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Westheimer, Susan oral history interview

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Interview with Susan Westheimer by Steve Hochstadt
Shanghai Jewish Community Oral History Project
Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

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Interviewer

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Date

6/8/1990

Extent

2 audiocassettes

Place

Newport Beach, California

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Biographical Note

Susan Westheimer (née Salomon) was born in Berlin in 1922 and lived in Neukölln. Her mother owned a small business in Berlin. Her married sister sailed to Shanghai first, then Westheimer and her mother took the Trans-Siberian Railroad across Asia in March 1940, and sailed from Manchuria to Shanghai. The day after she arrived, she began work as a waitress in the Café Windsor. She got married soon thereafter to another refugee. Later she worked as an assistant to a Chinese doctor, until she and her family were forced into the Designated Area in 1943. During the ghetto years they ran a Mittagstisch for other refugees. After the war's end she worked for the U.S. Army in a PX, then went back to waitressing. In 1948, after getting a divorce, she sailed to the United States with her mother. After living in Chicago and New York, Susan Westheimer got remarried and moved to California. She died on April 22, 1995.

Transcript

Steve Hochstadt: Let's just turn this on here.

Susan Westheimer: My husband's poker night tonight.

SH: Ah hah. Do you mind talking while we eat?

SW: No!

SH: Good.

SW: I talk all the time. [laughs]

SH: Susan, I guess what I'd like you to do is just tell me the whole story from beginning to end about your time in Shanghai, beginning perhaps with where . . .

SW: You mean, I came via Russia?

SH: That's fine, that's fine, beginning with a little bit about you and your family, where you were born, when you were born, maybe what your family did, and then . . .

SW: In Germany.

SH: Yes, and then why you went to Shanghai, and when you went to Shanghai, and how, and, and, and then about your life in Shanghai, just sort of following along, and I may interrupt and ask you for more details . . .

SW: Okay.

SH: . . . or questions. If I ask you something that you don't want to answer, feel free to say you don't want to answer it.

SW: I answer almost anything.

SH: Okay, [laughs] but it's all up to you. And I may have a few questions afterwards, but I'm mainly interested in your narrative story.

SW: I mean my parents they were divorced, so I came with just my mother. My sister was in Shanghai before, and she sent us some kind of papers. She had to go to Japan to get the papers, so she sent it to us and that was in, in the early part of 1940. And so we came by train.

SH: I see.

SW: And from Manchu-, what is it, Manchuria we came by boat, for it took two days to Shanghai.

SH: So, start with your, where you were born and where, where . . .

SW: I was born in Berlin and I had to leave school when I was fourteen, fifteen, something like that,

and I was eighteen when I left Germany.

SH: In 1940?

SW: Yeah.

SH: So you were born in 1922?

SW: Yeah.

SH: And what did your mother do, or . . .

SW: She had a small business and she supported my sister and myself. I will not say, I, I considered myself poor in those days. I mean, now I, it's different, things change.

SH: Yes.

SW: But, I mean, you know, she made a living and she supported us and it was, you know, when you're young, you don't care. I mean, here in America you do.

SH: Yes.

SW: But not in Germany. We lived in a poor neighborhood, actually. I don't know, do you know Berlin?

SH: No.

SW: No.

SH: But what neighborhood was it?

SW: Neukölln. It was close to the airport.

SH: So it was a working-class neighborhood?

SW: Yeah, more or less. Yeah. Yeah.

SH: And you went to school there? It was a Jewish school or just a . . .

SW: No.

SH: . . . normal school?

SW: I could've stayed in the school, but I, I just couldn't stand this, this Heil Hitler and all this, so I just told my mother, I want to leave school. And I, I don't know why I didn't go to the Jewish school. I could have, but I don't remember. There are certain things you forget. And then . . .

SH: But you didn't have to leave the school?

SW: I didn't have to, but it was too much for me. I just couldn't, couldn't take that. Some people can and some, some couldn't. I just couldn't. So when I was seventeen, I left with my mother for Shanghai.

SH: Now how did your sister get there earlier?

SW: She married and she, she went, I think, with a French boat. And then the war broke out, and I think they were interned for a while in Hong Kong.

SH: On their way?

SW: Yeah, on their way there.

SH: Why did your sister leave?

SW: Why did anybody left?!

SH: But some people didn't leave, and so . . .

SW: That's true, I mean, my husband's parents didn't leave, so they . . .

SH: Was there some special, some people were arrested after Kristallnacht and then . . .

SW: Yeah.

SH: . . . had to show that they . . .

SW: I think my father-in-law, he was, they died in '45, something like that, so if the war would've been out a little sooner, they could've made it. But he just didn't want to leave.

SH: Your father-in-law?

SW: Some of those older people, they didn't want to leave their money there.

SH: Yes.

SW: You know it. And I was young, I didn't care. You know how, you know how it is when you're young, you don't care about money.

SH: So you talked about leaving. Did you talk about leaving before Kristallnacht or was that . . .

SW: I did. I wanted to go to Israel. But my sister got married and my mother was alone so I actually felt sorry for her. I also could have gone to England, because I had an uncle there, but this

was always me alone. I had to leave my mother behind. I didn't, I just couldn't do that.

SH: And how did your mother feel about leaving?

SW: I don't remember if she was that anxious, or, I was the one who pushed her.

SH: And again about your sister, she, they, your sister and her husband left just because they wanted to, they didn't, or she wasn't arrested or . . .

SW: Sure. They were young, too. I mean, they wanted to get out. I think all young people wanted to get out. Some parents let them and some didn't.

SH: Did they try to go to other places besides Shanghai, your sister and her husband?

SW: No, no, they went straight to Shanghai. Then my sister sent the thing, they called it affidavit, that, did they? I guess they did.

SH: And who did you, what did you need that affidavit for? Who did you have to show it . . .

SW: To enter Shanghai! I mean, the Chinese were actually good to us, that they let all these people in, for nothing.

SH: So the affidavit she sent you was not to get you out of Germany, but to get you into Shanghai?

SW: I mean, this was the reason I could leave. That was the only way out. So I was very thrilled and happy. Can I get up?

SH: Oh, certainly! Whatever, don't let me disturb you. You're not a prisoner in your own house.

SW: I hope not! [laughs] So you teach history?

SH: Yes, European history.

SW: Oh, European. My son is very interested in history, but he didn't like teaching. So he gave that up. [pause] I put this right on your plate. Okay?

SH: Alright, that's fine.

BREAK IN RECORDING

SW: Oh.

SH: You, what kind of preparations did you make to leave when you finally, when you got your ticket? And how did you get your ticket to, to leave? How did you get the money? Was it very

expensive?

SW: I mean, the war was already out, so this was the only way to, to get there, via Russia. But what do you mean by preparation?

SH: Well, I guess, first I'd like to know about the ticket. You, you, how did you go, where did you have to go to get your ticket? Did you get a ticket on the railroad to go?

SW: My mother took care of this. This I don't know.

SH: And then did you sell things from your household?

SW: We smuggled those few things out, I guess. [laughs]

SH: Tell me about that.

