9-30-1989

Colland, Melitta oral history interview

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MELITTA COLLAND

PORTLAND, MAINE

SEPTEMBER 30, 1989

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Steve Hochstadt: . . . of Asherah Cinnamon's mother. I hope this works.

Joseph Colland: What's this, a tape recorder?

SH: Yes, and that's a microphone.

Melitta Colland: I don't know what I can do for you, because I don't, don't remember too many things about . . .

SH: Oh, you already remember things!

MC: [laughs] Well, they come to me as, as I see things.

SH: What I'd like to ask you is just to start at the very beginning, when Shanghai first comes into the picture, when your family first thinks about going to Shanghai. If you could tell me, maybe you could just tell me a tiny bit about where you lived, and what your family did, and then why, how you heard about Shanghai, and why you went, and just continue on.

MC: That's very simple. There were very few countries where you could go into without waiting for many many months, or even years, for a visa. And there was utmost urgency to get out of Europe, out of Vienna, out of the Hitler-occupied countries. And everybody went, as quickly as possible, wherever they could possibly get in, without needing a great deal of money to get in, or visas. And China, at that time, happened to be one of the few countries who let us come in without much to do. I had two older brothers, I was the youngest. And the oldest brother had finished medical school. He finished his internship at the Jewish Hospital in Vienna, and was looking to get away. It was 1938, in March, Vienna was occupied by Hitler. And from that moment on we started thinking of leaving. My brother Henry, who was sligh-, fourteen months younger than the oldest, the doctor, he had a good friend who had connections to Panama and was offered a job in Panama. But that young man didn't want to go. He felt that Panama is not a climate that he would like. And my brother came home one day and said to mother, and father, of course, that, Henry Tillinger, in those days it was Heine Tillinger, was offered that job and doesn't want to go. "How would your parents think of my applying for that job, if Heine has no objection to it?" Mother said, "Anything. Just get *out* as quickly as you can." And Henry went to Heine Tillinger, and asked him, and Heine said, "If you want to go to Panama, that's fine with me, go ahead."

JC: Where did this other fellow get to?

MC: America.

JC: He got to America.

MC: We, we met him later in New York. But, so Henry was really the first of the three of us, the middle son, who went to Panama. And then it got worse and worse in Vienna, of course, and Paul became one of a group of nine young doctors who tried to get out as quickly as possible. And they decided, the only place they can go and stay together is China.

SH: All Jewish? Nine Jewish doctors?

MC: Nine Jewish doctors, all different. One was a dentist, one was a psychiatrist, and so on. My brother was a, a chest physician. And they took their ship, and passage, they were able to get passage to China.

Asherah Cinnamon: With their families?

MC: No, no, in those days they didn't have families, except us. I mean, they were not married, they were single young men. And . . .

SH: When did they leave?

MC: In December of thirty- . . .

JC: Eight.

MC: . . . -eight. They arrived in Shanghai. And now comes my story about doctors. They were invited, I don't remember the name of the doctor, but he was very well to do, he has been there for about twenty years, had a fabulous home and a lot of servants, which were very cheap in those days in China. And he invited these young, so-called "colleagues" to his house for a banquet dinner. They were served by Chinese boys with white gloves. Behind every chair was one waiter. There was a long table, the food was absolutely fabulous. And at the end of the dinner, the doctor got up, and made a speech to these young doctors, and said, "My dear colleagues, it's nice to welcome you all here, but I'm sorry to tell you that there isn't really very much future in you being here. You might just as well go right into the Yangtze River, because to make a living here as a doctor is a very tough thing." That was his warm greeting to these young doctors. And all nine of them got up and said, "Thank you very much for your hospitality, but since we have come that far, we don't choose the Yang-, the river right away. We are going to try our best." And each one of them was able to get a job somewhere, not within Shanghai, most of them. They all went out. The psychiatrist went to Nanking. My brother went to the interior of China. I don't know what the others did.

The reason I remember the psychiatrist so well is because he was like a third brother in my house. He came from a broken home, and my mother always felt very sorry for him. He was a school chum of my oldest brother for many, many years, from, from grade school on, through medical school. And when it came to *my* wanting to leave for China, I wrote him a letter, as a good friend, and said, "Would you mind writing me a letter that you want to have me as your bride? Just make believe." So that, at that time you already needed a visa for China, which was April of '39.[1] And he wrote that letter, and I had no problem getting my visa, and even getting one for my mother.

But I also had a very close friend in Belgium, and he was able to get me into Belgium,

[1] In August of 1939, the Japanese authorities who controlled the port of Shanghai imposed restrictions on new immigration. The prospective spouses of residents were one category of acceptable immigrants. Possibly Colland is inaccurate about the date here.

and got me even a job in a department store in Liège. And I went to Belgium first. But I had my ticket to China in my bag, and my mother said, "If you are going to China, I'm going with you. If you decide to stay in Belgium, then I stay in Vienna." Because my father refused to leave Vienna. He said, "In six months this whole misery will be over, and you will all come back. But you have to take the young people out," and of course he didn't want me, as a young girl, to go alone to China, so mother had to go with me. Well, I went to Belgium, but I went to the man who gave me the job, and I said very honestly to him, "I appreciate your giving me this opportunity to work for you, but what would you do if you were in my shoes? I have a ticket for China in June. I can leave from Trieste with my mother, or I can stay here and work for you. What would you do if you were me?" He said, "Young lady, I'm not Jewish. And if I wouldn't be totally tied down here, with everything I own, I would leave tomorrow, because pretty soon we'll have the war, and there won't be any getting out anymore." And I owe this man my life, really, [laughs] because I probably would not have had sense enough to leave. I was young, I was a little bit in love with this young man who got me into Belgium. He wanted me to stay, and so on. So I decided to leave, and I met mother. This is at, in Trieste. This is how I came to China.

Three years later, the uncle of the psychiatrist told my mother, "You know, Fritz was terribly hurt." My mother said, "Why? Melitta wrote him a letter of thank you to Nanking." She said, "Well, he meant that he wanted to marry her, and she didn't take notice of it." [laughs] I was long married to somebody else already. Well, anyway, that's the story of my arrival in China. And . . .

SH: Most, most of the people that I talked to, who came out of Vienna . . .

MC: Yes.

SH: . . . came out because someone in their family was arrested, or for very . . .

MC: Well, my brother Paul had to hide in the hospital one night, which was November 10th night, *Kristallnacht*,[2] because they were going from door to door, and looked for young men, young Jewish men, to take them to the concentration camps. And in those days we didn't know that there were concentration camps. We only knew that they're taking them to the police station. But he stayed hidden in the hospital, and they came to our door in the middle of the night. Mother and I were rather frightened of it. But we said he had left already. And that's how he got away. And . . .

AC: Implying that he'd left the country already?

MC: Yes, yes, yes.

SH: But your family had already, but your brother had already left, before *Kristallnacht*.

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[2] Although the *Kristallnacht* actions began in Germany on the night of November 9, attacks on Jews in Austria commenced the next day.

