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## **Sumner, Ruth oral history interview**

Steve Hochstadt

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**RUTH SUMNER**  
**TAMPA, FLORIDA**  
**APRIL 17, 1991**

**Interviewer: Steve Hochstadt**

**Transcription: Matthew Bennett**

**Jessica Oas**  
**Philip Pettis**  
**Audra Pontes**  
**Robert Yahn III**  
**Steve Hochstadt**

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**Steve Hochstadt:** I'll just put this here.

**Ruth Sumner:** How many people have you interviewed so far?

**SH:** Thirty-five.

**RS:** Wow. And what, oh, you've already got that started, so . . .

**SH:** That's all right. It doesn't matter.

**RS:** And what is it, you gonna be having a book on fiction, based on fact, or something?

**SH:** Not fiction at all. No, I'm, I write history, so I'm . . .

**RS:** Oh, history. It's gonna be completely history?

**SH:** I'm interested in what really did happen, not so much in dramatizing it, or . . .

**RS:** I thought you would . . .

**SH:** . . . making fiction out of it.

**RS:** All right. Praise God, let me get started.

**SH:** You could just start where your family . . .

**RS:** All right . . .

**SH:** . . . where you were raised?

**RS:** . . . I was born in Silesia, Beuthen, which is part of Poland, now. My father was wealthy. And he operated a more kind of a bar, it was a, I don't know I can't think, it was, it was like Pennsylvania, you know, mine, and you know how many pubs they had. This type of thing. And, but it was huge, huge thing right across the street from smelters or something, smoke [unintelligible] . I have one sister. And when I was six my mother was killed. She was shot by an intru-, by a drunken intruder.

## BREAK IN RECORDING

**RS:** He fled. He shot at my, at her, he shot at my dad and put him in a hospital, killed her. Later, later on I found out that she was, had been pregnant at the time. I didn't know it. My sister told me. My sister's four years older than I. And, we lived in that small town called Bobrek. And after my mother's death when I was six, I don't remember very much. Like I said, it was one of those bizarre cases. My aunt, who was my grandmother's youngest sister, came to live with us. And, I guess I must have been about eight or nine years old when Papa sold the business, and he was wealthy. I was raised with a nurse, you know, with a maid, nurse, chauffeur, all this kind of stuff. And, and we, he sold the business because of Hitler and we moved to Beuthen, which was the closest town, you know . . .

**SH:** So what year would that have been?

**RS:** Oh, about '37, I don't know for sure. I was too young yet to remember. My sister would have to give you that information. We lived about a year or two before we left Germany, so we left in '39, '38, '37 I'd say. We moved to Beuthen. My father lived off his money, retired. He had no intentions of leaving Germany. Because he figured, now most of this that I'm telling you now, is retold, because I was too young to remember. All the memories I have of Germany was that we were no longer allowed to go to the school any more. We were asked to leave. We couldn't go to movies any more, and type of thing, the persecution started. But, we weren't allowed to have live-in maids any more, because we always had at least one or two. And, but we had a houseclean-, a woman, that cleaned house for us who was, all right, what else do I remember of Germany? Germany I was growing up. I was not a particularly good student, I had a four-year-older sister than I. But I remember the night, *Kristall* night, you know. I remember that. And when they shipped all the Polish Jews out of Germany. Because we were a border town, right, Beuthen was close on the Polish border. And I remember my sister going to the, to the *Bahnhof*, which was, now I was thinking German.

**SH:** It's all right. I understand that.

**RS:** [laughs] And he, and to, to have food and stuff for the people that came through with a, by train. That, they were evacuating all the Polish Jews back into Poland. That was before Hitler took over Poland, just before. And then I remember the night they burned the synagogue down. And just shortly after

that, it might have been a week, my daddy got a notice that his fath-, his brother was, he had been arrested, sent to Buchenwald and they had sent him back. They said he tried to escape. And they, he was all chewed up by the dogs. And my daddy went, now remember, I was nine years old, ten years old, I was very young. And at that time, my sister, at that time, my daddy came back, he died, and he said, "We're getting out of Germany."

**SH:** You're father's brother died from the . . .

**RS:** Well, his, my father, yes, from the wounds. That was my father's brother. Now we were never close family, I don't even remember him. And, and that, because he had planned, my daddy had planned to get us kids out of Germany and he figured he was retired, he had money and he wasn't that old. He was in his middle, late forties at that time. Now I say he wasn't old. And so he had made arrangements for my sister to come to the United States through a great-, my grandfather's brother lived in Bell, California, and he was gonna take my sister, who was fourteen, thirteen, fourteen at the time. And then if it worked out, they were going to take me. But when this situation occurred with my, it was my dad's brother, he said, "We're getting out of Germany." He went to Berlin and came back and said, "The only place you can go to without any papers was Shanghai. We're leaving." And within three weeks, we were gone. We left my sister behind because her papers, we left, according to my diary, it was in December, January, somewhere like this, in January, I think. And we, and, and my, and my sister left that spring for the United States.

And I think you might be interested in a story that, we had, like I told you, we couldn't have any servants, live-in servants any more. And we were the type of people that always had servants. So we had a Christian woman, because, why do I know she was Christian? Because her sons were Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And now, and, and at that time, it was very dangerous to be friends with Jewish people. And she, I remember, took us to her home, which was on the outskirts of the city and she had a root cellar. She picked up the rug, it was a little house, like we see more in the United States than in Europe, you don't see that very often, with a garden around it and a fence, and she took us in there, and she lifted up, took the rug off, and took the, opened that up and said, "If you ever have any problems, we'll hide you." I went with her, I remember. Because that's unheard of in those days, because everyone was afraid for their own lives, not that we blame them. All right, now her name was Mrs. Deckert, I remember that. And that old lady, she might have been in her fifties, I don't remember.

Anyway, after I was gone, after we left, now let me tell you the situation was like that. The, it's hard for Americans to realize that when the front

doorbell rang, my husband, my daddy went out the back door. We were living in that much fear towards the end, just before we left Germany. And I remember, you don't realize that. So, after my, after we left Germany, my sister, all of our possessions, we just left with suitcases. All of our apartment, my, my father, as a matter of fact, I still own that apartment house in Poland. He, we owned, the huge apartment complex that we were living in, because people live in apartments in Europe. And the, my sister told me that. She said the doorbell rang and a couple of SS soldiers were at the door. And she answered it and they asked for my papa, my father and she said he wasn't there. And they asked her some questions, and she said, "For the first time in my life, I was frightened. I knew they were looking me over, from one end to the other." She was fourteen, a young lady. And she said that he was making questions and kinda backing me up against the wall. Mrs. Deckert came out and said, "She is not alone! I'm here and I'm responsible for her." And they backed up. And she was okay. Now that I didn't know until here recently, you see, some of the things, some of the holes in my early life, my sister, who was four years older, consequently remembers more than I do. All right. But that, we left Shanghai, we left for Shanghai, we went by train. My dad, my aunt, Tante Erna, her only son, Gerry [unintelligible] and myself. We went, we spent a day in Rome, I think. But we went into, to Naples, yeah, spent a day there and then we took the ship, first class. You don't find all that in . . .

**SH:** A Japanese ship?

**RS:** A Japanese ship, U.S., "S.S. Hakuna Maru". That's a, this is why you gonna enjoy reading this after I'm telling you this. We had first-class cabins, everything. Now my dad was a hard to get along with person. He was a very difficult person. Always fought and always, not an easy going person. But, anyway, we were on the ship, then we came, it took us about three weeks, we went sightseeing, it's all in the diary, we came to Shanghai. Now this was, we came to Shanghai, and as you will read there, I don't want to repeat, they picked us up from the ship. Then, my dad was in the restaurant business, like I told you, he had bars and restaurants and all that kind of stuff all his life. He opened up what they called a "night club" on the roof garden of the, of, I think I've got a drawing of that in, in the diary. He put that, put that, and he had a couple of partners and he had a good business going. It was even written up in [unintelligible] successful. And then, so the first year or so we did, he did real well, and then, of course, World War II broke out and that was the end of that. And I grew up, I didn't have much schooling, because they closed the schools down. Have you talked to anybody my age?