SW: We, we, we had a maid, a German maid, I mean, who was very nice. She opened a, a purse, these purses had some lining in them, not like they have now. She opened this, this, the lining, and she stuffed in all the, the jewelry and, I think, money. We, my mother took, had, she, she got some money out and sent it to my uncle in England through Holland, I think.

SH: Before you left.

SW: And she sewed it up and she put it in a crate, and that's what we lived off, most of the time.

SH: Now, some people have told me that when they, when they took crates out, that there were Gestapo people who watched them pack the crate up and, do you remember anything like that?

SW: You gave those few people a couple of dollars, I mean, Marks.

SH: Is that right?

SW: Yes. My mother was, she was a shrewd businesswoman, so she did that very nicely.

SH: So that happened to you, they were there watching you pack up your crates?

SW: I don't, I don't think they were actually watching. I think they came before they closed it.

SH: I see. To look inside.

SW: And then she must have given them maybe fifty Marks or I don't know how much it was. So this way, the only thing they didn't let me take out was my sewing machine, which you had, I had to pay a double price for this. And that crate, fortunately, it was not the crate where, where the jewelry was in. I didn't, I never received that. This they didn't let to, let go.

SH: So, what else, what else did you do to prepare to leave that you can remember?

SW: What, what do you prepare? You just want to get out. I remember we didn't even, for, for two weeks, I didn't even have clothes, because my clothes, not quite two weeks, my clothes didn't come with the same train. So in Manchuria I found my suitcases and then I took something out so I had a change. But I met, met very nice people on the way, so they gave me some clothes and I was young, and they said I was pretty, I don't know, so they gave me clothes and money and all kinds, I mean, people were on the way very nice. In Lithuania we, we one time missed our train and a Jewish family came to the station and they just grabbed my mother and me and took us to their home and we spent the night there, then they took us back to the station the next day. She gave me clothes.

SH: Were there a lot of Jews on this train?

SW: No, there was only, I don't know, when she, I think after, then in, in, in Moscow, we also missed our train, so we had to stay five days in Moscow and we only paid for one night. So my mother started crying, "What should we do, we have no money and how can we stay here for five days?" So there was a diplomat from Lithuania, a Jewish diplomat, and he said, "Don't cry, don't cry! I will take care of it." So this man paid for everything. For four, four days stay in Moscow and he took her to the opera and dining and, I mean, he was just, it was just like a dream. And then from Russia, we took that train through Siberia, and I mean, I was, was not that innocent, but there was an In-, Inter-, what do they call this? An Intourist, Tourist . . .

SH: Intourist, yeah.

SW: . . . who, who went with us. I mean, he was our guide. I got engaged to him on the train.

SH: For the two of you.

SW: I never saw this man any more. I mean, it was just, it was a joke, but I believed him. When you're seventeen, you believe almost anything. In Manchuria this man completely disappeared, because he said, "I see you in a month in Shanghai and then we get married." After a month, I was waiting for this man. He never showed up.

SH: What did your mother think about this?

SW: There was one other woman, as a matter of fact, we had a, a coach with two beds upstairs and two downstairs, and this, this Tourist, Intourist, he slept upstairs and my mother always said to this other woman, "You better watch what's going on there," or whatever she said, and I mean, it was an innocent thing, but I believed this man.

SH: What did you think as you were on your way to Shanghai about leaving Germany and going to this strange place?

SW: Tickled.

SH: Really? Why?

SW: I don't know. Adventure, I guess. I mean, you were young once. [laughs]

SH: Yes.

SW: I mean, you're, you're, young people are like this and they still are like that. I mean, you want to have a good, you think you have the greatest time there, which, which I probably did have in, I mean, the first few years.

SH: When was this that you actually left? Do you remember the date that you left?

SW: I left, the date exactly I don't remember, I think it was in March 1940, because it took us about seventeen days to get there altogether.

SH: To get to Manchuria?

SW: To get to Shanghai.

SH: So you took the train across and then a boat?

SW: And then a boat for two days.

SH: From where? Where did the boat leave from?

SW: Manchuria.

SH: From, do you remember the, the port? Was it Vladivostok or . . .

SW: It was, what was the name of that port? Something with an "M".

SH: Mukden?

SW: No.

SH: I don't remember either. Well, so it was a Japanese boat?

SW: Chinese.

SH: Chinese boat.

SW: I mean, they were mostly Chinese on the boat. And I remember all of a sudden, he said "Susie, you have made a friend there on the boat."

SH: Also from Berlin?

SW: Yeah, yeah.

SH: Who'd done the same thing that you . . . ?

SW: Yes, yeah. No, she, where she came from I don't know, but she was on that boat.

SH: So what happened when you arrived . . .

SW: My sister . . .

SH: . . . in Shanghai?

SW: . . . yeah, my sister was there. We got a room.

SH: Where?

SW: Chusan Road, not Chusan Road, God, it's all so long. I'm not sure, something with an "S". Lots of people lived there. No, it was Broadway, on Broadway we had our first room.

SH: And where is Broadway? Is that in Hongkew or in the Inter- . . .

SW: Hongkew.

SH: Hongkew.

SW: I lived in, only in Hongkew.

SH: I see.

SW: Then, I think, days, in the next day I got a job.

SH: Doing what?

SW: Waitress.

SH: Where? In what kind of a place?

SW: Café Windsor.

SH: How do you spell that?

SW: Windsor. W-I-N-D-S-O-R.

SH: Oh, Windsor. I see. And is this a Jewish establishment?

SW: Mm-hmm. And . . .

SH: So you just walked, well, how did you get this job? How did you know they had an opening, or

didn't . . . ?

SW: My sister worked there.

SH: So she found you a job.

SW: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So I came pretty late, because most people came in '39. So maybe I was there three, four days, and we had, I don't know if you, if somebody mentioned that, about ten of the immigrants, young men, they were in the police force. Did you hear about that? Because I, before you came, I was thinking, I better tell you that, I'm sure there's nobody who ever mentioned that to you. The reason I mention it to you, because there were ten very bright young men who got this job, it was in the English police. And they had to learn Chinese, they spoke Chinese, they wrote Chinese, they read Chinese, and four days after we were there, I met one of them and I got married to this man, but not right away, because when you were in the English police force, you had to be in, in there for five years to get married, so we were engaged for years and when I was about twenty-one, I think, we got married.

SH: And how did these men get this job?

SW: They were very bright. They had to take tests. And my ex-husband, he's not my husband now, my ex-husband, he immigrated to Italy, he spoke fluently Italian, he spoke fluently English, and then he spoke Chinese and German. I mean, you had to speak Chinese, because you, most, most of the people he arrested there were Chinese.

SH: So these ten were all German refugees or German-speaking?

SW: Either German or Austrian or Czechs, I mean, refugees. I think there were about ten.

SH: Did they have any special jobs with the police force or were they just normal policemen?

SW: I think they were mostly patrol policeman. Yeah. Because he was on a motorcycle. I mean, they made good money. I mean, they paid very well and, you know, especially when you were young, uniforms they, you were fascinated.

