .

WW: Oh, now I know where North Szechuen, yeah, but that led more into the Japanese district, didn't it?

SW: Well, but anyhow, it got into Hongkew.

WW: Now I know now. It was a real wide street, I think.

SW: Szechuen Road was a wide street. It was also on the Soochow, on the bank of the Soochow Creek was also a movie house, the Capitol, the Capitol Movie was a smaller, smaller movie.

WW: On the other side of the bridge.

SW: Right on the settlement, on the, that's right.

SH: So am I right in saying that after the war was over, you were interested as soon as possible in leaving?

WW: That is a fair statement.

SW: Sure, even people who made their living, well, they certainly wanted to get, get out of there. After we described to you, who wants to stay in that condition. Even let's say if, and even let's say, there would be a few people who really made a living, who wants to, with the whole community gone, who wanted to stay there?

SH: So, tell me about how you got out. What, how you got papers, and how did that work?

WW: Well, everybody got, naturally got busy to pick up where they left off. In other words, wherever you had people who could help you. You couldn't do much sitting there. You had to get somebody who could help you getting the necessary paper. In our case, a cousin of our dad worked for a person who maybe isn't even unknown to you, funny I don't remember . . .

SW: Schocken was his name.

WW: Schocken.

SW: Are you familiar with Schocken Books?

SH: Yes.

WW: Okay, the owner of, I mean, I don't know who it is now, if the guy is still living, even though, I mean, theoretically he could be living yet. He was a business man who had department stores in Germany. A cousin of my dad's was a big general merchandise manager or something in that order, if I remember it right. And I mean big, not just an employee, a big wheel. And after the war, we approached him.

SH: Where was he? Was he in Shanghai also?

WW: Well, he . . .

SW: Was in New York.

WW: No. He was in New York. He transferred his assets, like business people were able to do that, transferred some of the assets, and made, and gathered more assets in the United States and in this case to his credit, he invested it in a publishing enterprise and he's head of Schocken enterprise, Schocken books.

SW: He, among other things he published a lot of books on Jewish content.

SH: Yes, Schocken books is excellent about books on subjects like this.

SW: Well here, that's Mr. Schocken. Schocken is younger, he was, when he wrote that affidavit, he was 32 years old. I remember that from that . . .

WW: So, we wrote him first, if he had any knowledge of what had happened to our cousin, uncle. And he told us that he went to the ovens like the rest of them, and so the connection was opened up, and as time went on, that was right after the end of the war, 1945, '46, or early in '47, we wrote him if there was a possibility that he could give us a affidavit of support. And he did.

SH: For whom?

WW: For, that was for, for my dad, our stepmother, my brother, me and my son.

SW: And for Elfi.

WW: Yes, that is right. Elfi was on that, too.

SH: Who is Elfi?

SW: His daughter in Vienna.

SH: So and with that piece of paper you were able to get . . .

WW: Right, later on, later on the US government created what you called *Sammelvisa*, that's a collective visa, and they were for that . . .

SW: It's what you called corporate affidavit, corporate affidavit it was called.

WW: Okay. And the technical way they did that, the quotas had accumulated during the war, that was German quota and English quota and so on, various quotas. That was the 1920-something immigration law. And they said, okay, all these quotas we view that as a corporate visa, corporate affidavit, and there you don't, there was, it was not a private businessman, like Mr. Schocken, but whoever the entity was, they guaranteed it. In other words . . .

SW: There was a Jewish organization, they, a Jewish organization, either the HIAS or that . . .

WW: Or the Joint Distribution Committee.⁸

SW: Yeah.

SH: So that made it easier to get into the United States after a time?

WW: You see, the basis of a affidavit of support, if you immigrate here and you don't, eventually you don't have anything, you are, you go and collect welfare. This affidavit says, if anything happens, if that person doesn't have the money for subsistence, you have to pay for him. So in that case, it was a Jewish organization.

SH: So with that you came here to the United States?

WW: With that we came here.

SH: And did you come here to Minnesota?

WW: Well, we, everybody from Shanghai came to San Francisco.

END TAPE 1, SIDE B

⁸ 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.

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A

WW: There was the Joint Distribution Committee who, to begin with, financed our stay in more or less liveable quarters. They supplied, some of the hotels they supplied there were more or less used for the flesh trade. But for people who came from living quarters like [laughs] we described to you . . .