MC: No, that, no, that was the . . .

SH: Your other brother, your other brother had already left.

MC: The other brother had already . . .

JC: One had left, yeah.

SH: Your family was very prescient about leaving.

MC: My mother was the brightest woman you ever want to know in that respect, really. Because she already, long before Hitler came to Austria, kept saying, "I want you kids out of here. I want you kids out of here." And nobody could really understand how a mother could push her son to go into Panama, because in those days, from Vienna into Panama, or Vienna into China, was like sending your own children into Siberia. You know? It was unheard of. And her friends used to say, "How can you, how can you even think of sending your son to China? How can you even think to send him into the tropics, into Panama?" She said, "I don't care. Anywhere else but here." And we really owed her an awful lot in that respect.

JC: Ah, it's very strange, there were very, not many, but there were some people who had the prescience to see that they got out, and their families got out.

MC: You mean the presence, to get out.

JC: No, the prescience.

MC: Oh, the pressure.

JC: No. P-R-E-S-C-, how do you spell it, I-E-N-C-E.

AC: He means the foresight.

SH: Foresight.

MC: Foresight.

JC: Foresight. Prescience.

MC: I don't know that word.

JC: You know the word that I was referring . . .
MC: I don't know it that well.

JC: But the, it, the foresight. And I think my father had it.

MC: My English, my English, I've the very poor English. [laughs]

JC: 'Cause he saw to it that I went out of Holland in 1938.

SH: Just in time.

JC: When I was 18 years old.

MC: He was lucky.

JC: And there were others. I had another brother also was sent out.

MC: There was even a difference in the attitude, at the beginning, towards this whole Holocaust, from one brother to the other. Because Henry, the younger brother, left really before it got so drastically bad. Paul left after *Kristallnacht*, and I of course, too. And when we first got together again, I could see that there isn't this utmost hatred in Henry, that was in Paul and me . . .

JC: I still don't think Henry has it today.

MC: No, no. Probably because he has very good friends all over the world, and he is more, how shall I say, internationally willing, willing to forgive and forget. I'm not and neither was my brother Paul.

SH: So you left in June '49, '39.

MC: I left from Trieste. From Vienna I left April '49.

SH: To go to Belgium.

JC: '39.

MC: I left at, pardon me, '39. I left one day before Hitler's birthday, April 19th I arrived in Belgium. And my then dear friend, who got me there, was only half Jewish, his mother wasn't Jewish. And he still worked in Belgium for a German auto firm. He was an, an auto car racer. He raced for them, and he sold the cars and so on. And for Hitler's birthday he had to show his face for the party. And as we said, he said, "I'm only going to show my face. I'll be back in less than an hour." And as we hugged, and I said goodbye to him, his lapel by accident turned over and he had the swastika underneath. Which was also one of the major reasons why I left Belgium. It was the man in the business that told me to go, and this little incident that made me realize, "What am I doing here? I don't belong."
SH: You said that you, you had very little money. You had only a few *Reichsmarks* as you . . .

MC: Nothing! Nothing practically. We were allowed five *Reichsmarks* each, to leave the country. That was all the cash we were allowed. We went, we were fortunate to be able to

get first-class transportation on the ship, on the "Conte Verde", which was an Italian line, to China. But we also needed money for tips. And the Italians were not very friendly, already, to the Jewish refugees. When my mother was very ill one night at the, on the ship, because she had gallstones, and was suffering a great deal with them, I asked for a special diet food. And one of the waiters, very gruff, said to me, "When you get to Shanghai, you'll be glad you have, you can afford to buy *any* food." And he was right [laughs] , unfortunately. He was very right, but it wasn't very nice. But anyhow, the reason I mention this, is that five *Reichsmarks* went for tips on the ship. So we arrived, between the two of us, with five *Reichsmarks*. But my brother in Panama had sent a little money to the parents of Paul's wife, the oldest brother, who, at, in the meantime, married a Viennese doctor, he'd studied medicine with him in Vienna, with her. And he wrote to her from Shanghai, "If you come here," she, she was related to the Orbachs, of the department store Orbachs, or her father was related. And they had sent her an affidavit to come to New York. But she knew my brother and was in love with him, and when my brother wrote to her that, "If you want to come to China, we will get married," she, of course, chose China, and went. And her parents later also went to China, but they were in Shanghai. And they lived in . . .

JC: But she didn't come . . .

MC: . . . help organizations of, of America, in Hongkew. And the mother was always someone who would rather save a penny than spend it, you know. And my brother Henry had sent very little money, he couldn't afford much, in those days, to her, to prepare housing for my mother and me when we arrived. And she prepared according to what she thought we refugees are entitled to. And that was a room that was as wide as this, from the wall to here, and as long as that, with a little window, on the upstairs floor of one of the White Russian women who had bought several houses like this, and made a lot of money by renting out these rooms. Of course one bathroom was for the whole building. I don't know how many rooms she had in that building. And we arrived, and went into that room, and sat up all night crying, because it was hot, hot, end of June. And . . .

JC: Tropical there.

MC: . . . and the bedbugs were all over the place. There was only room for a cot, to put up when the one chair that was there would be put on top of the table. My mother had a little couch to sleep on, and the rest of the width was wide enough for one of these little army cots that were folding up. I was supposed to sleep on that. And as I opened it up, it was full of bedbugs, and the roaches, these big flying roaches came running in and out of the window. And we just sat up all night crying. "How can we live here?" We didn't have any more money for rent, and in spite of that, we went next morning, we asked the lady, would she give us some of the money back? She said, "No, no, absolutely not." But someone was nice enough to rent us a slightly larger room, which was clean at least. And that's how we started.

SH: Did your family make any other kind of, of financial preparations for your going over there?

MC: None whatsoever. None whatsoever. My brother in Panama was really the one who

kept us from having to go for soup kitchens. Because the little bit of money that he sent, you could live on one American dollar for a whole week.

JC: What is it?

MC: What's happening? You know, if you exchanged one American dollar into Chinese money, we, in those days, could eat a whole week from it. And that's what we did.

SH: And otherwise, everything else was left with your father?

MC: No, it was partially left with my father, and partially packed up into a large *Lift*, which went as far as Italy, and then Mussolini didn't let anything go out that belonged to Jews. And that's where it was lost and never seen again. I mean, silver and furniture and, and fine linens and whatever we had, was, was in there, and we never saw it again. I also didn't mention the fact that the young man in Belgium, since he could travel freely still from Vienna to Belgium, my mother made what would have been the equivalent of a, a trousseau for me. It was money that we had in Vienna, and packed it all up into a big overseas trunk. And he took it out into Belgium for me. And then I was supposed to take it to the ship. I arrived by train, I was going from Brussels to, to . . .

JC: Paris?