SH: So when did you meet him? How soon after you arrived?

SW: A couple of days after. Yeah.

SH: Could you tell me about your job as a waitress?

SW: Sure.

SH: What, who the customers were and what it was like being a waitress.

SW: They were international, Russian, English, French, Arabians, German.

SH: Chinese and Japanese, too?

SW: Yes, a few, a few. I mean, yeah, there were some. I mean, later on there were mostly Japanese.

SH: Do you think it was any different than being a waitress in Germany?

SW: I don't know. It was fun.

SH: It was fun?

SW: Yeah. [laughs]

SH: Why? What was fun about it?

SW: I have to say this over and over again. When you're young, everything is fun. You know people make compliments and they give you good tips and it was nice.

SH: It doesn't, you don't sound like you were worried about the future.

SW: Worried about what? No!

SH: Living in a strange country.

SW: I started worrying when I matured a little. Then I started worrying. You know when, when the good times were over, then I start worrying, but in the beginning, I thought it was fun. Could buy nice clothes, look nice all the time.

SH: And you had enough money with your job to . . .

SW: To support myself and my mother, yeah.

SH: Your mother didn't have to work? Or didn't work?

SW: No. I, I don't think she worked. No. And she some, then she sold some of her jewelry, and she had some money, and my uncle sent some money, and, I mean, in the, the first few years it was fine, till the money ran out. The times, you know, eight years is a long time. I give you a little more. Okay?

SH: Thank you.

SW: Few years it was fun. I mean, that people tell you differently, you know, people make it much worse than it was. I mean, it became bad later on, but the first few years and the last few years, this, we had a great time.

SH: Did you meet other, other people your age and was that part of the fun?

SW: Of course. Sure. I was only with young people.

SH: Were they all German refugees like yourself . . .

SW: Yes.

SH: . . . or also Russian ones or Austrian . . .

SW: I had a couple of Russian friends and I met a, a Chinese, I met him at this Windsor. He was a Chinese doctor who studied in, in Vienna and I quit this job and I was his assistant.

SH: Oh, I see, when was that? How long?

SW: That was till we went into the ghetto, so I was with him maybe for two years. That was fun, too. [laughs] I mean, he paid very well, all his, all the papers he wanted that in German so the Chinese didn't know, he was a specialist, specialist for, for lungs. And the Chinese they had a lot of lung problems. So he taught me to make injections and fill, he had a little, a little pharmacy. I made the medication. I mean, he gave me the formula and I made it. And he only did this, actually, for fun. He, if a Chinese is rich, they're rich. They don't even know how rich they are. So he came from a very, very wealthy family and he only did this because he liked it, not that he had to make the money. And he was, I even was at his wedding. I mean, it was just the most gorgeous wedding you can think of, and he treated us, he treated me very well. Didn't pay too well, but he treated us well. But then after you had to move into the ghetto, I, I didn't want anything to do with the Japanese with those permits to get in and out, I, I was scared. You know, sometimes they block-, blockaded streets, the Japanese, and you had, I mean, I'm a little bit ahead of you now, and they had, you had to wait there till they opened up again and with the bayonets and all this, so I was kind of . . .

SH: That frightened you.

SW: . . . frightened. Yes. So I thought, then I did nothing.

SH: You didn't work then while you were in the ghetto?

SW: No. Then my husband lost his job. The, then the Japanese, they occupied Shanghai, they, they threw them all out.

SH: Now there must be some space between, after Pearl Harbor did he lose his job right away?

SW: Not right away, but shortly after. Forty-, no, wait a minute, no, he was still there, no, he must've lost his job, God, '43, 1943.

SH: And that was the year that you had to go into the ghetto, too.

SW: Yes.

SH: So, how, how did he manage, because the English weren't, didn't have a police force still till

1943, did they?

SW: The English, this was the English police force.

SH: But after Pearl Harbor were the English still . . .

SW: Then the Japanese took over everything.

SH: But he could, he was still, then he was working for the Japanese?

SW: For a little, for a short while, yes.

SH: I see.

SW: And then they didn't want them any more. I think one maybe stayed and he was, he was more or less with Japanese good friends, so they let him stay.¹

SH: What was your husband's name?

SW: Do I have to tell you that?

SH: You don't have to tell me anything.

SW: Okay.

SH: So tell me about having to move into the ghetto.

SW: I mean, when I got married, I lived in a boarding house with room and board, so I was pretty well off.

SH: And where was that? That was in Hongkew?

SW: Yes.

SH: Was it in the Designated Area?

SW: No, outside, so then we had to move. Then our landlady bought a house and we all moved into that. And then she . . .

SH: The whole boarding house moved?

SW: . . . she started, wanted to start a boarding house again and people couldn't afford it any longer,

¹ The British members of the Shanghai Municipal Police were interned after Pearl Harbor, but officers of other nationalities, such as the White Russians, were able to continue working.

because it was fairly expensive and they couldn't make a living any more. So, my ex-husband and a, a Russian-German policeman, they tried that she, she didn't get the license. I mean, they finagled something, so, but we could stay in that house, and did our own cooking and cleaning and all this.

SH: Was she also Jewish?

SW: Yes, yes. But she was a type, very shrewd, and she wanted to make money, and people just couldn't, it was impossible. They, they just couldn't afford it and we couldn't either.

SH: When you moved in with your husband, what did your mother do?

SW: Lived off her little jewelry and whatever, sell a sheet, they sell, they sold a tablecloth, and, and, I mean, she had her room. She, we, we never lived in a camp, we always had our rooms. And then, then my mother and I, we started, in my one room and I had a veranda, we started a little, what do you call this in, do you speak German?

SH: Yes.

SW: *Mittagstisch*.

SH: For, for whom?

SW: You know, for some of those young refugees.

SH: I see.

SW: Single men, mostly. So we cooked, we cooked a meal, a noon meal for them and we made enough that we three people had our food.

SH: You and your husband and your mother.

SW: Exactly. But I mean, it was a lot of work.

SH: I'm sure.

SW: But . . .

SH: So did you have to go out and buy the food and then . . . ?

SW: We bought the food, and every morning I got up and I went downstairs and I had this little stove, and I fiddled around and I brought the stove up, put it on the veranda, and then on that little thing we cooked. My mother cooked and I served. And then we cleaned the dishes and then the next day it went. So we always had, had enough to eat, maybe a lit-, even a little bit over.

SH: And who came, which . . .

SW: Oh, there was, one was a teacher. He, he was, he taught athletic, and one was a salesman, and one was a dentist.

SH: So did you, you had regular people who came every day?

SW: Regular people every day. There were about maybe eight. They didn't come at the same time, because we didn't have enough dishes, we didn't have a, a big table, big enough for eight people. So they came in two, two sections.

SH: And they knew each other then after a while . . .

SW: Yes. Yeah.

SH: . . . from coming to your *Mittagstisch*.

SW: Yes. Yes.

SH: And how long did you do that?

SW: We did that, I think we did this till the war was over.

SH: So for a couple of years?

