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BORIS KATZ
SHANGHAI, CHINA
APRIL 21, 1989

Interviewer: Steve Hochstadt

**Transcription: Scott Pugh
John Peterson
Steve Hochstadt**

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Boris Katz: What did I tell you? What do you recall?

Steve Hochstadt: You told me a lot of things, but I would really like you to start, start at the beginning of your trip to Shanghai, really, even if, and that means, even before you actually got on the piece of transportation to go . . .

BK: My early memories from Moscow?

SH: Early memories from Moscow about why you were, why your parents were leaving. And then the trip, and tell it as your story in as much detail as you can muster.

BK: Yeah, you see what happens when somebody asks me a question or when I think about questions, why did I leave, I find that I don't really have enough information because my father never talked about it.

SH: Whatever, whatever you know.

BK: I can only speculate as to why, and some of the better reasons emerge when I look at the overall political situation as we already mentioned earlier. This was in the latter part of the twenties, the 1920's, when they must have considered the idea of leaving. The, some of the events leading up to it that I can recall was the night search by the KGB who came to our house, and the vivid memories I have. (noise interruption) What's, as you know this period is during the Stalin regime and also at the end of the National Economic . . .

SH: New Economic Policy.

BK: New Economic Policy. So, ah, I recall, as I said before, the search at night that occurred in the house. This, as far as I recall, they were, I don't know exactly what they were looking for, but they found some letters from my mother's brothers in the United States who corresponded with us, who tried to, who sent us packages once in a while. I even remember such a package and the fascination I had as a little boy of five or six looking at chocolate bars and . . .

SH: Food packages, is that mainly what it was?

BK: I don't know about food, but I remember chocolate bars and I remember some sweaters and things like that and it seemed fascinating cause I realized this, this is something different, it's something new. But these secret police, as I recall, got hold of some of the letters that we received and pretended to, to invent some kind of political connection. There was absolutely nothing of the sort, my father was, well, call him a small merchant, I believe he worked in a, in a factory at that time where they made clothing and whatever they did during the New Economic Policy. He had a stall, I think he had a stall in the open marketplace where he could sell this and odds and ends. They were always connected with, something to do with tailoring, household industry of some sort. In fact, I remember my mother would take white sheets and dye them in different colors and sometimes the room was strung completely like a maze with ropes across with these, draped over with these cloths that she had dyed and that were drying. And that they would barter trade the thing with peasants, it was in the suburbs of Moscow, for produce. That I remember was one kind of thing, they did whatever they could. I think she knew how to make soap or, this goes back to the earlier

experiences in the Ukraine, during the time of famine, when they had to be very enterprising. So I have some early memories of that sort of thing, but after the search that night, a short time later they called my father in for questioning at the police department, and the next memory is that he wasn't there, he went off, he and his friend, the head of the other family with whom we lived, they went off and took off to the Far East and to pave the way for us to follow them a few months later. I remember a policeman coming up on a motorcycle one day looking for my father and they told him, they, he wanted to know where he went, so they told him he went south, okay, so he went south to Baku or someplace. Well, eventually the time came for us to leave and I remember we went, the railroad station, getting on the train, and settling in, and getting to Vladivostok after fourteen days. I even have memories of passing over enormous bridge over Lake Baikal, which was frozen, and so the trip, you know, was vivid, made vivid impressions on a child's imagination.

SH: When were you born?

BK: I was born in 1923. The trip on the, the escape route, so to speak, was in January of '31. So, we got to Vladivostok, we were set up for, we waited a whole month in some farmhouse outside of Vladivostok, and the view of the bay was also an impression I carried with me after that: beautiful vistas, mountains, and the sea, and so forth. We stayed there a month. We ate practically nothing but fish. You know, we survived. Then we got on a train and proceeded towards a little town near the border of Manchuria. Ah, I have no idea, you see these are only from memories. I wish, I wish I had questioned my parents, later on, and found out, gotten some more background on how was it all arranged and, you know, was most of it luck or was it possible to preplan this. Obviously there was a lot of planning and a lot of people who partic-, cooperated with this venture and who obviously must have been paid something. Now I know we were not wealthy or anything like that but I suppose there was enough to, to go through this whole procedure. So we came to this little border town and I've mentioned to you the episode where this man came in and scared the hell out of us. He was, see, a woman who, whose house we stayed in, ah, was also part of the, those who, who helped us out in the process. Now, one, while we were there, a soldier came in, in full, full uniform, long khaki, you know, the Communist uniform, the Army uniform, the long coat and khaki-colored with the cap and the star, and he proceeded to threaten us with, to expose us to the authorities, because he knew what we were doing there. Turned out when he left that this was the brother of the woman who sheltered us, and this was his way of getting his kicks, that he, he scared the hell out of people who, whom she sheltered. Nothing happened, well, nothing happened except my mother threw away all our, burnt all our documents, so we had absolutely no shred of evidence who we were. So, okay, then . . .