**SH:** Uh huh.

**RS:** So, so, but, well did, I remember about Shanghai I was young, I was optimistic, we had a good time. I was interested, I mean nothing fazed me, nothing bothered me. And then the war was over. You know [laughs] , I mean, what, you'll, you'll get more out of this by reading my thoughts at that time. It was, the Hongkew group, you know, you've talked to others, you've, you've, it was a little, a city within, in a city, it was a culture, we had brought our own culture with us. We had theater, we had a synagogue, we had, we, I mean, we had libraries, I mean, it wasn't public, it's somebody that had a lot of books, brought books with them. And, and we read. I don't, I used to have a very big complex about my lack of education until my daughter, who was, went through college said, "Momma, if you don't tell anybody, nobody will know. You're self-educated." So I quit having a phobia about it. It doesn't bother me any more, because we were well read and we had our culture. We went to theater, we did all the things. I was not lacking, we had, we had music appreciation. We, I, I was rereading that diary before you came and I thought, well, who paid those people that did this for us, you know, I don't know. But they, they had things for us. They had, there were sports, there were things available. We, I did not suffer. I enjoyed my teenage years. They were very uncomplicated when you compare with what the kids are doing these days. So I enjoyed Shanghai. I can't say, we didn't have much to eat. But everybody had, was in the same boat, so who cared? When it got cold, we crawled, when I'd go to my girlfriend's house and I crawled into the bed at night, if it was cold, and we'd sit there talking. You know what I mean. We never, I never felt a lack of anything, because I had my friends, I had enough to eat, it wasn't the best but it was adequate. We made clothing out of blankets and curtains and, but I dressed well. I learned to be very frugal. I still do because I, I, what have I gotten from, from Shanghai? I've gotten from Shanghai the, the, the realization that you can be down and still be up. You don't have to be afraid. You're the same person, whether you have money or if you don't. It's self-worth that counts. I've always been religious. I've always loved God. I am a positive person so it never bothered me. Ask me some questions. [laughs]

**SH:** Okay, I will, I will. You've told me very interesting things. I just want to ask you some questions about things you've already said. When your father was preparing to leave . . .

**RS:** From Germany . . .

**SH:** From Beuthen, what kind of preparations do you remember him making...

**RS:** None.

**SH:** . . . to get money out of the country or selling things . . . ?

**RS:** That I don't know. He, we left with suitcases and his lawyer shipped our, our personal belongings over later on. That's how I got my bicycle and our furniture and stuff.

**SH:** So furniture and bicycle you were able to, get some things.

**RS:** They came later, just before World War II broke out. I mean, within weeks before the war started, our personal belongings were shipped to us. He, I think you had to have 'X' amount of money to get into Shanghai and that was it. You didn't want to have any papers, as far as I know. I was too young to realize all these things. And my dad after World War, after the war was over, he came to the United States, my sister took care of that, because I was already married. And then he went over to Germany to get some, get some of his possessions. See, it's part of Poland now, Beuthen. So this is why we still, I still have that house is in my name now. I mean, it's my dad and I inherited it. But I can't sell it until, you know, someday perhaps it will do me some good. But the German, it's standing, it was not destroyed during World War II. So he's, I don't know with his finances. And I guess he got some refunds from the German government or something. I don't know how much money he got out, what was left.

**SH:** Was he able to take some money out with you . . . ?

**RS:** He's always had money. My dad was not, he, my dad always had money. But that was his money. When I was a teenager I stood on my own two feet. And he was, and he let me, as a matter of fact, in my diary you're going to find out I'm complaining, he made me pay my own doctor bills. And I was about sixteen. Because we used to eat junk on the, from the road stands and then get diarrhea, you know, dysentery, get sick. I picked up tuberculosis over there. I got sick with, when I was in my forties it became active. When I was twelve, thirteen, it's in that book. So, World War II was over, and my husband came with the soldiers over there, and we met and married. And I came to Tampa to live, and I've been here living ever since. All of my friends thought that marriage wouldn't last. But they . . .

**SH:** Why was that?

**RS:** Because different religions, different nationalities. When you think about, I was eighteen and a half years old. I did not know where he came from, who his family was, and I married him and went with him. That's not a chance I would like my daughter to take, as an adult, but it didn't faze me.

**SH:** Did your friends advise you against it?

**RS:** Not necessarily. They didn't say a thing, but when we went, it went to the Concord,<sup>1</sup> a lot of my peop-, my friends that had been divorced and otherwise said, "I'd never thought your marriage would last that many years." I'll be marr-, I'm over forty-five years married now. We got married December 23, 1945. We got married in Shanghai. So then we came, then from Shanghai to, in order for him to marry me, he had to re-enlist, his company was shipping back to United States. We met in November. It's all in that diary. We met in the last of November, October, the last of October, we met the last of October. We, I guess it was in two or three weeks, he asked me to marry him. He would, he had to re-enlist and then our papers came through. By December 23 we were married. And then a year later, we came back and I was pregnant. Then, right then [unintelligible], I mean, that's, I mean, that's taking quite a chance. I mean he couldn't, I spoke English, my daddy couldn't speak English, I had to interpret. So that's it, but it worked. We've been happily married, we've got children and grandchildren and you name it.

**SH:** When you were in Beuthen growing up, were you in a Jewish community there. Did you have mostly Jewish friends or a Jewish school or . . .

**RS:** They, they put, they took us out of the, the, of the, the public schools, you know. I went to a private, not a public school, it was a private school, I believe. And I had to go the last year or so to a Jewish school. But my memories are very weak on that. I don't remember. All I remember is persecution that didn't feel good that I couldn't go to a Shirley Temple movie. You know, that type of memory I've got. I remember going in the, going to see the rubble after they burnt the synagogues, yes. I remember that. I remember, but then we got out before it got bad. But our personal persecution, I don't, I remember, you know, I remember, I remember not having to have a maid any more, that we had for eight or ten years. She had to leave. And then we got Mrs. Deckert, I remember that lady fondly. But that's all the memories I have,

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth Sumner refers to a reunion of Shanghai Jews at the Concord Hotel, in Kiamesha, New York, in 1985.

because I was too young.

**SH:** Did your family or did you and your father and your sister regularly go to synagogue before the war?

**RS:** We, I have always been the religious one. My daddy went high holidays. I don't remember my sister, but I always went. I've always enjoyed it. So, I've always talked to God. I've always been, it's been very pertinent. God has always meant a great deal to me, yes. I've always prayed. Always been, quote, "religious," if that's what you believe in God, a faith in God. So, I haven't gone, but in Shanghai I can give you more memories about Shanghai than I can about Germany. In Shanghai, of course, we were in that little ghetto in Hongkew, and my friends were all Jewish. There was one of the boys, was, he was a half-breed, he was, his mother, I think, his father was Christian and his mother was Jewish. And, but I was always religious. Eva wasn't, but I was. And we celebrated the high holidays, yes. But, that was, I didn't go to synagogue on Friday and Saturday any more, not in Shanghai. We had, in Shanghai, we had some of the very religious Jews from Poland there. I remember they lived right across the street from, from the lane from us. But religion, we were never Orthodox Jews, no. We were the typical three, three holiday Jews.

**SH:** On the ship as you were coming over, was that ship filled with Jews or were there other people, other passengers?

**RS:** It was, the majority was filled with Jews. I made friendship with them, that seems a little bit funny. He must have been the age of my daddy, a Japanese, that befriended me. And he even wrote me some letters, and I thought that was real, you know, a ten-year-old gets, I mean she gets attention, it means a lot to her. But, they were mostly ref-, Jewish refugees on that ship. So, and I can tell you that much, I was very, even though I was very young, I was very much aware that from, I had, my life had changed. I still remember the fact that there I had been in, in first-class luxurious Japanese ship and then we were in a home with army cots and blankets. It's in . . .

**SH:** When you arrived in Shanghai.

**RS:** When we arrived in Shanghai, you know. And then of course, our life, my life completely changed. And things got worse as the years got worse. We had eight people living in one house with one bathroom.