SW: For, I don't know the exact date, but we did it for a while. It was hard and I cried a lot. Every morning I had to do this with my stove. Sometimes the coals were damp and it didn't work right, but I did it. That was one of my hardest times. Then it wasn't fun any more.

SH: Why?

SW: Then the fun was gone.

SH: Why was the fun gone?

SW: Because it, it was tough, it was very hard.

SH: You had no extra money then, is that, is that what it was? Or was it financially harder?

SW: It was not, yeah, financially it went down, and I think then we stopped, I don't know for what reason, and I think the last year we got the meal, the meals from the kitchen.

SH: Your own meals. I don't understand, you . . .

SW: I think the last year we did, before the war was over.

SH: And you hadn't had to do that before?

SW: No. The food was terrible.

SH: That's what everybody says.

SW: The food was really, it was bad, very bad.

SH: Were you afraid that you would have to move into the camp if somehow you didn't succeed in .

..
SW: No.

SH: . . . keeping enough money?

SW: I'm, I'm a big optimist. I never was. My father lived in a camp. My father also came to Shanghai then. He lived in a camp, but he also had a little money, so he didn't, he only lived there and he ate out.

SH: I see. Can you tell me about how your father came and why he came? That was separate entirely?

SW: My father remarried and my sister sent the papers just for my father and his second wife, she, she died, because my sister didn't, you had to pay for the affidavits and she didn't have enough money to send it to her and she . . .

SH: So then your father came and his second wife stayed in Germany?

SW: Yeah. But, I mean, he never lived with us. He lived with other women. [laughs]

SH: Did you find it surprising that he would leave his second wife in Germany and come?

SW: I was surprised.

SH: Was that surprising? I mean, it, it seems a little unusual that he would come to Shanghai with . .

.

SW: Well, he thought he, he can go to Shanghai and maybe he can bring her out then, because he came a few months even after us, which was already pretty late.

SH: Did he come the same way? On the train?

SW: Yes, yes. He also came by train.

SH: Can you tell me his name?

SW: Yeah. Max Salomon.

SH: Max Salomon.

SW: Salomon.

SH: Salomon.

SW: Why did you want . . .

SH: Why do I ask all these names?

SW: Yeah.

SH: Because . . .

SW: Why do you want my ex-husband's name?

SH: I, I'll tell you.

SW: I can tell you that. Really. It doesn't really bother me.

SH: I think that what I want to try to do at some point is have a list of all the names that I can of people who were in Shanghai, and try to follow as many people, where they started from, what happened to them, did they come to America, did they go to someplace else, did they die in Shanghai? And so I try to ask everyone who talks to me who mentions another person, especially a relative, to tell me about their name, and how they got to Shanghai.

SW: Oh, I see. I see.

SH: So that's, that's why I ask.

SW: Yeah.

SH: It's not important if you don't want to say it.

SW: No, my ex-, well . . .

SH: It's not important.

SW: For my . . .

SH: But that's why. . .

SW: . . . for my husband's sake, I don't think I want to.

SH: . . . that's why I ask. Now, where were we? We were in Hongkew. Your, your husband, your first husband was not working then, was he helping with your *Mittagstisch*, or what was he doing while you were in the kitchen?

SW: I think he had small, very small jobs then. It was very tough. He, we, we just didn't, it, it was very rough, but every night we went to, it was a small restaurant, a whole bunch of young people. We just had a, a tea without sugar and we just sat there all night, and this was our entertainment. For that, we had that.

SH: What restaurant was that?

SW: It was, I, I think the name was Suzanne.

SH: Suzanne?

SW: Yes. Was a little, little place on Seward Road and we, we, all our friends we met there every single night. Was in walking distance and . . .

SH: All friends from inside the District who were . . .

SW: We had a lot of friends. Yeah.

SH: Germans? All Germans?

SW: Germans, Viennese, and while my ex-husband was in the police force, the refugees were very much afraid of policemen. You know, this is the old-fashioned thing, and they asked him for lots of favors because, especially you know we had, we had very rich people there, very wealthy people, and they were in business, and they did something which wasn't quite so and then they always called. You know, can you do this? Can you do that? And he never took any money.

SH: Oh, so they offered him money to do things?

SW: They always offered him money. But some people had soap factories, they sent you boxes of soap. Some people had dresses, they sent you a dress or blouse, or things like that. But they called it *Spicken*.

SH: *Spicken*.

SW: You know, under the table. But some of those policemen, they took money. And unfortunately my ex-husband for, he wasn't really arrested, when, when he left, I mean, we got a divorce then, and he left maybe a month or two before I did, to San Francisco, and there was something like Ellis Island and they actually arrested him.

SH: For something that he'd done in China?

SW: He thought, they thought he was a collaborator.

SH: With the Japanese.

SW: Exactly.

SH: Because he'd been in the police force.

SW: But he wasn't. So when I arrived in San Francisco I heard this, I mean, you're, you're a human being, and I heard this and I thought to myself, I have to visit him, I have to bring him something, or whatever. I mean, this is and this Jewish committee, they told me not to, said I shouldn't visit him. They might leave me there, too. And he, he had to stay there for a few months, till they finally released him. He was not a collaborator, I mean, as far as I know. Because, I think, if he would've been, if they would've found out he was, I'm sure they would've sent him back somewhere.

SH: When did you get divorced?

SW: I got divorced in, I got married, got divorced in January '48.

SH: Okay, so that's further on, let's, we're still in the war here with our story. We'll get to that point.

SW: So I, I was married for five years.

SH: So, is there anything else that, that you remember especially about this, the time in Hongkew, about your work or about . . .

SW: Other people?

SH: . . . other people, or your friends, or, or what you did for entertainment.

SW: Sheesh, you knew a lot, what other people did. They did a lot of crooked business. I mean, one Jew took away from the other and all the, I mean, it was, went on and on and on. This, it was sometimes the situation and the living was really bad. I mean, I don't know if people changed in Shanghai. I mean, they either became crooks or drug addicts or hookers, and we had a lot of those, too. You heard that? Did you?

SH: Yes.

SW: Yeah.

SH: But people always talk about, talk about it in a very distant way.

SW: What do you mean?

SH: Well, I mean, they say, "Well, you know there were some, some refugee women who became prostitutes."

SW: Yes, there were prostitutes.

SH: That all that I have heard from . . .

SW: No, they, they worked in those houses and I knew these, these people.

SH: In which houses?

SW: I mean, they had, what do you call these . . . ?

SH: Whorehouses?

SW: Whorehouses. They worked there and they went, they went up and down on Broadway to catch men. And I know very well, I knew a girl, she, she had a lot of Japanese men, and her husband, I mean, he, she, he was some kind of a pimp. So she went, he waited downstairs, and she did her job upstairs, and when she was finished then he went upstairs again to, in her own room. I mean, she was not a friend of mine, she was just an acquaintance. And there were lots, lots and lots.

SH: Now were these women who were doing it out of desperation, economic desperation? Or, I mean, what did you understand about . . .

SW: They, some said, one said always, I have to support my children, and, I think most of these women did this for fun.