SH: You think that this woman helped other people, too?

BK: Sure she must have helped other people, yeah. I think that, I know that prior to this event, maybe six months before, or some previ-, some time before we planned this trip, a couple of men from, who lived in Vladivostok, came to, were in contact with my family, on business or some other, I don't know exactly what it was. And I presumed that the beginnings of all these arrangements were, were made with them, because they went back and they must have helped out. Whatever it was, it worked and one day I found myself being carried on the back of a Chinese guide and there were two or three guides, because it's not only my mother, my mother's sister and myself, but the other women of the other family: the, the mother, the, the two, no, a daughter and a son. So, it was already . . .

SH: You made this whole trip together, as a group?

BK: We made it together as a group. And so it took two nights, a night, a day, and a night, to get across the hills which represented the border between the Soviet Union and Manchuria, which was, you know, China.

SH: This was all on foot from this woman's . . .

BK: All on foot.

SH: . . . house where you were sheltered?

BK: Well, I think we went by cart, by horse cart, horse-drawn cart, just like farmers, as close as we could get to the border and then in dead of night with no moon, it was, as I recall, I even recall a kind of a flat plain, and when they, they had to run, that was the only time that they ran fast and I heard dogs barking in the background, but, and I even had the sensation of being snapped by a dog in the back of my feet dangling, but it wasn't. My mother was trying to make sure they were wrapped from freezing or so, because it was winter. It was relatively warm for winter. I don't remember, we didn't, that's another fortunate thing, we didn't wind up in a snow storm. So we crossed to the other side and then, maybe because the fear lifted or something, I don't remember how we got to Harbin. We must have gotten by tr-, to another village and gotten a train, or something. In Harbin, that was Harbin, Manchuria, a very chaotic time, just sheer anarchy. It was ruled by warlords, sub-divided. I one time read, read the history of it but I'm not fresh on it. I suppose if you want some historical background it's easy to find out, what exactly was happening, which warlords were in com-, were competing for power. And Harbin was a city where the people were, gangs would, get hold, kidnap young people for ransom. You see I, I had impression that I had told this before, but, it wasn't you, it was Bill Kaz . . . ?

SH: Kazer.

BK: Kazer, yeah, okay. And he, when I was, when I told him, got to this part, he even recalled a well-known historical experience of a very wealthy family in Harbin, whose son was kidnapped, he was 21 years of age, his name was Kaspé,¹ and that's, even he knew all about that. It's been written up quite a bit and they, he, his father fought them, he, he didn't, well I don't know whether he paid them anything and they wanted more, they wanted some exorbitant, impossible sum of money, and, the young man's, I think he died, he was, lost his life or so. Well, that was the kind of a political atmosphere that we came into, and sure enough, when we got settled in an apartment, which I remember, one morning a gang showed up in our apartment, it was an apartment where both families live, by that time my, we joined up with my father and the other man joined his family.

SH: You met them again in Harbin?

¹ Simon Kaspé, the pianist son of a wealthy Jewish family, was kidnapped and murdered during the early 1930s. The arrest of the Chinese judges who condemned his murderers caused an outcry by Jews in China against Japanese participation in the affair.

BK: We met them again in Harbin, right. And they had already rented the apartment in preparation for us.

SH: So you arrived to an apartment?