MC: . . . Trieste, via Paris. And when I came to Paris, they told me I hadn't paid enough for the transportation of that overseas trunk. Do I have more money? I said, "No, I don't have any money." I mean, this young man helped me. He didn't know that he had to pay more for it. But I didn't, I was ashamed to ask him for money. So I left without any money in my pocket really. So that overseas trunk was lost too, because I had absolutely no means, and didn't know anybody, in the middle of the night, at midnight, to ask for help to pay for that overseas trunk to go to China. Never seen it again. Never seen it.

JC: Thank God you were very young then.

MC: And there were all my, my school reports in there, and everything that I, I learned and made in the *Schneiderakademie, Schneiderakademie* that I went to. And that was it. So then, when we arrived in Shanghai, a few days later, my brother from the interior had sent a man he'd befriended, an American doctor, Dr. Brooks O'Neil, I remember the name as clearly [laughs] , I'll never forget it. He sent this man to say hello to his mother and sister, because Paul wasn't, also was not allowed to travel. So he couldn't even come to Shanghai to greet us when we arrived. And this Dr. O'Neil was a medical doctor on the "Luzon", the ship. And he came and set me down and said, "Now how do you plan to earn your living?" I said, "Well, so far I tried to make some artificial flowers," which I had learned in Vienna how to do, and luckily I had a little bit of the material you needed for it in my personal luggage. I started making those and carried it from store to store. That's how I think, to remember, the Tukaczynski's also had a dress shop, because I think I came across that name when I tried

to sell them some of these artificial flowers, for evening gowns.[3] And he said, "Yeah, but this isn't going to feed you and your mother forever." I said, "No, it surely won't." He said, "Well, what else can you do?" I said, "I finished fashion academy in Vienna, I, I know how to sew, I know how to fit garments, I know how to cut them. But the Chinese tailors do much better and cheaper than I can do." He said, "Well, the only way you can earn a living that way is to own your own business, and employ Chinese tailors." I said, "Yeah, but that takes money." He said, "Well, you go and inquire, how much money does it need, to go into business." I went to a renting agent. I inquired about a very nice store in the French Quarter, what the rent would be. I inquired what it would cost me to put a few pieces of furniture in, and one sewing machine. Didn't even think of fabrics to, to buy fabrics ahead of time or anything like that. So the man came back a few days later, and I said, "Yeah, I think with about seven hundred dollars I could . . .

SH: American dollars?

MC: . . . start in business. Yes. No! What am I saying? Chinese dollars. I think, it's too far gone to remember that clearly, but I think it was Chinese dollars. He said, "It's," no, it must have been American dollars, otherwise he wouldn't have said . . .

JC: You talked to me about four hundred.

MC: No. No, no, no. Seven hundred. Because of this . . .

JC: (unintelligible)

MC: No, you're mistaken, Joe.

JC: Okay.

MC: Because I remember distinctly, he said, "I give you three hundred and fifty, if you can find one more person that is willing to lend you three hundred and fifty dollars." And I knew one other doctor, who by the way was a gynecologist, but not your grandfather. His name was Lustig, Dr. Lustig. And he had also known my brother already, when he was in Shanghai for a short time. And I went to him, and told him the story. And he said, "Yes, I have helped a few refugees. After all, I was lucky enough to come here twenty years ago and make a lot of money. I'm willing to give you three hundred fifty dollars." And that's how I started in business.

SH: How soon after you arrived did this . . . ?

MC: That was just practically, maybe four weeks, five weeks after I arrived. So I rented that store, and I started in business. Didn't know *anybody* or anything. One Chinese came in and said, "Me tailor, number one tailor." I said, "Fine, you're hired." [laughs] He brought

[3] See interview with Yosef Tekoah (Tukaczynski), Beijing, April 28, 1989.

the others that I needed, as business increased. And he stayed my number one tailor for the duration. And in six months I was able to return the money to Dr. Lustig, who nearly fainted when I came back with a check, because, he said, "I have given money to a lot of grown men. I have yet to see one dollar back. And this young girl comes back with the money."

SH: How old were you then?

MC: Twenty. Just about. And unfortunately, to this day it bothers me that I was never able to give it back to Dr. O'Neil, because he was on high sea, in Manila and everywhere. And unfortunately, I think he was lost on the "Luzon", when the trouble in Manila started. Because we never heard from him again. But, what else? Well, and that went very nicely.

SH: Who were your customers at the store?

MC: That's the other part that, the Chinese tailor who walked in and said, who . . .

AC: Do tell him about the girls.

Ron Breazeale: Yeah, tell him that story.

MC: Oh that comes much later. But the Chinese tailor was the first thing that walked in. And then a lady, highly pregnant, walked in, and said, "I am supposed to attend the festive evening at the French Club, and I am, as you can see, very far gone in my pregnancy, and I need something that I, will look halfway decent in." And I made her a lovely gown. And she was the wife of the Danish Consul. And through her I practically had all the different consulary wives, because they, she really helped me a great deal. Among them, of course, suddenly came in the wife of the German Consul General, who was the biggest Nazi in Shanghai. But his wife, who never had any children, took, I don't know whether it was her guilty conscience or, or what, but she loved me as if I had been a daughter of hers. She brought on the customers, not only from Shanghai, but she told them in Tokyo at the German consulate about me. And I had to make garments that were taken to Tokyo by the German couriers. How I came to that, I never know. But I went in and out in her house, as I say, like a daughter, came to fittings to her house. And when the war was over, she came to me and said, or first of all she came three days before Pearl Harbor, and she said to me, "Melitta, I want you to get married." I said, "What are you talking about?" She said, "I want you to marry either an American or a Frenchman. Anybody who will give you a passport." I said, "I'm sorry," [laughs] , "I, I don't know anybody, and I don't intend to get married." She kept pressuring and pressuring, and I couldn't do anything about it. She knew that Pearl Harbor was about to happen. And she was really trying to save me from losing my business, by talking me into getting married to someone. But it didn't work, of course. So right after the war she came into, I did not have the business any more, but she saw me occasionally, and I would still make some things for her occasionally myself, and bring them to her. And she came with a double strand of pearls, and said, "Melitta, I want you to have these. They won't let me take too much out, and rather than give them to anybody else, I want you to have them." And those are the pearls that Asherah are wearing. They came from the German Consul General's wife, who really was the top Nazi in Shanghai.

SH: What were their names?

MC: Glimpf. Glimpf.

JC: Glintz?

MC: Glimpf.

JC: Oh, Limpf.

AC: Glimpf.

MC: No.

SH: Glimpf.

MC: J-L-I . . .

AC: G.

MC: G-L-I-M-P-F. *Frau Glimpf und Herr Glimpf.* He was as jovial and nice when I came to the house as anybody could be.

AC: He knew you were a Jew?

MC: Of course! [laughs] They knew I was a refugee.

MC: The only ones who didn't pay everything were the wife of the, don't put that in your tape, please . . .

AC: Why?

MC: . . . wife of the, the British Consul. [laughs]

AC: Didn't pay her bills?
MC: No, she left without paying the last bill. She knew perfectly well I couldn't do anything about it.

SH: So your business was, was good.