SH: Most people think that prostitution, being a prostitute somehow is, I mean, it seems exciting from the outside maybe, but that it's . . .

SW: And besides, they made money.

SH: . . . and made money, but, so, do you really think that, that some of them found this exciting and . . . ?

SW: I think so. I mean, there, there were some, one woman there, I can't even remember her name, she was definitely a prostitute and she had open syphilis. I mean, her legs . . .

END TAPE 1, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B

SW: There were an awful lot of abortions. Lots!

SH: You're telling me things that nobody else has told me about. Where did you get an abortion? Where, where did one get an abortion?

SW: The doctors did this. I myself had it.

SH: Was it illegal to have an abortion?

SW: I don't think so. I don't think so. As a matter of fact, the, he was a very nice doctor. He always treated me, because my husband was a policeman, he always treated me free. But when, I didn't have that many abortion, I only had two, but whenever I had an abortion I had to pay him. This was his, but women had abortion every day.

SH: From Jewish, these are Jewish doctors you're talking about?

SW: No. Jewish doctors.

SH: And it wasn't something you had to hide that you were worried that someone would find out.

SW: You just went there with a rickshaw, no, maybe you walked there and this, this doctor, I don't want to mention his name . . .

SH: No, that's alright.

SW: . . . because I am very good friends with him. He lives in New York. And he, he, his assistant was a dentist, who had an office in, in, in Hongkew with him and he assisted him, and he gave you an injection, and he did your job and you laid on the couch and maybe an hour later you took a rickshaw and you went home. You rested for a day or two and this was it.

SH: This was in his office? You, you went to his office?

SW: The same thing at, like it is here now. Easy.

SH: And this is in, all in Hongkew?

SW: This is all in Hongkew.

SH: Was it frowned upon to have an abortion? Was this something you wouldn't tell your friends because it was . . .

SW: What?

SH: Was it, was this something you wouldn't tell your friends about, that you had an abortion, or was it something that didn't matter to anybody?

SW: Didn't matter.

SH: Because in Germany it was illegal to have an abortion.

SW: Exactly. It was illegal here, too.

SH: And it was illegal here, too.

SW: Yes.

SH: But in Shanghai it wasn't anything to worry about.

SW: I don't think it was illegal, because I know quite a few doctors who did it. But this doctor he did a lot.

SH: Is that mostly what he did?

SW: As a matter of fact, he, he's a lovely man, I mean, it was a blessing that we had those abortions.

SH: I agree.

SW: Because, I mean, who wanted to bring up a child in this situation? And this doctor delivered my second son.

SH: Here in the United States?

SW: Yes, in New York. And, and, and I got married, I got pregnant then again, and it was a miscarriage. It was very funny. And I knew there was something wrong. I mean, it's been years ago. And I said, "Doctor So-and-So, do something about it." He said, "I can't." So I always came home and I said to my husband, "He did so many abortions and here he doesn't do anything. He wants to make everything legal." He was afraid, naturally. I mean, now, here in the United States, we didn't want any, any part of it, nobody should know, but everybody did know. Would you like a cup of coffee?

SH: That'd be very nice. Thank you. Nobody, also nobody's talked about the prostitutes, except to say there were these women who became prostitutes.

SW: I don't want to name . . .

SH: No, no, I'm not interested in names.

SW: . . . I don't want to tell you any names.

SH: But, but if you could tell me something . . .

SW: But, I know the names.

SH: . . . about whether most of these women were married or not married.

SW: Maybe you interviewed very conservative people.

SH: I don't know. It's just hard to know.

SW: I mean, I'm not, I'm not very conservative. I'm just the opposite.

SH: When, you knew some of these prostitutes. Were they, prostitutes as far as I know here in America, people want to stay away, they're shunned, were they . . .

SW: Well, I stayed away from them, too. I wasn't friends with them. No.

SH: So they were shunned?

SW: No, I mean, I was, I, I didn't like this morale, they, it, it was down, way down. And I could never understand it, that a Jewish woman, women are like that. This was beyond me. This I couldn't understand.

SH: Do you think their customers were Jewish too, or . . .

SW: No.

SH: No?

SW: I think their customers were mostly Japanese.

SH: I see.

SW: Maybe they were wealthy Jews. This I, I don't know. But in those whorehouses there were probably the low-class people.

SH: And who ran the whorehouses? Were these also Jewish people who ran them?

SW: No. No. No.

SH: No? Japanese? Chinese?

SW: They, I don't know. I've never been in any.

SH: But you, did you hear talk about them or . . .

SW: Let's see, if there was a Jewish, there was something, I mean, at least a rumor, there was something going on somewhere. There was something like that. One Jew had it.

SH: There was . . .

SW: But I don't remember where it was or, you know, it was a rumor.

SH: Was this in, all in a particular place, a part of Hongkew that, that this happened? Like a red

light district or something?

SW: No. No. We didn't have that. They were just there. Those women worked in bars a lot and that's where they met the men, too.

SH: You mentioned drugs. What kinds of drugs did people use?

SW: This I don't know. And they gambled a lot, too. Because some of those young men, they lost everything and they didn't have a shirt or pants, they gave them some of those, what do they call these, flour, flour bags.

SH: Sacks? Flour sacks?

SW: Sacks, yes.

SH: To wear? To leave?

SW: Yeah, something.

SH: Because they'd lost everything gambling?

SW: You know some of those young men, they got a lot of money from relatives in the United States and they lived it up very quickly. So then they had nothing.

SH: And what happened to them then?

SW: Some survived and some didn't.

SH: Was this gambling in organized gambling places?

SW: Where they gambled, I, I have never seen any of these places. I only can tell you what I heard. This I don't know for, where they did this. Because I know that the wealthy people gambled on their, in their houses. But these young men, they went somewhere else. They had horse races and dog races, and they, they just lived it up.

SH: Where, where were the horse races and dog races? At the big track there in Shanghai?

SW: Yeah, there was a big track in Frenchtown. I never went there. I very seldom went out of Hongkew, very seldom.

SH: Why was that? You mentioned fear, was that, was that the reason?

SW: No. Even before I, I just, I never had enough money to, to go out, I mean, I was satisfied with those café houses in, in Hongkew. But there were, there were my friends there. I didn't, I had no desire to be with other people. That's why my husband never understand, he, he can't, it's beyond him that we don't speak Chinese. And nobody does. Very, very few people spoke Chinese or

Japanese, barely English.

SH: Because your whole circle was German-speaking.

SW: Was all German, strictly German. It's a shame, though. It is a shame. I mean, if you live in a country, it's the same thing here, some of the refugees don't speak English either. They never want to learn.

SH: What did you have to do with Chinese people? What kind of relationships did you have with Chinese people?

SW: Very little. I mean, except my boss. Through him I met a few, but most of these Chinese I met, they were doctors who studied in Germany. This was his crowd. I had a few Russian friends. And then in the police force, a few English policemen or detectives, and but mostly you were among your own people.

SH: Where did you learn your English?

SW: Here. And . . .

SH: But, but . . .