SW: Was a palace.

WW: Was a palace. [laughs] And then a lot of single people or married, or young couples, they naturally, where would you want to go? Beautiful California. So they got themselves jobs in San Francisco. They had family or relatives in the Los Angeles area or whatever. They stayed right there and then also people went on their own, I mean, had somebody, even in New York, people who had relatives that they could go to, that's where they went. For people who had problems, like we had, that we had, I mean as far as another family in that sense, like father, mother and two kids, or three kids even, you had an aging couple, father was 71, let's see . . .

SW: Oh, sure.

WW: Yeah, he was 71. Our stepmother was . . .

SW: About 60, not quite 60.

WW: But anyway, so they were not capable of making or starting out with any business. We were greenhorns, and we got jobs.

SW: And they suggested various places in the South, where you felt it would be too hot, I remember Houston, somebody . . .

WW: So we would have, more or less, they had offers from Duluth, Minnesota, or from Madison, Wisconsin, or from some place in the country, the Jewish community would say, "We can sponsor a family." So the Jewish community in Duluth said we can use a family and we have an apartment, well, apartment was, also it was again better than what we had in Shanghai, so when they told us, I think, they have an apartment with, what did they say, three rooms, three rooms, I think. Three rooms? That's a palace. [laughs] It was also very small, it was not a, we lived through that, too.

SH: And so you all went?

WW: Well, we lived in that, all of us, there's five of us went to that and lived in that apartment. And then little by little, when my, my son, well, first my, our dad died after three years. The next, the following fall, my son graduated from high school and the job that I had, I figured I could duplicate in Minneapolis. My son went to, started college at the University of

Minnesota, and I thought I can duplicate the job that I had in Duluth, and I went to Minneapolis and I remarried, married thirty years until my wife passed away five years ago. We didn't have, I didn't have children with my second wife. My brother stayed in Duluth with my stepmother until ten years ago.

SW: Well, like I said in that thing, there was not the best of times, but we survived and let's say, how should I say, the majority survived to tell the story.

WW: Oh yes, I mean, so there is no misunderstanding, a lot of the people passed away, people who shouldn't have or wouldn't have under normal circumstances. For one thing, there were sub-tropical diseases like dysentery . . .

SW: Malnutrition.

WW: Malnutrition was the basis, many times, that you got sick and you would have survived if your background, your physical stamina would have been better.

SW: It was not mass destruction, but let's say at least, it's hard to tell, what I know, but statistically you are losing, I think, of the total colony of twenty thousand in these nine years, I think we lost about two thousand, which is of course over the average. So you figure that out, actually what the normal attrition would be. Normally there are a lot of older people came there. But not only, I mean, to Shanghai there were enough young people, too, who came to Shanghai. It was an average, there were younger people, there were older people, there were children born. But the figure I seem to remember is that we lost two thousand of the twenty thousand over the nine-year period, so it's hard to tell what actually is due to normal attrition or to the circumstances caused by the conditions.

SH: We've been, you've been talking for a long time, and I don't want to tire you out, or overwork your patience. I have other questions if you have time and . . .

SW: Like I say, I just wonder, a lot of these things, some of these things I'm going to send you, make another xerox of it and mail it. Should I mail it to Wisconsin again?

SH: No, I'll give you my address in Maine, which would be best.

WW: What are you teaching?

SH: I teach European history, German, Soviet history, modern European history.

SW: By the way, you were in China, were you, how you got together with people there, do you hear of that Rabbi Stampfer. You don't know who he is? He was pretty much interested. I know a few years ago he went to Kaifeng.

SH: What's the man's name?

SW: Rabbi Stampfer of Portland, Oregon.

SH: No, I don't, don't know of him.

SW: So you just heard about this and just . . . ?

SH: I just heard about the trip and decided I wanted to go, because I thought it would be an excellent chance to meet many, many Shanghai Jews, because I thought there would be many on the trip, and also to see Shanghai.

SW: Why is that? Why in the heck did they said in the "Jerusalem Post", there were two hundred?

SH: It must have been before the trip started. The article you got, I assume that it was before the trip started, and two hundred, the organizers said there were going to be two hundred, because that's what they thought, but they were dreaming. The organizers were dreaming.

SW: The way in that article, it says like it did happen.