**SH:** So when you arrived you went into one of these *Heime* . . .

**RS:** Yeah, that's right.

**SH:** . . . but you didn't stay there very long?

**RS:** No, ma'am. No, sir. We didn't stay but three or four days. Because my father had money. He was, I don't know how much he had. He probably had much more than I thought he did. But he was always, he was a very industrious, self-sufficient, he was always business, business, business. He always made a buck. That's, he's never sat on his behind, not earning. He was, and you'll see it in my diary, he sold kerosene, he sold, and then he sold things like on a flea market we had on the street. So, you know, he was always making dol-, making money. He was very, very conscious of, he was a very industrious man. He was, never sat on his behind. As a matter of fact, he tried to talk me into doing something with him and I wouldn't do it. He wanted me to make baby clothes, they sold real well, and I, at that time I didn't want the responsibility. I was very independent as a teenager, because I was standing on my own two feet from the time I was fourteen. My formal schooling ended, I think, when I was twelve or thirteen. The school closed down, just before that they took me out. They figured I wasn't learning enough. I was not a particularly good student. I was average, you know, the best of the worst, [laughs] that type. I was, I was not intelligent with [unintelligible] , you know, with, I had to work first. If I had to memorize something, it took me some time. But I'm artistic and my dream, in those days, was to become a fashion designer. And I did, I taught it, I learned, I took classes, I turned sewing, and I still sew, I still make my own clothes. And I was good at it. I've got a talent for clothing, merchandising. And I sold, I made my living selling. Teaching fashion designing and, and selling my designs, when I was sixteen, seventeen.

**SH:** You were doing that in Shanghai?

**RS:** In Shanghai. Yes. Because there was nothing available. And I was pretty good at it. I've got some of the stuff . . .

**SH:** So to whom did you sell your designs?

**RS:** Tailor shops.

**SH:** In the ghetto?

**RS:** No. That's what I had my pass for.

**SH:** Oh, I see.

**RS:** Go out, and in the mornings I sold my designs. And then I drew them. And I then taught. I got a free meal out of that at the school.

**SH:** What school did you teach at?

**RS:** The, the SJYA school.<sup>2</sup> You'll find all this, this is why I wish you'd read it first and then ask me questions. Because I, they had a club in the afternoon. And then we used the building, the club rooms. The school, the last one, the new one they built, was like a U-shaped. It was an open field in the middle. And that had a veranda all around and in the center of the U it was the veranda, or porches, were enclosed. And they had rooms there. It was, his name, according to my diary, his name was Kadoorie. He was an Indian Jew. Did you hear any of this before?

**SH:** Yeah, I knew about Mr. Kadoorie.

**RS:** Well, I've got it, and he had, Mrs. Hartwich was the principal. She hired me then in the afternoon to teach kids a couple of years younger than I was fashion designing. I taught in the afternoon in that club later on, later. I had, and in the evening we used the buildings for fun. We had one of the boys play the piano and we danced all night. I mean, it was very simple, we made our own parties. There, we had fun as kids. And then when we grew out of it, and we got a little older, then the younger generation took over. But it was a, I wish our, my, my grandchildren would be, have that innocent fun that we had when we were growing up. Yes.

**SH:** Did you have those parties once a week, or every night, or . . .

**RS:** Well, we, we kept busy pretty much. We, if I didn't go to my girlfriend's house, she was at my house. You know the main meal was eaten at noon. And then during the last of the, the last years we had, we went to the *Heime* for free food at that time. My aunt always compensated, she added to it. We were never completely dependent on it. And, but I did, that's the, one of the ways I

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<sup>2</sup> Sumner refers here to the Shanghai Jewish Youth Association School, often called the Kadoorie School, in Hongkew.

made my money. I went and got our food and some other people's food and my cousin's food and his wife's food and I got so much. Remember going with pots all the way from down to the floor, carrying it back. That was one of our ways of making . . .

**SH:** And then they paid you to do that?

**RS:** To bring it home, yes. And, I mean, we had no electricity, you know about that. Cooking on those little old flower pot things, those charcoal burners. And, so you, you're familiar with talking to that many people how we lived, we survived. We bought hot water. We never had any milk. Soya bean yogurt stuff was what we ate. We were very starved for, for some of the proteins. But it never bothered me, because everybody else was in the same boat. We used to laugh, because everybody knew what they had for lunch. For supper you had a slice of bread and some tea and in my diary, I'm putting down that every time the prices, you're going to be interested in the prices, I've got prices in there, how, how prices went up, you know, how exchange rates and how important to know all of that. And that's probably something you probably haven't heard which I have, wouldn't have remembered, had I not had it in my diary.

**SH:** Well, that's very valuable information.

**RS:** And so, you know, if, we ended up, I remember eating lard, you know, baking grease, fried-out. That on bread was soft. It's delicious. It was nourishing. So, so what, unto this day, I can do with tha-, this is the advantage of always, ever having been low, you're not afraid of it any more. It's nice to have nice things, but if I don't have it, so what? I'm still me. It's what's inside of me that's counting so much, not the possessions that I have accumulated. Because I've seen them go, and I've seen them, I mean, when I went to the Concord and my girlfriend and I, Eva, you know . . .

**SH:** You met her there again?

**RS:** Yeah. We see each other, we keep up with one another. I went to her daughter's wedding. She invited me to San Francisco and they are well prosperous, own their own business. You know, there I'm driving my own car and she's driving her own car in the fancy wedding for her daughter. You know what I mean. And we'd laugh, "Did you ever think we'd do that?" [laughs] You know. We, our entertainment was walking for miles. I mean, what did we do for fun? We'd go, she'd pick me up and we'd walk around town

as far as we could. Then they had all kinds of sports. And we had the club and we danced and we had, we kept busy. And then, and then, instead of TV, I was in bed with a book. Every night we read. I remember, God, my aunt and my dad, they would read to each other. They'd sit there, and my room was right off their bedroom after we rented the house out. You know, we had a nice house, you'll see, you'll read all this and then during, but then, when everybody had to move into Hongkew, my father rented all the rooms out including the bathroom.

**SH:** So the house that your father had was already in Hongkew?

**RS:** Yeah, we happened to be in there, so we didn't have to move. So we rented the rooms out, you know. And, and so, but the, so my bedroom was next to what we used, in the other bedroom, we just had kept two bedrooms, and, and two rooms, and I heard my father reading my aunt or, which one of reading to each other and they knew I was in the other room listening in. They came to a spicy story and they quit, you know [laughs] what I mean. They figured that was no good for my ears. [laughs] And, and then the next, within a week, Eva and I would go down to the, it was a hunchback little man and his young wife that had opened up a library. You know, he had many books and he bought books . . .

**SH:** Was he named Bruno?

**RS:** I don't remember. But I know he was a little, he was deformed some way. And his wife . . .

**SH:** Was it a lending library?

**RS:** Yes, that's how he made his money. He would, he must have been, he must have loved books and he had, must have brought a lot of books with him, and then he bought some more books and he started a lending library, only you paid. Everybody went and checked out books with me. And I remember, Eva and I going down there and going through the stacks of books he had in there and trying to find that book, [laughs] that we thought had such a spicy story in. I mean, that was our excitement. You know, we were very naive. And that was the youth of today. Because there never was no television. And, but we took our culture with us, that was German, Jewish. We had servants in Shanghai until towards the very end. We had, you know . . .

**SH:** Servants that your father hired.

**RS:** Yeah, we had servants to clean. *Amah* or boy they call them. Then in the end, towards the last, when we all rented out the rooms, when that, that stopped, and I remember I cleaned, Papa cleaned. But the start was, yes, we had, we lived well. We had our own furniture, we had the nice house. There was three bedrooms, bathroom, kitchen, living room. I mean, it was, you know. But then we rented it all out. And we had all those people.

**SH:** Why did you rent it out? Was it because you . . . ?

**RS:** Money!

**SH:** . . . your, the income, your father had opened a restaurant, you said.

**RS:** And it closed, and then it closed, because it was a roof garden. And it, it was December when the Japanese, when the Jap-, you know, when the war started. And they were closed and then he never opened up again.

**SH:** So it closed before the ghetto started, it closed right at the war time.

**RS:** Yeah, it was the only one left. And he started another business. He had another little restaurant and it never worked out. And then he started selling things. He was always industrious, making money. And, and, so, but he, he, and then when they put us in the ghetto, all sources of income stopped. Then they started making money selling the stuff on the street in a flea market. But at that time, to make a living, we rented all those rooms out. So.

**SH:** So with the renting of rooms, and with your job teaching fashion design and selling some of your designs in Shanghai, you were able always to have enough to . . .