SW: I, I spoke some English, yeah, because then after the war I, I worked for the Americans.

SH: So tell me about the end of the war. What . . .

SW: It was thrilling! [laughs] We all scraped our pennies together and bought a bottle of vodka and just got drunk. It was the best time. It was just a dream. It was wonderful.

SH: Was that, was that actually, I've heard that people said that there was a rumor that the war was over, but that it was a couple of days early and some people went to celebrate, but the war was . . .

SW: We celebrate right away, we knew. We knew.

SH: How did you hear about that? Was there, were you listening to radio?

SW: Radio. Yes. You had to return the radios.

SH: To the Japanese?

SW: Yes. But my, our landlady she kept that.

SH: And what station did she listen to?

SW: I don't know. I don't know. She was a communist, anyhow.

SH: A Russian communist? Or a German communist?

SW: No! She was a German communist.

SH: And what, what did that mean? Did she do anything different?

SW: She was the first one back to East Germany. She was a real communist.

SH: When did she . . .

SW: Did people tell you about the bombings? Yes.

SH: Yes.

SW: So I don't have to repeat that.

SH: Unless you had, you know, saw it particularly, or knew someone who was hurt in it.

SW: No. No. I always, I, I was very tough. I always helped. When the alarm was over I, I inspected and wanted to see if there are dead people and reported them and things like that. But most people just shriveled up.

SH: So why were you . . .

SW: I wasn't even afraid.

SH: Why not?

SW: I don't know. I always thought, it's the same thing here when we have an earthquake. I, I'm a very big optimist. I think nothing happens to me.

SH: So who did you report to when you went to see the bodies?

SW: Well, there was always somebody who was a head of the *Fliegeralarm*.

SH: Someone in the Jewish community.

SW: Yes. Yes. So I helped. But some people, they fainted and they were so afraid at, I had a little balcony, and we had one alarm, and, and this whole, this whole balcony collapsed, it was right in front of my room. It was just a broken-down wooden balcony, you know, with the, the pressure it just collapsed.

SH: And that didn't worry you.

SW: Of course, it worries you, but I always knew I made it, I'm gonna make it.

SH: So then after the end of the war what, what changed? What happened?

SW: Things changed a lot for the better. I mean, people got jobs and people left, and, you know, you could buy clothes and you could go out and eat and you, you could live like a human being again.

SH: Now why was that? Was there more money? Or was it just that you could leave the, there wasn't this ghetto any more.

SW: Money was the most important thing in those years.

SH: And where did this extra money come from after the war that, that wasn't there during the war.

SW: I mean, if you work for the Jap-, for the Americans, they pay you.

SH: So there were a lot of jobs to work for Americans and that helped everyone.

SW: Yes. I worked for the PX, but I only made seventy-five dollars which was a lot of money. So I went, I wanted to go to the Unit-, United States with some money.

SH: You knew you wanted to go to the United States.

SW: Oh, yeah.

SH: When did you . . .

SW: Most people do.

SH: Why, why not Israel? Or why not back to Germany? Did you ever think about going back to Germany?

SW: Well, I mean, I met so many after the war, so many Americans at that time, and they tell me, I mean, they tell you money grows in the backyard. You know, you believe these people, and that's why I wanted to go.

SH: So . . .

SW: And I had relatives here, so they sent me immediately papers and so we went.

SH: When did you go? When did you come to the United States?

SW: 1948 in March.

SH: So there's a, there's a long time there between the end of the war and 1948.

SW: Then I quit this job in the PX and I worked, went back to waitressing. I made more money.

Then I could save some money.

SH: Waitressing where, in what kind of . . .

SW: Several places. I mean, you know, those Ameri-, this was very strictly American people, American service people, who came there and they were very good tippers, so you, you made good money.

SH: Did you move? Were you able to move?

SW: No. I stayed right where I was.

SH: And you mother also stayed?

SW: Yes. Yes. Yeah.

SH: So you were saving to come to America? You knew . . .

SW: Yeah.

SH: Why did you have to wait from '45 to '48 to go somewhere?

SW: Well, first of all, I had, we had papers, I had papers with my ex-husband. So when we got a divorce, my relatives in the United States, they had to send me new papers.

SH: I see.

SW: So everything took longer. But, I mean, '48 wasn't really that bad.

SH: You had no interest in going, did you ever think about going back to Germany?

SW: No. Oh, no. I was back in Germany two times and I hate these people. The funny thing was, you can turn this off, this doesn't have to go on.

BREAK IN RECORDING

SH: . . . unusual about it, but some, as you said your friend went to Vienna. Did she, and she . . .

SW: Oh, my friend, I mean, this was my best friend. We lived in the same house for years and years, we are the same age and she married, no, she didn't marry, she, she was also born in Berlin, but her boyfriend was from Vienna, so she couldn't come to the United States, and she went from Shanghai to Israel, but she stopped in, not, not that she stopped out of her own free will, in Ellis Island. So that's where I saw her again. I visited her. This was very sad. I mean, you know, they were behind bars, I mean, they were treated just like animals.

SH: She was on her way to Israel?

SW: Yes, and they . . .

SH: Through the United States?

SW: She went by train to the Unit-, to, to New York, and it was all guarded, and then they could not, didn't see a thing in New York, and she went, they stayed in Ellis Island for a few days, and they had visitors and then they went to Israel. They didn't like it in Israel and she went back to Vienna. And till this day I don't understand what she's doing in Vienna. I visited her twice in Vienna, she visit, she visits us once a year. She comes to the United States. But these people there, I always said to her, "Millie, I don't understand how you can live here!" But she is my age and she doesn't want to change any more, is getting too old.

SH: Could you tell me about this train across the United States? This was a whole group of Shanghai refugees?

SW: They were all guarded, yeah.

SH: And they, they . . .

SW: I don't know if the whole train was them, but maybe a few . . .

SH: Cars.

SW: Yes, cars.

SH: And they were all on their way from Shanghai through the United States . . .

SW: They went by ship to the, to San Francisco. From San Francisco they took the train to New York, and from New York they were shipped to Israel.

SH: So this was . . .

SW: Because they didn't have papers. It was not like that in those years, like the Vietnamese and, and whoever comes in, here I am, "*Hier bin Ich*," I am here now, and I stay here. It was different in those years. They did not let them get out. And they built a business in Vienna and they did very well and that's where she is. Have you ever been to Ellis Island?

SH: No.

SW: It was terrible. Very sad. I mean, to see these people, they were free, but they weren't free.

SH: How many of them were there, do you think, who did all this?

SW: Quite a few.

SH: A hundred?

SW: I don't know, maybe even more. They didn't, they didn't have a, they had a different quota, so they couldn't get in here. It was hard.

SH: So tell me about coming to the United States then.

SW: Well, we came to the United States.

SH: Arrived. What, what ship did you take and when did you come exactly?

SW: It was an army transporter. It was an up and down thing. I think we were eighty people in, in one room. Bathroom and all this, but it was great.

SH: It was great because you were going to the United States?