MC: Was doing well! But for how long? From about August, I arrived beginning of July, August, I think it was about beginning of September that I started in business. Of '39. 'Till Pearl Harbor, which was December of '41.

JC: Which was December of '41.

SH: Jews didn't have to move into Hongkew until '43.

MC: No, that's not true. I'm sorry. We had to move almost, almost immediately. No, dear, I don't . . .

SH: The proclamation about the Designated Area came in 1943.[4]

MC: Yes, you are, right, we had to, pardon me, we had to report immediately to the Japanese. At certain days we would stand in line, and, and this miserable Japanese would be un-, unbelievably rude to everybody. And, and I've forgot his name now. Ghoya!

SH: Oh, it was Ghoya.

MC: Yeah. You knew that.

SH: And this is after, and this is after Pearl Harbor?

MC: You're right. Yes, you're right.

SH: All, all German, Viennese refugees . . .

MC: Yes, all the refugees, and Polish refugees, and he threw some poor young Polish boys, who were out after the curfew hour, because we had a curfew hour, and he threw them into jail with all the lice-covered beggars from the streets. And they died of typhoid before anybody could do anything for them.[5]

SH: What did you have to report? Or what did you, just show your . . .

MC: Just ourselves, so to say, that we are there. And you are absolutely right. It was not immediately after, you see, things, things [laughs] get mixed up.

JC: Things get blurred.

SH: Were your, were you able to continue in business for that . . .

MC: I did it myself, as I told you. Mrs. Glimpf and a few other ladies. One lady was a French lady, who was married to a Chinese, Mrs., can't think of her name now. She was the

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[4] 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.

[5] Colland is probably refers here to the jailing of several young Polish yeshiva students who refused to move into the Hongkew ghetto in 1943.

one who said to me once, when we be-, she was a very, very private lady. She, she never had any conversations about her private life with me. But then one day something must have happened at her home, because she came in for a fitting, and not, not in the store, in the apartment I continued for a while. And she said, "Melitta, just make sure of one thing. Don't ever marry a Chinese." I said, "Why not? I, I, you have two lovely children, they're beautiful children, and I thought that you're happily married." She said, "A Chinese will always be a Chinese. He met me in Paris. He was a perfect gentleman. He studied medicine there. He, he was just like any gentleman I would have known in Paris. But as soon as they come to their own country, they might even have the spittoon right next to their dining table." [laughs] That's how she expressed how unhappy she was. She said, "They may even have the spittoon right there next to the dining table."

SH: So at some point you had to continue the business in your apartment, instead of . . .

MC: Yes, yes, yes, yes. And then I married her father. And we were married . . .

JC: Where were you married to . . . ?

MC: 1944.

JC: '44.

SH: That's already, though, in Hongkew.

MC: Yes, yes.

SH: Tell me about doing away with your business and moving to Hongkew, how, and finding a, finding a place to live there.

MC: Well, as I say, mother and I were able to save a little money in that business. And I continued a little bit afterwards to earn money. And then we decided to buy that little house. And there we lived until I met my husband and he, he still, he moved in with us. But he still had his position as a doctor for the Swedish legation. So he was allowed to see his patients. But he went on bicycle to see his patients.

SH: He would leave Hongkew . . .

MC: And go into . . .

SH: . . . to see his patients . . .

MC: Yes.

SH: . . . every day.

MC: . . . and then had to be back at a certain hour, and if there was any need for him to

come at night, then he had to call a colleague who was within the area where they lived, because he could not go out. He had to be in, in that area after a certain hour. I think it was 8 o'clock in the evening or something like that. It was no fun. [laughs]

SH: Could you tell me about, in February, I think, of 1943, came this proclamation that you had to leave.

MC: Yeah, you see, you remember more than I do.

SH: Well, I've just, this isn't memory, this is just something that I've read very recently, so. And then, so, but you had three months, I think, in order to leave. So you must have . . .

MC: I don't remember.

SH: Tell me about going out to find a house. Were you very nervous that you wouldn't find something? How, how did you feel about, about . . .

MC: Hard for me to remember really, I would say. I, I really don't, don't, that is sort of blank, that transition. I remember that we, mother and I, went looking, and, and we saw that little Chinese house that looked kind of half way decent, in an area that was fairly clean. We still could afford a houseboy, who was cleaning for the, in the house, and who was cooking for us a little bit. And that was it.

SH: And you made some renovations, you said.

MC: Yeah, yeah. Oh yes. [laughs] We made it liveable for western living.

AC: Did you lose the business before or after that?

MC: Long before, 19-, practically the day of Pearl Harbor.

JC: After Pearl Harbor.

MC: Long before.
SH: In Hongkew, what did you do to support yourself?

MC: Really nothing. I couldn't do anything there. We, we couldn't work there. We lived on what we had. In other words, we used up our reserve. And Henry in Panama, in the meantime, did very well for himself. And he pretty regularly sent us money, which was very helpful. He already sent me packages from Panama, or rather, they came from New York. He ordered them through a friend who came to New York, to send nylon stockings from Woolworths, which I sold for a lot of money. That, that, that he still did when I had my business. And in those days nylon stockings in Shanghai were very, very . . .

JC: Yeah I can imagine! [laughs]

MC: . . . highly regarded because nobody had them yet. And so I said them and . . .

JC: In Europe also they were highly regarded . . .

MC: . . . made a little money on that, made a little money on that

JC: . . . during the war.

MC: And this is, I mean, this is how we lived. We bought some of the rations in cans, you know, from the soldiers, who sold part of their rations on the street. We ate those, Spam and all that. We didn't [laughs] , we didn't have too much luxury. I remember when I was pregnant, much later, and I was so, so longing for peaches, canned peaches, and they cost an arm and a leg. [laughs] And I really, I ate them, I loved them, [laughs] I bought them. Felt very guilty about it, spending that money, but I wanted them so badly. [laughs]

SH: Could you tell me something about your, your life outside of business, before you went to Hongkew. Social life, or what you did in the evenings, or people that you would, would go out with.

MC: Mostly refugees. Mostly, we befriended a couple of sisters, very, which were perhaps in my age group, who introduced me to a very nice Hungarian refugee, who wanted very much to marry me. And I also knew a young man from Finland, who also wanted to marry me. And I had told your father about it when I met him. I said, "I don't know. There are two, two perfectly fine, nice guys, who want to marry me, but I, I don't know which one to choose really, or if any of them." He asked me to arrange for dinners. He wanted to meet them, each one of them. And after he had met them, he came and told me, "I have your solution for you. You're not going to . . . "

END SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

AC: Is it okay if I ask a few more questions?

SH: Oh sure.

AC: You said that one of the things you did for entertainment was take the bus?

MC: That was in the very beginning.

AC: What other things did you do for entertainment? Do you want me to close the window, Steve, are you cold?

SH: No, no, I am fine.

JC: I am cold. Close the window behind me a little bit.

MC: We went a lot to the movies. We went a lot to concerts . . .

JC: Thanks a lot. It is getting a little cold.