**RS:** I, we never depended, except for that one noon meal, on any other handouts. And that we did only towards the end, you know. But that was, you could barely survive on that one meal a day. But we never lived in communal living about the first three or four days. We were on our own independently. Paid our own bills. But there were thousands that depended on American money. As a matter of fact, I, in my diary, you gonna find out my thoughts about, when the money didn't come in I had one of my cousins, well a second or third cousin, anyway, that worked there and they said the money wasn't coming in, what would the people are going to do, if the money isn't coming in, how much it would cost and all that. I worried about it, about the people in, that were absolutely destitute. Then people lived all those years in those

places, many of them. But the majority of the people, the friends that I had, had little houses. Lived in that area and made, survived.

**SH:** So you, your friends and acquaintances were mostly not people in the *Heime*, but . . .

**RS:** No.

**SH:** . . . people who were outside.

**RS:** More people were on the outside like my, Eva's father had a little export and import business, that he did. He had a little office. And he lived, they had a nice place. And there were three families, one, two, three families living in that one house. But they shared the kitchen, each one had one or two rooms. That was quite common. And, and Inge's parents had a little grocery store that they sold. And I mean, you bought a quarter pound or two slices of something and it's very precious. And, and we had parties in their closed grocery store. That was a good place to dance.

**SH:** Because it was a big space or . . .

**RS:** It wasn't a big space, it was, the store wasn't, was about the size of this living room, not even my dining room. It was a little teeny, dinky thing, but they had a little counter and, and, and I think I've got it in there, that we, that we used the closed down store for a party. Yes, we had parties. We had fun. We had costume parties, we wrote plays, we listened to music, we fell in love and out of love, typical teenage stuff. But we always had a good time. I can't, I don't, my memories are not bad. They're good. They're very positive.

**SH:** How about relationships with the Japanese? Did you have to wait on line to talk to Mr. Ghoya about getting your pass?<sup>3</sup>

**RS:** Yes siree, you had to stand in line, and it was sometimes for two, three days to get that pass. You stood in line, you got that little badge. I've got it around here somewhere and I couldn't find it. And then, we, at one time I worked for a Kitty's Paradise, that was a, they sold children's clothing, as sort

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

of assistant [unintelligible] .

**SH:** Was that in the ghetto too?

**RS:** That was in the ghetto too. And, and we had a lot of Japanese, Japanese soldiers, Japanese women and children that came. I even learned a few smidgen of Japanese at that time. There was no communication much between, with the Chinese either. They would never, I never once remember going into one of their homes. They stuck to themselves and we stuck to ourselves. The only way you communicated is if you had a servant, to come and clean. They called them boys and *amahs*.

**SH:** How did you talk to the servants, in what language?

**RS:** English.

**SH:** In English.

**RS:** Yeah. I learned English in school, and I was bilingual for many years. Now I've forgotten German, my accent's very poor. But we, my father, of course didn't, he, he didn't learn English until he came to the United States. He spoke with a very heavy accent. But us young people spoke English with a British accent. And we had no problem, I mean, we spoke English, we spoke German. Mostly German at home, when we went somewhere we spoke English, we could use both. But our major language was German. It wasn't until I came to the United States got me [unintelligible] but what I quit using the language. So now our, my sister and I don't speak German, we speak English. I don't even think in German any more. You know what I mean, it's, it's there and if I, I can still read it, or I can, my ear has to get used to it. But you don't forget, it's just there, it's just not used. It's rusty. Don't use it at all. How did you learn to keep the language? Did you learn it from your grandparents?

**SH:** No, I learned how to count from my grandparents playing canasta, but otherwise I learned, I learned it in college . . .

**RS:** Oh you learned in . . .

**SH:** . . . and in Germany.

**RS:** Oh, you went to Germany. I never went back. So I had, my, this, my,

they used to, when Forrest, when we first got married, my father and my, my husband learned to say, "Eins, zwei, drei," playing cards, because they played cards. But my cousin spoke English because he, well, he was bilingual anyway. He spoke several languages. He worked for the police department.

**SH:** Was that Gerry?

**RS:** Gerry, yeah. He is, he spoke English before he came to Shanghai. Then he got, was working for the British. British, we had Sikhs, we had the ones with the turbans.

**SH:** So he worked for the Municipal Police?

**RS:** For the Municipal Police, then later on he was the detective, he was off the street. He worked for the police department to the very end.

**SH:** What was his last name?

**RS:** Schaie.

**SH:** Oh, that was . . .

**RS:** That's the car, that's him.

**SH:** This was your cousin, G. Schaie?

**RS:** Yeah. That's my aunt I'm talking about, her son.

**SH:** I see. S-C-H-A-I-E.

**RS:** Schaie. They live in San Francisco, he and his wife. So, what else do you want to know?

**SH:** Well what, you were talking about how you didn't have much relationship with the Chinese. What difference did it make that you were in China . . .

END SIDE A, TAPE 1

BEGIN SIDE B, TAPE 1

**RS:** Would you like some more tea?

**SH:** Oh, I'm fine, thank you.

**RS:** The, the, on the street corner, they used to have vendors, and there was big old pots and they heated it with charcoal and around lined with sweet potatoes. And they baked the sweet potatoes like that.

**SH:** Good, tasted good?

**RS:** Yeah, we paid for it, we'd get sick. What else did we [unintelligible] ? Peanut butter, I never had peanut butter before, that was a, that's what we used to buy, lick, eat it, [unintelligible] right off the [unintelligible] , the Chinese candy, all that junk, we were told not to do it, but we did it.

**SH:** By the parents?

**RS:** Because we knew we would get sick and we paid the price every season.

**SH:** So when you got sick where did you go to . . . ?

**RS:** There were doctors, no they had, my girlfriend Eva worked for the lab in Shanghai, at the Jewish hospital, they had hospitals there.

**SH:** Was that on Ward Road, the hospital?

**RS:** She worked there. She is, was lab technician, and but a, there were some doctors there from Germany. And you called them and they made house calls or you went to him, and he gave you something. I guess they didn't have antibiotics like we have now, but you survived. The only time I really got sick, is I'm sure at that time is when I picked up my tuberculosis, because I was, and it's mentioned in my diary. I really got a bad cold and it wouldn't go away, the doctor kept coming back and then papa got upset with me, thought he was just trying to make himself some money coming back all the time to the house and I wasn't getting any better. And he took me to, into town to a hospital to have my chest X-rayed and it came out clear. But I believe that was by the time that I was well enough. Whatever, when I got, was 39 I came down with tuberculosis. And I believe I could not have picked it up in the United States. I think that's incubated in me for all those years. I mean, I can't, that's just a feeling I have, because it's very, I remember how sick I was, and I was out

three or four weeks, not in school, I was about twelve.

**SH:** So you created, or you and your friends and everybody living in the ghetto recreated a Jewish culture from Europe . . .

**RS:** Yes.

**SH:** . . . there in China. Did you think about doing that? Did you think about recreating things, were there some things that you couldn't recreate, and you just had to forget about?

**RS:** Oh, education. Now I had, my, my boyfriend went to the university for a while. So, I mean we took our values, just like if, lets me put it this way, if they were to replant you, you'd take yourself with you. You're still the same person that you are, with your values. That's, money can't, this is what I'm saying, this is what's important. It's not what you've got, it's who you are that's what counts. What your beliefs are, the type of person you are. And if you had children and took your children with you, you'd put into them your values, no matter, the geography has nothing to do with it. And times were hard, yes, but we survived. And it didn't, and I'm sure had I been the adult I'm now, I would have worried about certain situations or things. But at that time I was fourteen, fifteen, having a good time, caring about boyfriends and, and doing the things that young people enjoy doing. So we did it and, and took in stride with a youthful bouncing back. That's the way the situation was, so we survived. Now like I told you, I 've got that last will and testament of the twenty-two-year-old that took his life. We never thought he would, he never said a word. He took some Bayer aspirin, killed himself.

**SH:** And that was at the end of the war . . .

**RS:** And that was after the war was over. He had survived and gotten out of Germany, and his whole family was left behind. And when World War II was over, he found out, he and his, an old uncle, he was living with an uncle.

**SH:** And they were the only two who got out?

**RS:** And there was only two, and this young man, a nice looking young man. And one day they brought him to the hospital, and he had taken the bowl of Bayer aspirin and he was they, they couldn't save him. Eva was working, it was her boyfriend. And then they found that note, that he had just lost all hope and faith in God and humanity because of the, of the war situation. But

that has nothing to do, that has something to do with the personality and the faith of a person and has nothing to do with the situation. I mean, you, suicidal people commit suicide in the United States and they have nothing. I mean have, you, don't you have friends that have everything and yet they're miserable? Well, we weren't miserable, or I wasn't miserable, and neither were my friends.