SW: Yes. Stopped in Honolulu, they, they welcomed us, big lunch, and I mean, we were treated very well. And you arrived in San Francisco, immediately they gave you money.

SH: Who gave you money?

SW: The Jewish committee. They, they had a room for you in a nice hotel. They gave you, I don't know how much it was every day, so many dollars for, for your meals and I stayed in San Francisco for three weeks.

SH: Did you know that was going to happen when you were on the boat, that you were going to be met and taken care of?

SW: No, no. You didn't know that.

SH: What did you think was going to happen when you landed?

SW: I thought they would ship me immediately to Chicago.

SH: Why to Chicago?

SW: Because that's where my papers were from.

SH: I see.

SW: That's where my family was and my sister.

SH: So what did you do in San Francisco for three weeks?

SW: Had a ball. [laughs] We ate good.

SH: You had some friends who were with you?

SW: Oh, yes. You knew everybody there. It was great. Then I went to Chicago, I didn't like. And then I went with my, my sister. My mother stayed back in Chicago and my sister and I, her husband also couldn't, couldn't come. He was also from Vienna, he came after and we went to New York.

SH: So you and your mother and your sister were all going together on the boat?

SW: No. My sister was always first. I don't know why. She was always the first one, pioneer. And then my sister and I, I didn't like Chicago at all. For young people it, it was awful. And then I, you had no trades, you had no, no education, you had no, what did you want to do? So they told us, we are, we go to the country, Fleishman's in the, in the Catskill Mountains.² You find a job there and they give you room and board and whatever. So we worked as waitresses, and we saved up some money and then . . .

SH: You and your sister?

SW: My sister. My brother-in-law came and, and I, I would, would've wanted to go to school, but if you have no money you have to make a living. It, it was difficult. In those years I wasn't thinking of going to night school, things like that. So I saved up some money and I became a beautician, which was terrible, I hated it. And I met my husband and, and I got married. He had a good job, he's a scientist, and he's also a doctor, a Ph.D., and so I started a family. That's, that's all I wanted. I wanted to live a normal life with a husband and children and I got that and I was very lucky.

SH: Do you think, I mean, most, many people want to live a normal life as you say, but was . . .

SW: But I had, I was young and I was single. I had the chance. Some people are married and they didn't have a chance, they have, they have to earn a living. So when I got married, my husband didn't like being, having a wife being a beautician. You have to quit right away, then I got pregnant right away, so it was good.

SH: Was there anything in, in your desire to have a normal life, was this something partly a reaction to an abnormal life in Shanghai? Do you think?

SW: I never had a normal life. I didn't have a normal life in, in Germany, because, on account of Hitler, and divorced parents. This was not normal. I didn't have a normal life in Shanghai. So when I came to the United States, I still was young and I thought I can have a normal life if I try hard enough, and I was very fortunate. I mean, I was more fortunate than many of the refugees who came from Shanghai. I wanted to marry an intelligent man, I wanted to meet my, be, be something different, have, even if you don't go to school, you still can have an education. You can read a lot. You can learn a lot from other things than going to school. True?

² Fleischman's was a well-known Jewish resort in upstate New York.

SH: Yes.

SW: And my husband taught me a lot of things which I'm very grateful of, and I brought up my children the same way and I made it. Now I wish I would be twenty years younger.

SH: Why?

SW: Well, would be nice to have children and grandchildren when you're younger, but I'm satisfied. I'm happy. I mean, it didn't start out all the, I mean, you don't buy a house, you get married, you don't buy a house right away. You buy a little house, you buy a little better house, and now I live where I want to live. I mean, my husband want to live here anyhow, I didn't need that big house, really. But it's, it feels good.

SH: And what's left from Shanghai, do you think, in your, in your mind?

SW: I tell you something, I am a person, I don't look back that much. You know, I know a lot of, I mean, not a lot any more, but I knew a lot of, a few refugees, they always look back. And you should look ahead. You should look in the future, not always live in the past. You can't live in the past all your life. I mean, I don't have much future any more, but I mean, I, that's the way I was. I always want to better myself.

SH: Do you think that being in Shanghai changed you in some important ways?

SW: You matured a lot.

SH: Because it was hard?

SW: It was tough. It was pretty tough. I mean, like I said before, we had good times, but we had lots of bad times, too. The, the two and a half years in the ghetto, it was bad. But I never cried, never. My mother did, older people, they do cry.

SH: You thought you would make it?

SW: Yeah. I think if you have a positive attitude, you make it. I mean, it's the same thing with, with illnesses. I mean, all older people have some illness. I'm sure your parents do, too. I do, too. My husband, fortunately, he doesn't. But if you have a, the right attitude, it goes away, and we all don't live forever.

SH: What did your mother do after you came to the United States?

SW: My mother, she was cooking for a woman, for a couple, for a little bit, and my husband supported her.

SH: And your sister?

SW: My sister had it rougher. I mean, she, she married in Shanghai a man who was twenty years older and, I mean, she divorced, too, this is her second husband, was her second, he's dead, and he was twenty years older than she was, and she worked all the time. She worked, had different kinds of jobs, factory jobs, and, I mean, now she's retired, she's a little better. They all are better off now, because they all get their checks from Germany. Fortunately, they're lucky.

SH: Could you tell me about getting a divorce in Shanghai?

SW: It was easy.

SH: Who, who you had to go to, and who did it.

SW: It was just a plain lawyer, he was a refugee, he always, we, we came there, it just, you know, when you get married and you're very young, and then the war was over. It was not a bad marriage, but I thought I can do better and, and so we just, it was just a mutual agreement. We just went to him and he said in German, you speak German? He said, "*Wollen Sie?*" What did he say? "*Wollen Sie es nicht nochmal versuchen?*" I said, "No. This is, this is my final decision and that's it." You got your divorce paper and, and a funny thing, when I remarried, we had a Jewish wedding, this, this was only a civil wedding we had in Shanghai, I had a Jewish wedding, and the rabbi needed the, the Jewish divorce paper, and I said to him, "I was never married by a rabbi in Shanghai." So I, I guess, he got it from somewhere and I, I needed that divorce and then he could marry us. It was just a reform wedding. But the divorce and marriage, it was nothing. I think anybody could've divorced you, I think. It was a, a German Jewish lawyer. He was fat, fat man, I remember. And you just walked out, now you're divorced.

SH: Could you tell me what your name was? Your, not your married name, but your, your maiden name, and your mother's name.

SW: I told you, Salomon.

SH: Salomon. You told me that, that's right. That's right. Do you think there were more divorces in Shanghai because of the hard conditions? Or maybe more marriages?

SW: I don't really know percentage-wise how many divorces there were. There were bad marriages, but I think towards the end, they all emigrated together. But those were mostly marriages, people who were married already in Germany. I mean, I was only married for a few years. And I, I think I made the right decision, because most of the refugees, now they all are pretty well off, because they get their pension from Germany and things like that. But that any of these people, I'm not talking about, what was the Secretary of . . .

SH: Blumenthal.³

³ Michael Blumenthal was Secretary of the Treasury under President Jimmy Carter. See interview with him, Berlin, February 3, 1995.