MC: I, I had a nice surprise, we went . . .

AC: What kind of concerts were they?

MC: Philharmonic concerts.

AC: Philharmonic?

MC: Yes. The Shanghai Philharmonic was a very good orchestra.

AC: Western music?

MC: Yes, of course. And a little guy, by the name of Pacci, was the conductor, an Italian. And about a year ago, Mrs. Lourie, that's a friend I have in Connecticut, invited me for dinner. And I met a lady at her house, who was her houseguest. And she turned out to be the daughter of the conductor in Shanghai.

JC: Really? That's amazing.

MC: Yep. Yep.

JC: How small the world is.

MC: Yep. Of course there again we talked the whole evening about Shanghai. She, she was quite a bit younger than I, so she was a small child . . .

JC: Was she in Shanghai?

MC: Yes, of course she was. She was born there, I believe. And it was a pleasant evening.

AC: And what was my grandmother doing all that time?

MC: Trying to help me make ends meet. Trying to hold things together when I was in, in the front of the store, waiting on clients, or fitting them. She had to watch the workroom. She, in, in the beginning, we couldn't afford any, any household help. So she cleaned and cooked and did everything for me. And, among other things, when I had the first order for the Danish lady, I didn't have the money to go and buy the fabric, and I was ashamed to ask her for a deposit. My mother had a winter coat in her luggage with a little chinchilla collar. And there

was a furrier on the corner of this building where we had the store. She took the chinchilla collar off, went to the furrier and sold him the chinchilla collar. And with that money I bought the first piece of fabric to, to fill my first order.

AC: Did you see Paul at all, your brother?

MC: No, not until quite a bit after Pearl Harbor, they had to move to Shanghai . . .

AC: They were . . .

MC: . . . to Hongkew.

AC: . . . they were forced to move to Hongkew also, from the interior?

JC: And they didn't stay till the . . .

MC: No, no, they couldn't. No. And we kept contact with Bishop Ward. And then he got him out into Canada. But Stella always laughed about when Shanghai was bombarded, and I happened to visit Paul and Stella where they lived. And the siren went on for an air raid alarm. We were just eating. I was pregnant and hungry always.

JC: No wonder.

MC: I went, I went under the dining room table. And Stella is still laughing. She says, "Soon as the off siren went, Melitta went right back to eating."

JC: You had the children already, yeah . . . ?

MC: Yes. No, Joy was later.

AC: No, only one.
JC: Francis was, is older than you are, but Joy . . .

MC: Joy is younger.

SH: Can you tell me some more about life in Hongkew? About what you did every day, what a day would be like.

MC: What would a day be like? We would get dressed, we would go walking, promenading. [laughs] What could we do?

JC: Shopping or look for food?

MC: I didn't have much money for going, going shopping . . .

JC: Groceries.

MC: . . . for food. Grocery shopping primarily and meeting friends somewhere for a cup of coffee, and talking, and really not, not too much. It wasn't very [laughs] exciting, the life.

SH: Did you ever take meals at the soup kitchens at the *Heime*?

MC: Never, never.

SH: You had enough to avoid that.

MC: Thanks to my brother, Henry, who sent us a little money, we never had to do that.

AC: How much money? Roughly, just to get a sense of how much it took.

MC: It's hard to, hard to tell. To give you . . .

JC: He may remember himself.

MC: . . . to give you a sense of what money meant, when I lived in the French Quarter, I befriended a man who worked for Shell Oil in Shanghai. His salary was one hundred American dollars a month. And he could live like a king on that.

JC: Yeah, but they take off a lot of money at, in, in the beginning of the war.

MC: He lived in all luxury you could possibly want.

JC: You know . . .

MC: So that gives you an idea of what money meant.

JC: . . . well, I'll never forget, I came to the United States in 1939. And I know that that year, and early 1940, there, I remember that one had a seven or eight course meal on Third Avenue in New York, in a supposedly very fine restaurant for about a dollar. And it really was first-class food. And so that, that isn't comparable with what we know or don't know today, you know? So therefore I say, China was even relatively more, cheaper than, than America. I don't think we can talk about, but this hundred dollars was a lot of money, I'm sure.

MC: I remember we were very, sort of a little disturbed about the fact that we always said, we always come to where things were so wonderful before. You know. Because we came to Shanghai, and at that time people would tell us that a couple of years earlier they would buy a hundred, you could buy one hundred eggs for one Chinese dollar. Well, that was next to nothing, I mean, you could live, as I told you, on one American dollar a whole week. We lived on one American dollar for a week. So Henry couldn't have sent more than maybe twenty dollars occasionally. That would really be very, very helpful. Because he himself had a total of seventy-five dollar a month. And in Panama he, he needed American type living.

JC: Yeah, but also there it was much cheaper than in . . .

MC: Not, not . . .

JC: At that time, yes.

MC: . . . not that much.

SH: And there was no trouble for him to send you this money, for you to receive it.

MC: Not, not before the war. And later I don't remember any more . . .

JC: What happened after the Pearl Harbor?

MC: . . . how we did it? I don't remember any more, but we did get it occasionally. And I don't know whether he paid it to somebody in New York, and then somebody paid us there. I really don't remember any more. It's very interesting how . . .

AC: But it was finagled. It wasn't a direct mailing of money.

MC: No, no, no, no. Certainly not.

SH: Can you tell me about the end of the war? How, what happened to you. You've said a little bit. You had went, gone back to your old apartment to try to get it back.

MC: Yes, yes. Well, of course, it was almost hard for us to believe that the war is over. You know. It's, it's something that takes time to sink in. But of course then everybody was jumping with joy. And . . .
JC: No wonder.

MC: . . . everybody was trying, again like they did in Vienna, preparing oneself to, to leave. Since we didn't want to start all over again in China, and since everybody more or less felt that there is something coming that we don't want to be part of, we don't want to be caught in, namely the revolution in China, we were very busy trying to . . .

JC: Was that already summer of '45, that you felt that?

MC: No, it was, oh yeah, no, '47, '47.

JC: Wait a while. The war was over, also the war ended in '45.

MC: '45! Yes! And we left in '47!

JC: Right.

MC: So it wasn't all that much time, really. You know, you, you . . .

SH: Did you try to go back into business in that two years?

MC: No. By that time I was married. My husband earned a good salary. We didn't need that, no, no . . .

JC: And Asherah was born.

MC: . . . he earned very well, and she was born. I had to take care of her. In fact we did rent a nice apartment, back in the French Quarters. And we had an *amah*, a maid, who took care of her.

AC: Do you remember her name?

MC: *Amah*. You never hear their names, other than "*amah*".

JC: Is someone coming?

AC: Someone coming to visit the tenant.

JC: Ja, somebody is coming. Do you know?

AC: It's for someone else. It's not for us.

JC: Wait a while . . .

AC: It's for upstairs, Joe.

JC: . . . people can't get in.

AC: Yes, it's okay.

MC: Oh, you mean the gate for the dog? Did you undo that?