**SH:** Do you think that you, as teenagers, you had more freedom to have boyfriends or to do things on your own than you would have had, if you had still been in Europe?

**RS:** Well, I can't compare with Europe, because I wasn't rais-, you know, the situation in Europe, if I would have lived in Europe. I would have been into the best schools. I would have been well chaperoned and had all the advantages, I'm sure, that I did not have, because every summer they sent us into fancy places for children. They didn't travel, my parents went to Switzerland and shipped us off to [unintelligible] children's camps, the best and the finest. [laughs] You know what I mean. But that's the memories I have. Shanghai eliminated all that. We had no education, except that, our heritage, formal education. But yet, I mean, the difference between me and some of my schoolmates of those days was I came to the United States as a wife, a pregnant wife, and within a month of coming here I had a child. My husband had to make it, you know, had, he was a typical GI, who had to go back to school, got him a job, we built our first house. This is our second house and we're still living in it. We raised our two children, they're college educated, and you [laughs] know what I mean, and etc, etc. But while the other young people my age came here, came to the United States single, went back to school. We have doctors and businessmen and very successful, they picked up their education, which I never did, because my lifestyle was different. I did not need that, I was a housewife. So I never pursued going back to school. Because my girlfriend Eva is still going to junior college taking courses, just for the fun of it, you know. And a one of the boys, I mean, Claus Schaie is a, he's a distant cousin, he has a doctorate, works at University of Pennsylvania, up there in State College, you know. It's, I think, my gen-, the people that came out of Shanghai in my generation became very successful. Concord showed that, Curt Pollack, you know. He was one of my first boyfriends, you'll find him all through my diary.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See interview with Curt Pollack, Shanghai Jewish Community Oral History Project, Shanghai, April 22, 1989.

**SH:** Well, I met him.

**RS:** Yeah? Little guy. He's, I've, I've got him in there, you know. He said he always, he told me in, at the Concord I was the first boy, girl he had a crush on. [laughs] You know, so I mean we were kids. And it so happened that my life was, after we came to the United States was different. Because like I said, I was married. And Inge has a nurse, she is a, she had the nursery school. My, my, Eva worked as a lab, her training was good enough to for her to get, pass all the tests in the United States when she got here.<sup>5</sup> And she was a medical technician, technician, she's not a technologist, she's a technician. Then she married and they were very successful. I'm the only one that, I'm not married a Jew. They all married Jews. Because it so happened I met, you know, I mean, at that point of the game, I didn't, religion wasn't that important to me. So it didn't, it worked out anyway. But that's . . .

**SH:** Did people who spent the whole war in the *Heime*, did they also have children your age?

**RS:** Yes. There were some that had some have, had children my age.

**SH:** And did those children come to the dances with you all and, or did they have different lives?

**RS:** You know, now that you mention it, we did not associate much with them. Most of my friends had home, they did not live in the *Heime*. Perhaps there was a social, I don't know. It is, it's just that, it just so happened. I, at that time it, it, it just happened that's the friends I made. And it was Eva, I met her in school, and Inge, and we from the very beginning we were friends and we stayed friends, and we're still friends. Inge's coming at the end of this, in May to come to see me, we keep up, you know. She lives in [unintelligible] . Where is it? Across the Golden Bay Bridge, in that area.

**SH:** Oakland?

**RS:** Oakland, in that area. They're coming, they're coming end of this month, and the next month, in the next month into this area. I've had Eva, we've kept up for years. Not close, but we keep up. It's those two close girlfriends I have. The boy I used to date for years, he lives in Iowa. And he's kept up, we've kept

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<sup>5</sup> Ruth Sumner's friends were Inge Pikarski and Eva Wolffheim.

up a little bit, not too much, because it's a little bit awkward. But these past, I've made a new life, I've made new friends, but you still keep up because of the Concord. When I went to the Concord, it was, it was a very funny situation. It was all of a sudden you were back, back when, where. You, it was, we were almost and I wasn't the only one, I was almost giddy. It was almost a reliving of the past. I'm sure if you have high-school reunions, people feel the same way. But yet you were so changed, that you knew that you were like two ships meeting in, at sea. "Oh good, I'm glad to see you, you've changed." You know what I mean, "How ya doing?" And unless you had, you kept up over the years, it didn't mean that much. It was fun. And it, like I said I never would have translated that diary had I not gone through that reunion, and begin to realize that my past is different and I wanted to live that. And I wanted my daughter to know about that, and perhaps her children. I don't know if the girls are interested in that. I've got five granddaughters, so, but right now they couldn't care less. You know, they are very proud of their Jewish heritage. My little granddaughter said, "I'm half-Jew." And I said, "No, you're not, you're quarter-Jew, but that's enough." So she's very proud of that, you know. [laughs] But my dead mommy, of course, the older generations are dead. And then of course when I came back to the United States, I got reacquainted with my sister. And she had moved to, to, from Los Angeles to Wichita, Kansas, he's, he was a professor at the University there. And now he's retired and they living in Port Richey. And we had been separated for that many years, because when, after we, you know, when you have young children and getting a, starting life you don't have much money to visit. So because now that they've retired I have got a sister again. It's amazing, how much alike we are. And like I said, she let me in on many things that I had forgotten from Germany. She, I had blocked the fact of my mother's death and the funeral completely out of my mind. I had always said that I did not go to her funeral, and my sister said, "I beg to differ with you. You were there. You were sitting right next to me." I says, "Well, if that's what you say, so it must be so." [laughs] See, so it's, I guess it has something to do with the personality.

**SH:** Were you able to communicate with her while you were in Shanghai?

**RS:** No. There was a few letters went back and forth through Switzerland. As a matter of fact she, I've got that in my diary that we've received a letter that she was planning to marry. And then we did not hear from her at all for years. And don't forget, while we lived in Shanghai, we, the Japanese was winning the war, until the last. We did not know. And it was against the law to listen to, I mean, it was arrest, and s-, being put in jail could mean

immediate death, because of the typhoid, because there were such louse-infested. You don't, have you ever been in, well, Asia wouldn't look, Shanghai probably doesn't look like . . .

**SH:** I have been to, I was in Shanghai two years ago . . .

**RS:** You were, oh, you were . . .

**SH:** I don't think it was . . .

**RS:** It probably doesn't look that way any more. Because those who that have been back have told me. When we were living there, they had the beggars. And you recognized the beggars. I mean, with loose, cutoff, shoving themselves across the street. You know what I mean, wrapped in, stumps wrapped in things with plague, I guess, rotting limbs. And you just walked by them, you don't pay them any attention. You learn to live with that. You don't, it doesn't bother you after a while. And I know that they cleaned all that out. I remember when after Forrest and I met, I think we were married, they had one street that was full of bordellos right by the water front, you know. And I remember, I wanted to go see what that was like. And one night we walked down there, [laughs] just curious little me, you know. And, and those girls, you know, almost like you see in the movies, you know. And the bar girl, according to my diary, was a good paying customer, because she always had money. So what else do you want?

**SH:** Did you, were your friends Ger-, all German Jews or were there some Austrian Jews or Russian Jews?

**RS:** They were from, they were, none of the Russian Jews. The only Russian Jews I met was later. We kept pretty much to ourselves. It was, wherever from Germany you were from, it didn't matter, it was just, that didn't matter. I, Austrian, but there were mostly German Jews and Austrian Jews, not much else I don't think. And then some of the Polish Jews, that, the real religious Jew, was the pious in the black hats. We didn't associate them, with them at all or nor would they with us. You know, they keep very much to the [unintelligible] . As far as they were concerned we weren't even Jewish then, you know . . .

**SH:** But the Germans and Austrians just mixed?

**RS:** Mixed, that didn't make any difference. I mean the background didn't

mix. I think people, the situations don't change. It's who you are, you, tell me where you are and I'll tell you who you're with, or vice versa, you know, it's the same, I guess I came from an upper middle class and I got to Shanghai and, and we still went around with the same kind of people. That's why I guess we did not associate with the kids in the *Heime*. Does that make sense to you?