SH: Like it happened, well then I don't understand, then I don't understand.

SW: Like I say, at the moment I just wanted . . .

SH: Then somebody . . .

SW: I thought I had the things together with these papers here.

SH: Then somebody was fooling somebody, because there was only seven. I was very disappointed.

WW: As you hinted there are some shady . . .

SH: I think there was some shady stuff. But I don't know, because the guy who was doing the organization was a business-, he was a *Macher* and how much interest he had in Shanghai Jews, or how much interest he had in making money or in having better connections with the Chinese and being . . .

SW: That Seder never took place?

SH: The Seder took place.

SW: Where?

SH: The Seder took place in the hotel that we were staying in, in their dining room.

SW: Which hotel did you stay in?

SH: The hotel was called the Xi Jiao Hotel, Xi Jiao Guest House. It is on the outskirts of the city. It's a fairly new building. It's a very beautiful, kind of in the middle of a park, a very beautiful building, and in this banquet room we had a Seder and it had about, there were probably seventy people at the Seder. But this was . . .

SW: What was the other, you said there were seventy, but who were the other sixty-three?

SH: Okay, there were the seven Shanghai Jews, then there were the rest of us on the trip, who were journalists or wives or myself, so that made about twenty. Then there were all the Jews who happened to be in Shanghai at the time for one reason or another who heard about this. They came. The American Consul in Shanghai and his family, the Russian Cons-, the Soviet Consul, the Hungarian Consul and some . . .

SW: All right, now we coming closer, now we are coming closer to that thing, they mentioned that Seder with two hundred might be exaggerated.

SH: So the Seder probably had seventy people and then some American students who were, there was, I sat at a table with a 25-year-, 22-year-old girl who had just finished college, and she was a student at a, she was doing some work at Shanghai University, and she was Jewish. She was the youngest person there, so she got to speak, she got to say the things in the Seder ceremony that the youngest person says and then I sat next to another woman who wasn't Jewish at all, but was also an American, who happened to be teaching at a Shanghai University. So everybody who had any connection with Jewishness, or with the Seder or with America or with Israel came to this Seder, but that was the only time there were seventy people. Otherwise there were fifteen of us going around in the bus.

SW: They also said they had here, nine months earlier, they said in that article that they opened a new Jewish center there.

SH: No, [laughs] that was fiction, that was fiction. Fiction, I am sure, from the mouth of the man who organized this trip, who had a lot of, he was a myth-maker, a myth-maker. Nevertheless, I am very glad I went on this trip. I don't know when I'll get to go to Shanghai again. I'd like to take my family to Shanghai. My wife is also a historian and she would like to see this, too, and my children. So I want to go back eventually, but this, I got to go on this trip and meet some Jews who were there and see some of the buildings. And it wasn't two hundred. It was seven.

WW: Where did you say where your grandfather practiced, it was at the intersection of Bubbling Well and . . .

SH: Seymour Road.

WW: Seymour Road.

SW: Was there intersection of Bubbling Well and Seymour Road?

WW: Well, sure.

SH: I will show you something I have here. I have here a bunch of slides.

SW: Look, maybe even at that time we even knew the name, after all it's been forty-five years now, and just forgot about it, maybe we heard your grandfather's name.

SH: I haven't found anyone yet who has, who recognizes the name. But I'll show you a picture of the, of the Uptown Cinema.

SW: We just got the slide there?

SH: Yes.

WW: I remember one house where . . .

SW: This I won't be able to . . .

WW: I remember a house . . .

SW: That is Uptown Cinema?

SH: That's the whole building.

WW: There was a building, where a children's doctor was that we took my son to.

SH: It's hard to see, just to see a slide.

WW: Yes, well I, that's a clear picture, that's fine. But I really don't remember. There was a house, as I said, another doctor was there, a children's doctor, a pediatric doctor.

SH: Do you remember his name?

WW: No, you have names?

SH: I know, well, Preuss.

WW: No, that's not the name.

SW: What?

SH: Preuss. Preuss was a doctor friend of my grandparents, or Peretz was another relative of mine. There must have been many doctors.

WW: Yeah, well, I just wonder if that was the same building.

SH: I don't know.

WW: There was also a confectionery store there nearby.

SH: There was a club in that building, called The Mandarin Club, a very fancy night club . . .