AC: It's okay.

MC: Okay.

AC: It is taken care of.

MC: Good.

SH: Tell me about leaving, about how that was arranged, and how you got visas to, to come. Was it difficult or easy . . . ?

MC: My brother sent papers to come to Panama. We took a Norwegian freighter from

Shanghai to Panama. Not to America, because in Shanghai we tried to apply for immigration to United States and we knew, we were told in fact, that it would take at least three years to get the papers. Number one, because the Consul, the American Consul was terribly anti-semitic. He, he did everything to keep us out. Not only us, I mean the whole bunch of immigrants who wanted to come to America. He kept old people out who had their sons and daughters long here, practically since 1939 or even earlier, and who never survived getting out of there. They died before they ever could get to see their children.

SH: Do you remember his name?

MC: No. No, I don't. Do you know it by chance?

SH: No.

MC: No. But anyway, when we went to Panama, there my brother, who was already a very highly regarded businessman, and, in the meantime, and who befriended a lot of the consular people. He was a very close friend of the American and British consul. And through them we were able to get the visas to the United States in six months. I had the German quota rather than the Austrian quota, because I was married to a German-born man. And we were lucky. For one thing, we thought that in order to make it easier on myself, my husband and I would come into New York first, and leave the child and my mother in Panama with my brother, who was overly generous. He, he rented a beautiful apartment for us, furnished it completely, and of course mother and child could have very easily stayed there very comfortably, as long as it was necessary. And we were going to do that. So we did not think of mentioning a child, or getting a visa for the child. We just got it for ourselves, and thought that later on we will come back and pick her up. Well, it so happened that my brother made a dinner for us. It was almost like a goodbye dinner, just a few days before we were to leave. And the American Consul came to dinner. And at one point the maid brings her in on her arm, and she had a head of blond curls, the most adorable baby you ever want to see.

AC: It's true.

JC: It is lovely pictures. I saw the pictures.

MC: And you show him the picture! Don't make me out a liar! [laughs] And he says, "Whose child is that?" And I say, "It's my daughter." "I don't remember giving a visa for the child." I said, "No, we did not intend to take her with us right away. She will stay here with mother, and come at a later date." He said, "Oh no. Don't do that. She's born in China. Don't do that. It may take you ten or twelve years to get her into the United States. You come tomorrow morning to my office, and I'll give you a visa for the child, and you take her with you. I don't care if you send her *back*, but you take her with you into the country." And that was lucky. [laughs]

JC: You know, because . . .

SH: So did your mother, though, stay?

MC: Mother stayed. Mother stayed for a few years and then she also wanted to come here, and we applied for her papers. She also went to Canada first, to be with my other brother for a while. And then I really needed mother badly, because I divorced, and worked, and I depended on strangers taking care of her, which I didn't like very much. And my mother always loved that little one, more than she should have. She practically devoted her old age to her. And, so mother came, and was a tremendous help, because I had to travel a great deal on my, in my work.

JC: Well, isn't that normal that a grandmother loves a grandchild?

MC: Yes, dear. But not to the point where she totally had given up her own life. She never went to a, to a party. She never made friends. She never, mother loved to play bridge in Europe, she never touched a card in this country because she always was busy . . .

JC: She played canasta with me.

MC: With you! Right! [laughs] Well, my mother was, in that respect . . .

JC: She had had a rough life.

MC: Nobody could duplicate that.

JC: Oh! She had had a very rough life.

AC: When was the last time you heard from your father, when you were in Shanghai?

MC: In Shanghai, in 1941, yeah, that the last letter, as a matter of fact, just not too long before Pearl Harbor. It was very shortly before Pearl Harbor, he wrote and said, "Now is the time to get me out of here. Please try your best." And then Pearl Harbor came, I couldn't do anything.

JC: Did you, hadn't your brother and, Henry tried . . .

MC: He tried it too. Couldn't do it.

JC: He couldn't do it. No.

MC: But the worst part for my brother in Panama was that when the war broke out, there, they interned all the Germans. But they interned the refugees with the Germans, with the Nazis, together. Until they could sort out who was a . . .

JC: Who was who.

MC: . . . who was an escapee from . . .

JC: Then I told you about my old parents, didn't I?

MC: Yes, sure.

AC: What's this? I didn't know anything about this.

MC: Yes, yes.

AC: In Panama, Henry was interned?

MC: Yes.

RB: (unintelligible) . . . they'd round up anybody.

MC: Sure.

JC: You know, when my parents and the rest of my family arrived in Cuba, they were also interned. Had to prove that they didn't give their store away to, to the Germans. When the war was over, they came in from Europe.

AC: How long was he interned?

MC: I don't know how long it took, but in a, probably not very long, but it was not very pleasant to be in with . . .

SH: You went to Panama knowing that you would go on to the United States?

MC: No. No. We, we hoped to. But there was even a question, whether we should stay in Panama or not. Because in Panama my husband could have practiced medicine immediately, without having to go through another state board. And here he needed another state board, which he had done twice by the way. He studied in Berlin. And in '33 he was thrown out of his job at the clinic because he was a Jew. Went to Rome. Made his . . .

JC: Medical degree.

MC: . . . degree in Rome.

AC: No.

JC: No.

AC: He finished his degree in Germany.

MC: I know, but he made a state board for the Roman license . . .

RB: He took his license there.

MC: . . . and worked there until he had to leave again in '39, and went to China. So, he lived in, in, I think in Sicily for a while.

AC: Sardinia.

MC: Oh, Sardinia, in Sardinia, yeah.

JC: And there he couldn't do much either, uh?

MC: No, before, from '33, I think, to '39 he lived . . .

JC: In Sardinia?

MC: . . . in Sardinia.

JC: That wasn't very advanced either, remember in those days.

MC: I guess not.

SH: Melitta, could you tell me everything about Arthur Peretz.

MC: There is really not too much that I could tell you, except that my husband knew him well, and I, in fact, I think he, he examined me a couple of times, as a doctor.
JC: Was he a gynecologist?

MC: No, no, no. I think general practitioner, yeah?

SH: I think so, yes.

MC: And we saw him socially a couple of times. And then we, when we heard he had married, he withdrew a little bit from his friends because, and acquaintances. I don't know whether his wife was influential in that or that was, or it was his own doing. I cannot judge that today. But that was it. But I, I only remember that I liked him very much, and I think my husband liked him very much, too. And my husband wasn't one to like people easily. [laughs]

AC: I have remember, when my father comes back, to ask him.

MC: Yeah. Peretz. Dr. Peretz.

JC: On the phone . . .

MC: What was his first name?

SH: Arthur.

MC: Arthur Peretz, yes.

AC: I don't think he'll remember. He has to be kind of in the middle of a conversation . . .

JC: And then he starts remembering things?

AC: . . . and then he starts remembering things.

JC: Your father was quite a bit older than Mother, so . . .

MC: Of course. He was 85.

JC: And his mind is still okay?

AC: Well, Ron says he's getting senile, I think it's probably true.