**SH:** Yes.

**RS:** And we never thought about it. It's, it's the, it's too bad that humanity has such, they're so prejudiced. You think you're not and you are. I've been thinking, I was, I am. But I believe being in Shanghai and having tasted poverty, having tasted being a nobody, makes you a little bit more aware that the veneer is not what's important. You know what the veneer is? Good manners, money, *Kinderstube*. I had a dickens of a time with that, because I was so raised of, see I am not behaving the way a lady should. I have gotten over that. Because that is not what's important. What's inside a person that's what counts. It's their inner values. But this is me now speaking. That's how I have changed. But I think Shanghai has helped. I've seen, my aunt used to say, there's you, people so, people go up and down, it's like, life is like a wagon wheel. One time you're up and the next time you're down. You see other people coming down and it's you going up. But there's still the same people that count. Which she used to teach me, she says, "A lady, there's a difference between a woman and a lady, a man and a gentleman. It's breeding." It's, but that's still, I, now that I'm an adult and I'm beginning to judge myself, but this is the way I was raised. And now I am beginning seeing it doesn't really matter. So if you don't know what fork to use or if you don't, aren't that educated, but what's inside of you that counts, what kind of person you are. And that, that bridges all color barriers of people and heritages and backgrounds. But that's, that told me that I've become.

But I think Shanghai helped. Because being a stateless refugee is being the bottom of the barrel, so you become a little more tolerant and understanding. So I'm not, I'm proud of my heritage, because that's what made, that is my, it's, it's the soul that I grew out of, matured into the person that I am today. But my life, it's just me, it's part of me and I'm not ashamed of it. But it was a good foundation. But I don't know if I would have been the same person I am, I am had I been brought up like my husband. He lived comfortably middle-class America. Happened to go out, I'll tell you something else that might amuse you. My husband was born and raised in Tampa, typical middle-class Americans, hardworking. Then he goes overse-, over, you know, four years of World War II, then he comes into Shanghai, war's over. He writes home, "I found me a girl. I'm going to get married. I'm going to stay

here another year so we can get married.” And then a year later, I talked to my mother-in-law, she says, “I got a letter. I thought, my God, I’m going to have to, I have me a Chinese daughter.” He forgot to tell her who I was. [laughs] So she told me, she said she cried. She says, “I am going to have to ask the Lord to help me to love a Chinese.” She was so glad when she saw me and who I was. What makes life? It’s your experience that you build on with a positive attitude.

**SH:** Was that positive attitude hard to maintain when you always thought that the Japanese were winning and that this might go on forever?

**RS:** Not for me. You, this is why you want to be it, it, when you read my diary it, it was on my mind, it was part of my, of the everyday living. Like, just like kids know what’s going on out in the world. They’re killing each other and Aids and everything else. But it is there, they’re concerned about it, but it, it is, they still go on living. I was amazed at, it must have been important to me or I wouldn’t have put it in that diary, prices and what would happen to the people if the, the money doesn’t come in from America. And they would have to close the *Heime* down. You know what I mean, that was, it was important to me, but that did not keep me from having a good time. Because I was young and carefree and not burdened down. I’m sure that the generation ahead of me that had children to worry about etc., etc. They probably were more concerned. I wasn’t, no, I was having fun. So I, we did well. I haven’t any regrets.

**SH:** Tell me about what happened when the war ended, how you felt, what, what you thought about doing next or your father . . .

**RS:** Oh, let me think. You’ve heard about that when they bombed us, didn’t you? Yeah, I was in on that too. Then the war was over. I have this story in my diary when, the night we heard that the war was over, when there was, before it was really over, and they put the people back in jail, we were up all night. We were up, that’s the only, first time in my life I was ever up all night. We had, the group of kids I was with, we had a whistle, it used to aggravate my daddy. I can see it, “You’re not a dog, you don’t go running out with a whistle.” I can see that now. [laughs] But at the time, it was [whistles] . We had that boy come around or I’d go pick my girlfriend up. Before we got half a block, you know, we’d walk. We, as soon as we got to earshot we’d whistle and know we were coming. So, and I mean, you know, typical. Parents don’t understand the kids, kids don’t understand the parents, there was no difference then there is today. The war was over. And, and I’ve got that in my diary so good because, the war was over, it was my birthday, it was in August.

And then some of the people, the army hired people. That's how I met my husband. And one of the, and it was his first day and they were telling us, they were bragging how much money some of them made. I made forty American dollars a month and that was enormous.

**SH:** What were you doing to make that?

**RS:** I was, I was being a sign painter. The, the, the man that, that did all the advertising knew my father from when he did, when he had the restaurants, did all the art work for him, was in charge and he knew me. So he sat me down and I filled the "No Smoking" signs, it was a stencil and filled it in. I was artistic, so that wasn't very much. That's where I met Forrest, my husband. He was the sergeant in charge. And we met and we married. And they put us on the night shift then. And I never worked. I signed in, and he and I used to go talk or go somewhere. He was in charge so I didn't work. [laughs] And we got to know each other and got married. So that's, and then he was transferred to Nanking and the, the U.S. Army went from Shanghai to Nanking apparently. And some of the guys went to Nanking, that had worked as civilian employees for the army went with them. Like Horst Sigmund, some, some of the boys, like I showed you those pictures. And then Pit committed suicide, that was Eva's boyfriend.<sup>6</sup> And she was devastated. And, but don't forget boyfriends they, they, I mean, it isn't like today, there was no sex involved with none of us. We just, you know what I mean, that was just something you didn't do. It wasn't as free a society.

**SH:** Why didn't you do it?

**RS:** Why didn't we do it? Because we were raised with a standard of morality and, and it's in my diary too, it's very interesting, that you just, that just, a girl just does not go all the way, unless she is completely committed. And this is very interesting in, in my diary, that boy I had, he wouldn't commit himself and I wouldn't go any further because he wouldn't commit himself, so we were at a standstill, that was a very healthy one. You know what I mean, there was a certain amount of petting, what little time, I mean we had no opportunities, there was no parked cars or nothing, you know what I mean. But it was a very healthy, now there, I'm sure there were some, morality has changed. In my days it was the bad girls went all the way, and the good girls played around a little bit, but they never went, you know what I mean, were sexually active.

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<sup>6</sup> Heinz (Pit) Bergman was Eva's boyfriend.

They kissed and touched a little bit, but that was it. And there was always a few, but they were well marked. When my daughter was growing up, it was still the majority of the girls were decent. She's in her forties now. But now it's the way opposite, you know, those girls are the decent, the, the, the ones in the minority. Because this is the accepted way of living now.

**SH:** When you say the, the girls who had sex were marked . . .

**RS:** They, they were known.

**SH:** They were known.

**RS:** They were known as loose livers, I mean, you do that in this day and time. I mean, now it's the other way around, now the girl that is called, they call them a prude or whatever that keeps pure, you know, now they're marked in the other direction. But in our, the group I with, I was with, none of the girls were sexually active. I can guarantee you that.

**SH:** Is that partly because of your age that you were . . . ?

**RS:** We were seventeen, eighteen.

**SH:** Oh, you were, so you were old enough.

**RS:** I mean, in this day and time you find junior high school kids being sexually active. But that was the society and the morality we were taught. That is just, you know what I mean, boys would try to persuade girls, but girls wouldn't get involved, they'd say "No." And that's the way it was.

**SH:** Did your father talk to you about that?

**RS:** Not necessarily, my parents, my father and my aunt didn't talk to me about that. We talked about it.

**SH:** Among the girls?

**RS:** Among, among girlfr-, you know, usually young people that are not sexually active do nothing but talk. They could talk and that's, when they're doing it, they don't need to talk about it any more. So we talked a lot. But we, none of us, I mean that just, that just wasn't done. And I can, I can pretty much vouch for my frien-, now when they, you know, that was our kids. You

didn't associate with, with kids that were. And there were some girls, one of them married my age, got married in India. And then another girl that was living with a guy, there were some, one of, you know, I can, I know the names, but I'm not going to say, you know. Because those two in particular were there at the [unintelligible] you know, that were, that was unusual, you know. But the majority of my friends, it's just that was, what was expected of us and that's what we did. And that, and I wish society would go back to this, because it's much healthier. For women it's a lot of problems. You wouldn't have all these babies and abortions etc., but that's, you know. But no, we, we had boyfriends, but they were friends, there was none of this [unintelligible] . And I liked it.