WW: Well, I don't remember.

SH: . . . in the basement and then there was a café there.

SW: I do not remember.

WW: No mention was made of a confectionery store? That was also emigrants, who . . .

SW: Oh, Eisfelder? Yeah, that was not corner of Seymour Road.

WW: That is just what I am just trying to establish. If that pediatrician, I think Eisfelder was in that building where the, or nearby where that pediatrician had his practice. I think it was rather there you have, did they show you Yates Road? No?⁹

SH: Maybe. I don't remember that.

WW: What was significant about that road, that street, was that it had antique stores, all antique stores. Now I don't know if, what, how the Communists feel about antique stores, if that is still a big business. I mean, I could imagine yes, that if people come there, foreigners come there, they still might have stores like that.

SH: I don't know.

WW: That was in the general area where . . .

SH: Is that Yates Road?

WW: Yates.

SW: Yates Road was a street that you could bought embroideries.

WW: Yes, that's right. Antiques and art and Chinese art and things like that. And that was, I think, when you came out from Yates Road, there was on Bubbling Well, that's where that building was where that . . .

SW: Well, at the corner of Yates Road there, there was what was called *Deutsche Apotheke*, a German pharmacy.

⁹ The Eisfelder family from Berlin opened the Café Louis on Bubbling Well Road.

WW: That I don't remember. On Bubbling Well?

SW: Yeah.

SH: Well, let me ask you, what you, what difference has it made in your lives that you spent this time in Shanghai or how has it affected your outlook on life . . . ?

SW: It was an experience.

WW: All you can say, any place that you move away from the place of your origin, where you grow up, widens your horizon, bad experience like Buchenwald, or good experience, highlights of your life, everything, or trips that you take widened your horizon, even if they are bad experiences, and you think it's better forgotten.

SW: But altogether, it was not a bad experience really. It was tough.

SH: And you left with good feelings about Chinese people?

SW: Yeah, I would say, yes, I did.

SH: About Japanese people, how did you, what kind of . . .

WW: The thing is that we saw the Japanese at their worst. We saw them mistreat Chinese, mistreat coolies, mistreat refugees, like Mr. Ghoya did.

SH: Did you see physical brutality? Or was this . . .

WW: Oh, yeah.

SH: Yes? Against Jews?

WW: Not against Jews. I mean, he, I think some stories go around that he was physically abusive . . .

SW: Some, no I was, some . . .

WW: . . . a few times, but that was on, I mean, not on a regular basis or anything, nothing that you can say a, what you would expect when you, that you took your life in your hand by walking up to the guy or anything like that.

SW: Considered that the Japanese knew that we had to pray for their defeat, you couldn't expect anything better.

WW: Let's say you couldn't hope for much better.

SW: You couldn't hope for anything better.

SH: Could I ask you just a bit about, about your social life or your life outside of your work while you were in Shanghai? What you did in the spare time? You obviously didn't have much money to spend.

WW: How should I say, living took a long time. I mean that the functions, you want to make a cup of coffee, you step up to your stove here, and you put your coffee, go to the faucet, fill up a pot with water, you make the coffee, right? [laughs] Cooking a meal was a big thing.

SW: Washing laundry.

WW: Washing laundry was a big thing. Living took a long time, okay? And otherwise, just communication. Friends are friends, but we sat on each other. The people, you just visualize, you have this wall, but it only goes this far. In other words, you are in the same room, and there is a couple with a young child, and there is my brother and I and my son. So you communicate even to the point where even if you are the best of friends can get on your nerves, right? I know we were able to read. We, there was a library. I am trying to remember, but I know there was a library where you could get English books and we partook of the services there. I don't remember now, I mean how that was, how that came about, who . . .

SH: Was it a lending library?

WW: A lending library, yeah.

SH: Do you remember the, that the man who ran it was named Bruno? The woman who came on the trip, who was from San Francisco, who was a German-speaking woman, she and her husband, whose name was Bruno, ran a lending library in Hongkew and it may have been . . .

WW: It could be, but . . .

SH: She told me the name of it but now I have forgot.

WW: I don't . . .

SW: In the beginning, at least until 1941, until Pearl Harbor, we would go on Bund, there was a, there was a "North China Daily News", which was the English paper, and we would just go up there, read the paper. But this, all that took time. You didn't have the money to take the bus, so you walked there. I'm sure that was a half an hour walk, a forty-minute walk. I forgot now how long it was to walk to the Garden Bridge.