MC: Really?

JC: Oh.

AC: He's losing his mind.

MC: Sorry to hear that.

AC: He's losing his memory, short-term memory especially.

RB: He might remember this. Pretty much.

AC: Yeah. Long-term memory I think is . . .

JC: Yeah. My mother, in those last years, only remembered what happened . . .

AC: In the past.

JC: . . . in, from the First, from before the First World War until about 1935. My old mother, you know.

MC: Well, I, I evidently am not yet senile.

AC: Well good, Mother.

JC: No, you aren't. But not, my old mother was also 85, at between 80 or 85.

AC: Who were, whom are some of the other names, what are some of the other names of people who you knew in Shanghai, that you remember?

JC: You still . . .

MC: Mostly doctors. Doctor Mosse. Doctor Didner.

JC: Who were the guys? Wait I know somebody . . .

MC: Doctor, I don't remember. I don't remember. And . . .

SH: Is the name Preuss familiar?

MC: Yes, sure! Dr. Preuss, of course. His last wife lives in Palm Beach. He married a very young, very attractive woman, shortly before he left Shanghai for, for the United States. He died in New York, I believe. And, Jürg and Charlie, in Palm Beach, befriended Dr. Preuss's last wife, who is . . .

JC: Widow?

MC: . . . yes, who is . . .

SH: Had she married him in Shanghai, or . . .

MC: Yes, yes. She had a little girl, I believe. With, not with him, from her first, previous marriage. I remember once being with her socially, with her and her husband, Dr. Preuss, Dr. Preuss was, and we were also quite, quite frequently with him.

SH: He was very good friends with my grandfather.

MC: Really?

SH: They were very good friends.

MC: Well, that's very possible. Yeah, very possible.

JC: But you know, my Aunt Charlie must be in her middle '90s by now . . .

MC: Yeah, yeah. This lady . . .

JC: So we are talking . . .

MC: . . . this lady is younger than I am.

AC: The daughter.

MC: No, no, the wife, the wife.

SH: It would be very, I would like to find her, to ask about my grandfather. She probably knows . . .

MC: I, I have a feeling that she would want to talk very little about Shanghai. I don't think that she has ever admitted to be Jewish or refugee or anything like that. I don't think so.

JC: Wasn't that doctor Jewish?

MC: Preuss? Must have been, yes, I don't remember asking him or discussing it with him.

SH: Yes.

JC: Was this doctor friendly with your grandfather?

SH: Yes. They were very close.

MC: Yes, yes. Because Preuss was there long before the European refugees came. He was well established by the time they arrived.

SH: Was he a big shot? My grandmother says that he was a big shot.

MC: Yes.

SH: Was that, is that reasonable to say?

MC: He was well known as a doctor. Big shot, I would say. Yeah. He, he was probably envied by a lot of refugees, because he was well established by then. And we certainly looked up to anybody who made a normal living already, when we arrived. [laughs] Because that was something to look ahead for. But your grandmother and your grandfather, of course, were well established by then, too.

SH: Yes, yes.

JC: When did they get there?

SH: 1939.

JC: No, wait a while. Then is . . .

MC: Oh, they only arrived in 1939?

SH: They only got there in 1939, but they were well established within two weeks after they got there.

JC: Yeah?

SH: They had a charmed life.

MC: You see, you did not, you did not need the medical state board in Shanghai. I don't think so.

JC: What I think is they must have been able . . .

MC: And as far as I know your father had no . . .

JC: . . . to transfer a lot of assets from Europe to China.

MC: . . . problems. They must have . . .

SH: They brought, they brought a lot of things.

MC: We didn't bring anything.

SH: They brought my grandfather's office furniture. So that he set up his office in that room that you saw with the office furniture from Vienna. They, they were able to bring a lot of things.

MC: They must have left much earlier than we did.

SH: It wasn't so much that it was earlier. It was connections, connections that they had.

MC: Well, had that thing, had that *Lift* arrived, that my mother packed up, it would have been living from what we could have sold for ten years. Silver and Persian rugs. My father was in the Persian rug business. And there was an enormous amount of valuable things in there.

SH: How did your mother make this transition from being at least reasonably well off in Vienna, to, to living . . .

MC: Let's say comfortable middle class. Nothing, nothing very . . .

AC: No, she wasn't that well off, she was a shopkeeper really.

MC: No, she was no shopkeeper. My mother?

AC: In Bad Gastein.

MC: But not *mother*, my *father*.

AC: Ahh. That's not how Henry tells it.

MC: No, Henry, you know Henry glorifies his mother a little bit.

SH: Well, let's say then, "comfortable middle class" . . .

MC: Comfortable middle class.

SH: . . . to very uncomfortable in Shanghai.

MC: Like for instance sitting and crying over the bedbugs all night, and then trying to scrape a, a living together, because she was too proud to go to any *Hilfsfund*, or any organization to ask for . . .

JC: She, like she sold the collar off her, off her winter coat, in order to . . .

MC: Yeah. The few, the few linen sheets that she'd packed in her own luggage, she also sold, to, to buy the next meal.

AC: Now, the bedspread that you gave me.

MC: That she made herself.

AC: But where?
MC: Where? In Vienna.

AC: So she brought some things with her.

MC: She had that in her suitcase, and that she loved and would not part with it. And that's really the one and only thing from, from those days.

SH: What do you think about all this now, about having this time in Shanghai? How do you think it changed you?

MC: Well, I used to say, "I'm grateful, I personally am grateful to Hitler, because he pushed me out of becoming a very middle-class, very narrow-minded little nothing." Because that is the feeling I have now, that I would have grown up to be, in that type of life that we lived in Vienna. Vienna in itself, to me, was always very, how should I say, a little mediocre in certain respects. Outstanding in others, like music and opera, etcetera. But very mediocre in the, the world horizon for people. And when you lived there and you stayed in that kind of life, you became that way, too.

JC: Austria . . .

MC: A little narrow-minded little, little nothing. And it . . .

SH: So this travel wasn't, it broadened . . .

MC: It certainly did. I mean, I, I would not have been the person I feel I am today, with somewhat knowledge for life and, and world, etcetera, and other people's feelings and other

people's knowledge.

AC: From what I, from what I remember of my grandmother . . .

MC: Yeah.

AC: . . . if you had turned out like her, I think that you're absolutely right. I loved her dearly. She was a wonderful warm-hearted woman, but she was a woman who lived in a very small world.

MC: Of course. It's not, not her fault.

JC: Yeah.

AC: No. I never blamed her for it.

MC: That was the type of life you lived.

AC: But I would imagine that if you had stayed there . . .

MC: Oh, absolutely . . .

JC: If you talk about Austria . . .

MC: I was . . .

JC: Austria became a very small country, and Vienna was the head of that very small country after the First World War. And since you're a historian, you know a little bit the history of Europe, too. And you will know, you'll know what I'm speaking of. And even, I saw Vienna once, and that was in the, in the early sixties. To me it was more or less like a village, compared to a London or a Paris or a New York or a Los Angeles or whatever we are talking about.