**SH:** But if a boy and girl committed to each other and thought about getting married, then it was more acceptable?

**RS:** That was more acceptable. And they, then they, they had plans for the future. They were just, you know what I mean, that's the kind of allowances we made, and we knew it was going among the adults. But I was raised that sex was a adult privilege and I raised my children that way. You know, it's amazing when you, with hindsight what you've been raised you put into your children. I, I raised my children the same way that I was raised, that sex is an adult privilege. And once you get sexually active, I told my daughter, when she was planning to get married in senior year in college, I says, "Okay. You plan to get married, don't expect any more out of us. You're sexually active and that means you are an adult and you take responsibility of adulthood." And I feel that way. That is minute when they, that makes the, that's the cutting line, whether fourteen or twenty-five. They, then they lose, that innocence is gone, that depending on daddy is gone. That makes them adults, no matter what age. And I, that's the way I believe and that's the way I was raised. And I've raised my children that way and they s-, and thank goodness they did not, now I can't say about them, I've got one granddaughter that's a little [unintelligible] , one is getting married, but one little she's gone with the crowd. But she knows I don't approve of it. I don't think it's right. But it's coming back to Shanghai, that's the way we were raised. [unintelligible] healthy. Boys had respect for us, and that doesn't mean, I mean, we had parties in the boys' houses but they were, you know what I mean, but the parents, it was always a group situation. And the only time you were alone with a boy when he walked you home, and you stood in the hallway of your house or at the door frame, that's the only privacy we had. Because it was always groups, and that's a good protection. What else do you want to know?

**SH:** Well, I'm interested in coming to the United States.

**RS:** Oh. When Forrest and I got married, okay, I knew, I met a young man, you saw how handsome he was. He was a sergeant in the army, I met him and I fell in love. But I also and I, I mentioned that in my book, that I was sense enough, there were some girls that got engaged and then he went back with big promises and never, that was the end of it, never heard from him since. And I, I remember there's more than I wrote in my book that when I knew Forrest's company was shipping back, I had made up my mind that he was leaving and that I was pick up my life no matter what, you know, never gonna let it bother me. That I was [unintelligible] enough to get myself tied up with a promise. But I didn't have to do that, because Forrest asked me to marry him. He went to the chaplain and found out what it took. The first think my dad asked me, when I said I was going to get married, he said, "Is that marriage going to be legal?" Because I came into the room and woke him up in the middle of the night, I worked in, we worked the night shift then, said, "I've got myself engaged and I'm going to get married, and [unintelligible] . And I don't care what you say, that's exactly what I am going to do." And [laughs] and he said, "We'll talk about it tomorrow." And then the next day, the morning he asked me, he says, "What about this marriage, is it legal? Or are you getting yourself into something illegal?" I said, "Well, he's going to go to see the chaplain and we'll go find out what it will take for us to get married." Like I said he's a Christian. We had different backgrounds, nationalities, different religions. He couldn't even communicate with my father. I'd had no idea what social background he had. I mean, he lived in Tampa, Tampa could have been, he could have lived in the slums, you know what I mean. I didn't think that far. And at that time some of the girls were running around, like I said, they got engaged and all this and then they . . .

**SH:** To American servicemen?

**RS:** To American servicemen, and you know how that goes. And of course, I'm sure that they didn't tell me that, but they probably thought that, "Well, Ruth is one of them." But with me, it was different, see, he reenlisted, because I wouldn't have, and we got married in Shanghai. We got married in the Chaplain's office. Had a reception and we rented a little place, they broke into it, it was a little apartment. And he was still working, we were still working together. And then they shipped the, they shipped all the American servicemen over to Nanking, and, and I was left behind. I closed my little apartment up, went home to my dad and then I followed him. My father took me on a train from Shanghai to Nanking and I don't have it in that diary, but I

have to, I have it somewhere else, the letter that I wrote. That we got on the train and every, and you know it was the typical, you've seen trains in India, you know, crowded and no place to go. And I was sitting there crying, I didn't know what to do, I couldn't, you know. My daddy [unintelligible] [laughs] we had a first-class compartment to go to Nanking. He took me to Nanking. And I started working for the, as a file clerk, the adjutant general's office. We lived in, in a hotel room. I was the first army dependent that even existed at [laughs] that time. And we had a good time. Both, we were making money, saving it and paid for our first house. And then Eva [unintelligible], and then after Pit died, we got her a job in Nanking.

**SH:** So she came to meet you?

**RS:** She came, yeah, she came to Nanking and she got a job for the army. We had, we had every couple of, two, three months, every month almost, we had a weekend, we'd take the army transport, you know those big old things, where you looking at each other, I never forgot, I was pregnant then, I must have just gotten pregnant. I got sick on that thing, the bumpy road and there was nothing for me. [laughs] I vomited in Forrest's hat, I never forgot that and there was all officers [laughs] and he was the only enlisted man and I, and I must have embarrassed him, [laughs] I didn't realize probably at that time I was pregnant.

**SH:** So where were you going in the transport?

**RS:** We going back and forth from Shanghai to Nanking . . .

**SH:** I see.

**RS:** . . . about a thirty-minute flight, flight from here to Miami, you know. So we'd, they'd, I'd go home to see my, my family and my friends. We'd get a TJ and Y, I think that is what they called it, weekends off. And we'd fly back home and get the army transport and fly and fly back to Nanking for the weekend. Stayed a day or two in Shanghai to see my friends. We had all the advantages, he had a car, we had a weapons carrier for his disposal, we ha-, you name it we had it, because he was the supply sergeant. And everybody treated him very nice. And I worked with personnel files keeping them in order. Yeah, you know, I had to be just cleared, and I did. Then I got pregnant, that changed the situation a little bit. And his year was up, so we came back to the United States, we came on an army transport. I was an army dependant, so he was in with the soldiers. We went from Shanghai to

Corregidor over to Philippines. I saw Battan, Corregidor. We went, Forrest was there, had been there during the war so that was, was very interesting to him. He saw all the ships still in the harbor, belly up, you know, sticking out, it was very interesting. And then we went from the Philippines, we went from Manila, we came over to San Francisco. My sister and her husband picked us up in San Francisco. They had, I stayed there about three weeks and Forrest got his discharge. Meanwhile my father had, my sister had sent papers for my dad. He came. And my Gerhard, Gerry, he went to, he went to Israel for a while. He lived there for a while, and then came to the United States later.

**SH:** With his wife and . . .

**RS:** With his wife.

**SH:** . . . and child?

**RS:** And child, yeah.

**SH:** And his mother, wasn't his mother . . .

**RS:** No, his mother came to the United States. It was some [unintelligible] because he was born what was after World War II Poland, and they wouldn't let him into the United States or something. They were separated for a while. They lived in San Francisco. My father remarried in Shanghai, in, in [unintelligible] . And, and after my sister was pregnant, both of us were pregnant. Mary was born in March and Jackie was born in July. Because their husband had come back, you know, the baby boom had started. And then Forrest got discharged in California. And we took the train to Florida and his dad met us and the, at the railroad, Union Station down here. Little old me, big, you know, and I was not Chinese. [laughs] And they took me, took me into the Sumner family and they treated me really, that was my, that's been my family since. He's the oldest of five children, he's, his family is, he's, and I came and I lived and we had our two children. You know my daughter was born a month after I got here, we got here in February, I think. Mary was born in March, she was a little early, because of all the traveling I did. I think that I cheated a little bit too, I was not supposed to travel that late pregnant. And, and she was born, then my son was born, and that's the family I wanted, I believe. When I started out I, the difference in religions didn't bother me because I figured, it's the same God. And I had always had that same deep-rooted religious, I'm the one who goes to church. He, my husband doesn't even really. And, and I was going to bring my children up without religion, because

I have no contacts with Jewish people.

**SH:** Here, you mean.

**RS:** In Tampa. I've never, I've met one or two, but it's just, I came into my husband's family as his wife. They took me in and I became one of, one of them. You know what I mean . . .

END SIDE B, TAPE 1

BEGIN SIDE A, TAPE 2

**RS:** . . . so I never had. And then when my children got into their teens I felt like they needed to have more of God than what they had. And I had met some friends up here with the Methodist church, I had Girl Scout troops. So somebody invited me one day and I went. I figured it's God's house no matter what. It didn't bother me. And then later on I became a Christian, but I'm still a Jew. [unintelligible]

**SH:** Tell me about you father coming to the United States.

**RS:** My father coming to the United States, I don't know that much about it. He came because my sister sent the papers for him.