SW: Blumenthal. I'm not talking about him, those are rare people. And who's the other one, I just talked to my son about him, I didn't even know him, Max, the one who makes the posters, Max . . .

SH: Peter Max.

SW: Peter Max, his parents are also from Shanghai. Did you know that? And I mean, few people made it, but most of them had very small factory jobs, salespeople, nobody really did anything, I mean, some were lucky, but very small percentage really did well. Now they all are well off, thank goodness, but this is not from their jobs. You know usually, man and wife worked and, you know, they saved up and, because I could see it with my sister, I mean, they, they had to struggle, too, to buy a house, things like that.

SH: Is there anything, any other incidents that happened to you or unusual experiences that you had?

SW: In Shanghai? One strange experience I had, I don't know if this interests you, one morning I woke up, I had, I was covered with a rash from top to toe. I had no idea what it was, and in order to go to a private doctor, you, I mean, this doctor couldn't, the doctor who made all the abortions, he was not spe-, I had to go to a skin doctor. So at the corner there was a Chinese, little Chinese hospital. So this girlfriend of mine, who lives in Vienna now, she went with me, and they took blood tests, and it was, all of this, this happened overnight. I was, it was, it look, it didn't look like measles, but all these little spots all over your body. So in a couple of days later, I went there for the result and guess what they tell me? I had syphilis. I almost died. Yes, I mean, the test was right here, you have syphilis. So I, my mother sold something so I could go to a dermatologist, what was it? Psoriasis. Till that day I have it. I mean, things like that, they weren't very good doctors. The German refugees, they were, yeah, they were very good doctors, and they were also very nice. They treated you, sometimes you don't have to pay anything. I mean, I never did, so he was very nice.

SH: Was there any difference in being a, a young, single girl in Shanghai than there was in being a young single girl in Berlin? Was there a difference in the way men and women interacted, or young men and young women interacted in Shanghai than in Berlin?

SW: I think you were looser.

SH: In what way?

SW: Every way, I guess.

SH: Why?

SW: The immigration has a lot to do with this.

SH: Less willing to listen to your parents?

SW: Oh, I, I was, I always listened to my mother, [laughs] till she died. No, I was pretty good. I have to pat myself on my shoulder.

SH: But looser in some ways?

SW: Yeah.

SH: Less disciplined in some ways.

SW: More free. But in Germany I was like that, I, I was pretty rebellion, in Germany when, when, when they had the, the curfew, you know, you weren't allowed to go to the movie, you weren't allowed to go here and there, I always did, and my mother always prayed, she was sitting home and prayed that I would come home. So I had a friend who was in the German army. He was a gentile, and I thought, if I, and he was, he, he was a soldier, so if I go with him what can happen. And you know in the movie theater they have those flash things, right in your face they, they look, look for people.

SH: Really?

SW: Yes. Oh, yeah.

SH: Who were they looking for?

SW: Jews. But I was never home. You, you weren't supposed to be out after eight. I always was. I went dancing.

SH: So because you were with this German soldier you were alright.

SW: No, not all, I went with girlfriends, too. Yeah.

SH: But you didn't get caught.

SW: You know, you do things when you're a young girl, you do things, you don't even think of danger. My mother always said, "Susie, don't do that. *Mach das nicht. Komm nach hause.*" So she was sitting and always waiting for me. But I, when you're sixteen, seventeen, you, if you're a girl or a boy, you want to have a good time. You don't think of the danger. I don't know if it's good or bad. I mean, I could've ended, God knows, because when, when we took out the passport, I remember this Nazi, he said to, because they, they took all those young people for, you know, farmer's work and things like that. So he said to me, "*Du hast aber viel Glück, daß Du raus kommst.*" So he meant, if I'm not going, getting out now, I knew exactly what he meant, they would've gotten me right away, because I was a young, healthy girl. They didn't want my mother. They want younger people who can work. So I was in a way very lucky.

SH: I'm not sure what else I want to ask.

SW: I want to give you more coffee.

BREAK IN RECORDING

SH: So . . .

SW: Don't put this on. [laughs]

SH: Really? Should I turn this off?

SW: No, it's, it's okay. My mother and my first husband and I, we went up there, there was always a beauty contest.

SH: To the Roof Garden Mascot.

SW: Yes, once a year. And they always say I was one of the prettiest girl there, girls there. You, you don't see that any more, but I can show you pictures, and they always, they came up to me and I should enter, which I didn't. I was very shy, so I didn't enter that, but we went up there all the time.

SH: And was there music there?

SW: Oh, I was also, forgot to tell you something, I was modeling there, too.

SH: Well, tell me about that.

SW: Yes. I had a couple of modeling jobs. One was, I don't even know who this person was. I modeled straw hats and they sent those, they made a magazine out of those straw hats and they send them to Manila and I've never, one picture I got, because it was, they didn't give you any pictures, and the second pictures, the second modeling job was raincoats. I did that, too.

SH: So this was for the people who manufactured the, the hats and . . .

SW: Raincoats.

SH: . . . and the raincoats.

SW: No. The, the Pana-, the, the straw hats, this, this had nothing to do with, with the refugees. This was somewhere else. I don't know. The raincoats, that was a company in, he was a ref-, a refugee.

SH: Tell me about the beauty contest. Who was running the beauty contest and . . .

SW: Who was running it, I don't know, but all the, the, the pretty, prettiest German Jewish girls, they were patrolling up and down and they picked one.

SH: And this was at the Mascot? Is, is that where it took place?

SW: Oh, is the gar-, the roof garden.

SH: Roof garden.

SW: Yeah, yeah.

SH: And . . .

SW: I think I know this, I remember this Rossetty.⁴

SH: He played the sax . . .

SW: Didn't he play the fiddle, too?

SH: No, there was a man and his band who played the fiddle.

SW: Yeah, yeah.

SH: Whose name was Leist-, Leisten, something like that, and he played the saxophone and the accordion.

SW: Uh huh, uh huh.

SH: And so I just talked to him, he lives in Laguna Hills, I just talked to him today.

SW: Oh, he does?

SH: But what, what did the women wear in the beauty contest? Dresses or . . .

SW: Dresses.

SH: Not bathing suits, not like in a North American thing.

SW: No, no, no.

SH: And what did the winner get? Was there a prize?

SW: I don't think they got anything. They were just, the picture in the paper.

SH: I see.

SW: Yeah, because we lived in one house and the girl became one year. She was only sixteen, she became a beauty, beauty queen. But they wanted me to enter that time.

⁴ See interview with Henry Rossetty, Laguna Hills, California, June 8, 1990.

SH: Who wanted you to enter?

SW: Those schmucks there.

SH: The people who were running it?

SW: Yes. They came to the table and said, "Come on, Susie, go, go, go!" And my mother and my ex-husband, they, "You should go, you should go, maybe you'll win." And I said, "No, this, this is for the birds."

SH: Why would, why would anyone do it? Was this a way of making money somehow, or . . .

SW: Popular. This, they were mostly single girls . . .

END TAPE 1, SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