MC: And I was there one, once and once only, in 1960, for three days, with Asherah as a teenager and my mother. I couldn't wait to get out. I hated every minute I was there. And my brother Henry, who travels all over Europe continually, and who has friends in Germany and friends in Austria and friends in Switzerland, he called me recently, from Vienna, and I could hear by the tone of his voice, that it was even depressing to him.

JC: At this time . . .

MC: He says, "The city is beautiful. Everything looks lovely." But there was such a sadness in his voice. Well, alone the experience of being back in the town that you lived all your childhood in. You have all your childhood memories, and you had all your friends there. And suddenly you come to the town, and there isn't a soul that you really know, that you're, from way back. That in itself is depressing enough. But I, I couldn't . . .

JC: Was that the first time for Henry then that he is in Vienna again?

MC: Yeah, no, yes.

JC: Since the '30s?

MC: I believe so.

AC: No, not since the '30s.

MC: In Vienna? I think he was never in Vienna. He went to Austria, but never to Vienna. I don't think . . .

JC: He had a wife from Salzburg, so . . .

MC: In Salzburg, but not in Vienna. It's a big difference.

SH: Why did you think about coming to the United States rather than Israel, say, or Pa-, actually it was Palestine then.
MC: I really cannot tell you.

SH: What was, what was the attraction of the United States?

MC: Well, at that time I, I was married to her father, who would never have gone to Israel. But he did want to come to the United States, so I went to the United States.

JC: And they wanted to . . .

MC: In those days I was still the little housewife, who did what her husband wanted. This has changed a lot. [laughs]

JC: And you wanted to go to your brother in Panama.

AC: But it was also, my father was a German Jew, and his father was more German than Jew.

MC: Yes.

AC: So that Pal-, the whole concept of Palestine was not one that he could relate to. This whole Judaism was not something that he relate to. He came from a totally non-observant family.

JC: You . . .

MC: While, while I came from a family who was observant, who kept a kosher household,

who had relatives who went to Palestine already, I remember when I was yea high, to talk about it, that so-and-so is leaving and so-and-so is leaving. And my father, even though he was a very good Jew and a very observant Jew, used to laugh about these people. He would say, "What are they going to do there? What are they going to do?"

JC: Where?

MC: In Palestine.

JC: In Israel.

MC: Yeah. He thought that only the Jew with the beard and *peyes* and caftan would go to Palestine, but not an assimilated, half-way educated Jew.

JC: There were two types of Jewish people in, in between the First World War and the Second World War. There was the groups, mostly from, more from Eastern Europe, and also in Holland and England . . .

MC: Well, my parents, they're from Eastern Europe.
JC: . . . who, who wanted to remain Jewish, and were conscious of it. Then you had the German Jews especially, and the Austrian Jews also, and some others . . .

MC: My father was a very . . .

JC: . . . who wanted to be, who said, "It won't happen to us. If we change, it won't happen to us," what happened, the pogroms that happened in Poland, in Russia, and wherever, you know? They were mistaken, 'cause it happened to them when, when Hitler came about.

MC: Yes, but . . .

JC: But these people were not dishonest, in that they wanted it, or believed it, but it didn't work out. And I don't think it will ever work out.

MC: But even the assimilated Jew, like my father, looked down very much on a Jew who converted. That was taboo. You stayed what you were born, and that's it. And I knew a lot of Jews who tried to get away from it, simply by converting.

SH: In Shanghai, or in Vienna?

MC: No, no, in Vienna.

SH: Vienna?

MC: In Vienna.

JC: Vienna, and especially in Germany. You know.

MC: You had plenty of it in Vienna.

JC: I know you had plenty of it.

MC: Shh, shh, shh, shh, what's the matter, what's the matter?

SH: Do you have any more strong memories, or incidents, things that, that happened that you can recall easily that you want to tell me?

MC: Not at this moment. It might come to me in the middle of the night.

JC: I have a question to you. What is the reason that you are very interested in knowing all this? Because of your own grandparents?

SH: This is how I started, that was my initial interest.

JC: There is no, no harm to it, I am not criticizing . . .
SH: No, I understand. That was my original interest. But now, there has not been much written about Shang-, about Jews going to Shanghai and living there, and I want to write a book about, about it.

JC: Oh, you want to write a book.

SH: And I want to write it, to base it on what people like Melitta tell me. I want to do a lot of interviews and, and find out that way.

JC: Because most of the people that were there, in '38, '39 and then through the war, they are now in an age group where a lot of it has been forgotten.

SH: Yes, I know, and I'm late, I'm about ten years too late to do this, but I am going to do it anyway.

JC: What is that friend in Baltimore? What's . . .

MC: You mean Fritz Kobler, the psychiatrist who was so disappointed that I didn't really marry him.

JC: But he's a sick man too now.

MC: He went from Nanking, he married a Chinese woman, who is also a doctor. He has two lovely children, a son and a daughter. And he first went back to Vienna. Because he was only half-Jewish, and he was married to a Chinese woman. His, I don't remember what it was, his father that was Jewish or his mother. I imagine it was the father, with the name of Kobler, but, although they had a Kobler in the country that is not Jewish. And the, the, what was I talking about now? See, I'm getting senile! [laughs]

JC: About Kobler.

MC: Yeah. He went back to Vienna, tried to establish himself as a psychiatrist in Vienna.

JC: With the Chinese wife?

MC: Yes, yes. And realized that it doesn't work. He did not like living there any more. And he also lost his mother and his sister in, somehow, not, never been heard from again. And he wrote me that he would like to come to America, and he was leaving his family and wants to travel via New York to Baltimore, because he has friends there. But he stops in New York first, and I went to the airport, of course, and helped him get to a hotel, and then he went to Baltimore, and evidently established himself there. Now he's retired, of course. He is a multiple grandfather now and . . .

JC: He wasn't so well. I think he had . . .

MC: . . . he had prostate cancer and a heart attack, too.

JC: Yeah, 'cause otherwise, I don't know whether he's well enough, but otherwise he might be an interesting party.

SH: You don't think he's well enough to talk to?

MC: Oh yes, I know him very well!

SH: I mean, you don't think he's well enough for me to talk to?

MC: Oh yes, he would be. Yes, if you're willing to travel to . . .

SH: I'm willing to travel anywhere. I suppose I'm going to turn this off now.

END SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

Melitta Colland (née Sommerfreund) was born in November 24, 1917. One of her brothers left Vienna for Panama, another went to Shanghai in December 1938, and she sailed with her mother Sarah on the “Conte Verde” to Shanghai in the summer of 1939. She immediately started her own dress shop. After the war broke out, Colland lost the business and had to move to Hongkew. In 1944 she married Dr. Bruno Meyerowitz, a refugee from Germany. They had a daughter, Asherah, in September 1945. The family left for Panama in 1947, and soon afterwards for the U.S. Mrs. Colland lives in Connecticut.

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