**SH:** And what year did he come then?

**RS:** The, the same year I came, that was in '45, no '47, in '47, that's right. Mary was born in, and that was before my daughter was born, it must have been February '47. He came over here, my sister had sent for him, and they didn't get along. My daddy was very hard to get along with.

**SH:** Was he happy to come to the United States . . .

**RS:** Oh, yeah, they were . . .

**SH:** . . . happy to leave Shanghai?

**RS:** Shanghai, after I left Shanghai was, I think there wasn't a Jew left,

they're all gone. All the Jewish people left Shanghai, there's nobody left there any more. I had, everybody started, we, it just scattered, you know, some went to Israel, some went to Australia, some, everybody was leaving. The war was over, you started fresh. And I had to wait to go, I had, I had married, you know. Now for instance, Eva and her mother, her father had died and her brother had died, so it was just the two women. And somebody sponsored her and she came to the United States.

**SH:** A relative?

**RS:** No relatives. She came to Fresno, I think. And she was real sick coming over. I think she had typhoid or something. She was, she, she really had a hard time coming over here. When she came, she came a couple of years after I did. Like I said, little by little all the people from the, a lot of the people from Shanghai came to the United States, somebody sponsored them. Or the Jewish relief fund or whatever, Jews always look after each other, you know, that's one thing you can give them credit for. And, and so it just, and my dad came to the United States and he lived with my sister for a little while. Dad was a very difficult person, very moody, very, and they didn't get along. You could, it's very hard to get along with my father and my sister had forgotten that. And so they had a fight and they split up and my sister, and he found some lady and he married her. And, and, and then he died in '64, I think.

**SH:** Did he work again when he came to the United States?

**RS:** Yeah, he started out as a dishwasher. He was a very industrious man, a very hard working person.

**SH:** So when he came to the United States he had no money any more?

**RS:** Yeah, he, my daddy always had money. I don't know where he had it, because they went back to Europe, him and his wife. I mean, he'd, they had house, you know, they had a duplex house in Los Angeles and houses in Los Angeles are not inexpensive. So my father knew about, knew how to handle money, always had money, he was never poor. He might have acted he was poor, but was never poor. So he, his wife inherited most of it now. He was a difficult person. When I left the house, I was just glad he wasn't living with me. I was always honored him, according to what the Bible says, you honor your father and mother and that's what I did. And, but I, the distance was very welcome. He was a very difficult person. He was not, let's put it that way, when I married I was going to marry the opposite kind of man, which I

did, quiet, peaceful, loving, not a yeller and a screamer and a temperamental person . . .

**SH:** Did . . .

**RS:** . . . my husband's very quiet.

**SH:** . . . did going to Shanghai change your father?

**RS:** I don't think so, I mean his personality, I, I don't know, he was my father. Do you know what I'm saying? He was old, when he wasn't, [laughs] now I don't think he was that, you know what I mean, I'm older than he was now. He, he was, he was always a business man. He always was very interested in business. He never could hold friends. He had a violent temper. He was not the kind of man I wanted to marry. And I didn't, I knew that. When I was a teenager I had made up my mind, what I had, but he was not a bad man. I'm sure he loved me, he didn't know how to show it. You know, he was, had a bad temper. So we, we, I did not have a family. I, I have to say, this is why I enjoyed my husband's family so much and, and felt so secure when I come, come to live in Tampa, because that was a family of loving people. It, my father, and you can, it comes through in my diary quite, or it came through to me when I read it. My aunt, my aunt and her son and his wife and, and, and her father, you know, I wrote a little story, that at four o'clock, there's coffee time, this is European, I don't know if you're familiar with that. You have a cup of coffee, a piece of cake, because you eat a late supper and a light supper, a sandwich for supper, and the big noon meal. So at four o'clock they used to send out for those little mocha cups, little cups of coffee . . .

**SH:** Send out where, where did you . . . ?

**RS:** To the little store next, they had a little st-, they were, they were little stores, little beauty shops, businesses were all over, in your living room, in your, you know what I mean, there was, it was all over, the entrepreneur was, that was, they were the people. And they took themselves with them so that and they, they used to go out and buy little coffee and cake and brought it in. Now I knew they did it, I knew that they didn't have the money to buy extra for me, so they kind of sneaked it and I knew they were doing it downstairs and I felt left out. But I was also realize and it, I mentioned it, this is why the memories kept coming back. But I was also mature enough at the age of sixteen or whenever to realize that they couldn't do anything else. There wasn't enough to share with me, and they didn't want to share, but I didn't

belong. And my dad was a loner.

**SH:** So this was your dad and your aunt who were doing . . .

**RS:** Yeah, yeah, my, my dad and, and his, his son and, and I mean my mo-, my aunt and her son and his wife and her, you know what I mean, they lived downstairs in our living room, you know, and they were a family. Papa was upstairs, and I was, I have a story, there was some kind of New Year's Eve and Papa was in bed, mad, you know what I mean, he was not social. He was a very unusual man, very temperamental, very, he used to say people like him only for his money and what they can get out of him. I never knew my family and my relatives because of that, because he was the rich one. Money, money, money, money, money was very important in his life. And he always had it. But he kept it. Like I said he, he used to, if he wanted, I think I've got the note, but I even remember that, to buy a can of cream was a major purchase, American, any kind of canned goods was hard to come by. And Tante Erna and I wanted her, she was a good cook, I wanted her to cook, to make something, some kind of pudding for me. So I bought it for my birthday from my dad, I mean, he wouldn't donate it, I had to buy it, [laughs] you know what I mean. And then I got sick and couldn't eat it, I probably had diarrhea, because I ate some of the junk that we used to eat. And he ate it all and he didn't give me my money back. It's in the diary. You know this type of stuff, there was no loving relationship. My friends, my family were my friends. I lived at home and I didn't, I mean, we had, I mean, I obeyed the rules of the home, you know what I mean and we came in but I made my own money, I made my own living. I was, although I lived at home, I was on my own, because I did not have the good, strong family ties.

**SH:** So was that unusual among your friends? Were they also supporting themselves?

**RS:** Not necessarily so, they were self-supporting, working independently, but I think that has something to do with the family and not with the situation. I mean, I mean, if I have a family now and no matter where I'd be that I would not have the situation between me and my children that way. But that's, and now that I am an adult and I've seen the other side of the coin coming to my husband's family. I made sure that my children are raised up and I feel sorry for anybody that has to live like I did. But I survived, I'm a survivor. That's what my sister says, "Ruth, we're survivors." Because she came to the United States and she tells me a different story. I talk about Shanghai and the hard time. She came into an American household at fourteen. And they put her

back in school. She had to the situation, she was going to stay with one of the daughters, her, and, and she was divorced and it didn't work out and she ended up in, on the living room couch for years. So she didn't have a bed of roses either, as a refugee girl, you know, being taken into a quote "strange" family. So although our backgrounds, somebody said we need to write a book about, my daughter said that. "Momma, one of these days I'd like to write the book Two Sisters." Coming out of the same household, one being raised in Shanghai, one being raised in the United States and both of us thinking we've had it hard. And we did. But we survived. And we both married loving, gentle men, because of my father being such a stinker. And I am sure he didn't have it easy or he had, I'm sure he was in love when he was a child, I'm sorry to say these things happen. But I was very sure that I made up my mind even very young, that this would not, history would not repeat itself. And my sister married a very gentle, sweet, loving man and we were raised in the same household and it's amazing how much alike we are, even though we've been separated for many years. You know, my brother-in-law calls me "little Eva," that's my sister's name, because we are so much alike, we have so many things in common. It's funny because we, you know, it's heritage or back in early young, you know, youth. What else do you want to know?

**SH:** Well, I don't think I have any more questions. Are there certain things that, other things you haven't mentioned that really stick out in your mind?

**RS:** Stick out . . .

**SH:** Things that happened or people you met?

**RS:** No, we, no, not really. I think I've given you about all that, and I think you're gonna, well, I'd like you to read this and then ask me questions. You know, read my diary and I think with what I've told you, now apparently you've, you've talked to enough people, some of the names will be familiar, that come up in my diary. No, my life has been enriched because I have been in Shanghai. I don't talk, make a big todo about it, but I don't hide it. I mean, I don't go into detail. I haven't done this in years, you know, talk that much about the past. We were very fortunate that we weren't killed, that we had enough food. And life went on. I don't know what else to tell you.

**SH:** Well, maybe that's enough then.

END SIDE A, TAPE 2  
END OF INTERVIEW