WW: A good half hour, a good half hour.

SW: It took a good half hour. And we played cards with . . .

WW: I, I, we were talking about that air raid, US bombers. I was on my way between the Garden Bridge and Hongkew, where we lived, and the planes came, and I took shelter in a, well, in one of these houses with a big door, there was a big door and I just stood there under there. And some Chinese took shelter there, too, and the, no bomb fell there, but the pressure from, the planes flew so low, that the woman held a bottle of cooking oil somewhere on her body or something, and it broke and splashed me with oil. I mean, it's a, how should I say, it's a little thing, but it gives a little atmosphere, a little life to the, to what life was like, one of the little things that happened.

SW: How much did your grandpa know?

SH: My grandfather became senile and died before I was able to talk with him about this, although he lived into his nineties. But I've spent, talked like this with my grandmother a good bit, so she was able to tell me about their life. But they never went to Hongkew, so she wasn't able to tell me anything about, she said she went to Hongkew once to look for an apartment, and she got very depressed, because she thought it was a slum and she didn't ever want to live there.

WW: That is exactly what I was trying to describe, when we before our par-, my father and stepmother came, and we said, well, we have to have a room for them to stay over for the night, and we rented something there and our stepmother just looked at that and said, "No." She didn't say, "No way," because she couldn't speak English, but that's what, words to that effect, and we turned around and rented something in the French Concession.

SH: But she told me a good bit about her life and their life.

WW: Which probably was very different.

SH: It was, it was very upper middle class, they knew a lot of doctors, and they had a lot of parties.

WW: Yeah, then she probably, their social life centered around the Russian Jews there that lived, I mean there were a lot of Russian Jews on Bubbling Well.

SH: Yeah, other foreign people that were patients of my grandfather.

WW: And they were not the people from Hongkew.

SH: No, they were the diplomats and wealthy businessmen, so they had a different life. They had a very comfortable life.

SW: When did they leave Shanghai?

SH: In '49.

SW: They still stayed until '49.

WW: In other words, they left just to get out of the way of the Communists.

SH: The Communists, yes. I think they would have stayed longer otherwise, because they had quite a nice life.

SW: Like I said, I just thought maybe someday I go back and be a representative of some American firm and, you know, do some, have a nice office on the, near the Bund or someplace.

SH: Yes, I can understand that.

SW: So, like I say, it was tough, but I didn't leave with any bitterness.

SH: Well, I don't have any more questions. If you have some special memories of particular things that might seem interesting, events or . . .

WW: We have been trying . . .

SH: You've done wonderful

SW: There are a few things here you will find in here. I'm gonna send you, gonna send you the, I suppose that it is all right to turn that over to you, as far as, what's his name, Pat . . .

SH: I think that she wouldn't mind that. I don't think she would mind that.

WW: I mean, I think you, the approach that you took, how shall I say, in episodes, shed more light than a systematic sociological speech about these things. And, I mean, it is, I'm sure there would be a million, a lot of little things that you can mention. But I think it gives you some of it.

SH: When I've talked to a hundred people like yourselves, I think I'll understand a lot about Shanghai and be able to write something.

SW: You are not going to talk to anyone else here in Minneapolis?

SH: I've only been able to, well, I don't know of anyone else here in Minneapolis, except for Helen Bix.

SW: Well, she was on that panel here.

SH: And I spoke to her on the phone and she said she is very busy now and I should, and I said that I come here every year, so I'll talk to you next year. But she is the only other Shanghai Jew that I know about. Do you know, can you give me names or addresses of other Shanghai Jews, anywhere, if they are anywhere in the United States, eventually I will make contact with them so that . . .

END TAPE 2, SIDE A

END OF INTERVIEW

Siegbert and Werner Wollstein were born in Berlin in 1906 and 1908, respectively. Werner was arrested in June 1938 and sent to Buchenwald for three months. The two brothers, along with their younger brother Kurt, left for Shanghai in 1938. Their father was arrested during Kristallnacht; he and his wife sailed for Shanghai in 1939. In Shanghai, Siegbert and Werner sold printing, while their brother was a photographer. They left for the United States after the war, and settled in Duluth. They still live in Minnesota.

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