BK: We arrived to an apartment. So, I remember several Chinese men and perhaps there were one or two Russians, a gang. So they came in, you know, ran-, well I don't know if they ransacked the place, at least they went through the drawers and they pretended to find a gun in the drawer of the living room and threatened us with, as if they were some sort of authorities, the local police, you know, condemning us for having this weapon, which was totally false. And then proceeded to take, now this other man had a son who was about eighteen years of age at the time, and they grabbed him and started to walk off with him. And I, I remember this, it was this one room and we were all there and the two men were there and, they didn't, nobody knew what to do. Except my mother, bless her soul, a little, short, dumpy, plump woman, a wonderful Jewish mother, you know in the best sense, she started to scold them, and challenge them and asked them if they had a warrant of arrest, what basis are they taking him away and started, proceeded to go after them, yelling at them all the way. They went down the steps, this was on the second floor or so, and down an alley where the car was waiting, and I could see it from the window. And by the time they were almost at the car, she went and she physically grabbed this young man and took him away from them and saved his life. And they were so astounded they just, they just went. That's my mother (laughs). That's my little, little, I'll never forget that. And the men, the men didn't know what to do, but she, this little woman, did that. She, she always, I mean, this is the supreme example of, of the courage that she had. But she exhibited courage in the long term because life was a, was a tough struggle for our family and she worked very hard and died at a relatively early age, well, from cardio-vascular problems and was buried in Shanghai. God, I, I'm starting to shake. As I get older, I find that nervousness becomes, has its physical symptoms with the shaking of my right leg and (laughs) that's neither nor there. But, so we lived in Shanghai for six months, Shanghai, I mean Harbin, for six months and we left it about September or so of 1931, and three weeks after we left, I checked recorded history, Japan invaded Manchuria, so we must have been among the very last families who, who managed to get across that way, because, you know, military troops and so were everywhere.

SH: Why do you think you left? Did your parents know that this was going to happen, or ...?

BK: What?

SH: About the Japanese invasion?

BK: No. Who could have known? They couldn't have possibly known.

SH: Why leave Harbin then? Was . . .

BK: Oh! Why, oh why leave Harbin? Well, I don't know, whether it was just luck, Shanghai was the destination and I can tell you for sure why, because of a story that I told Bill and I didn't tell, well, we boarded the train in Moscow, I'll tell you why I, we knew that we were going to Shanghai. I knew that we were going to Shanghai, and as I was lying on the top bunk, in the train, I started singing a little song. And in Russian, Shanghai and *chai*, which is tea, rhyme. So what I was saying to myself, playing, just lying there, when we get to Shanghai, we will drink *chai*. And my mother's face appeared at the bunk and being

usually a very kind woman, she was furious and she said if I didn't stop that she would kill me. Because that would give away the whole story, you see. If there was a conductor, or some stranger who would hear about it, we would be dead (laughs). So I knew we were going to Shanghai. So that was the destination (laughs). Proof positive that we had no knowledge of the Japanese would invade Manchuria. I do remember going on the train from Harbin to Mukden, you know, to Diaren, south, and I do remember seeing a beautiful Japanese woman for the first time in a kimono, you know, and she offered us a little bamboo box and chopsticks, beautiful large grains of rice, that was on the way. And then we came to Diaren and got on board ship, and it took three days travel to get to Shanghai.

SH: Tell me about, if you can, I want to ask you two questions going back a little bit.

BK: Okay.

SH: Can you remember any preparations that your father or mother made, when you were leaving Moscow, selling things, collecting money?

BK: Good question, good question. Ah, another memory . . . Well, we were living in this house. Ah, I know we didn't, I presume we didn't own the house, people didn't own houses in those days, but there must have been some arrangement whereby if you rent it out, or have somebody else move in, they pay you something and I know that happened. Because, now my father was already gone and I remember the other family moving in. In fact I remember vivid-, we had a fierce Siberian dog, Siberian . . .

SH: Huskie?

BK: Huskie, or something like that. And he, nobody could touch him except, again, my mother. He was a fierce dog and he, I remember, he even attacked my father and he had a scar for the rest of his life on his arm. And I remember playing with the darn thing, it was winter and I was shoveling. I had a sled and I tied him up to the sled and shoveling snow and he stood for a while and then he grabbed and, and I can still hear the snap of his teeth as I pulled my hand out from his mouth, from his jaws. That was the dog. And they had to get rid of the dog, and somebody bought it and in order to get, get him into, transport him, they brought a new kennel and they had to from one kennel to another. I could st-, I was brushing my teeth in the morning, and hearing this dog howl as they were draggi-, drove him away on a cart in that new kennel and he was howling at the top of his voice and, and I wept, losing my dog. Well, but that's a, then so somebody else moved in and paid several hundred, I know why, there was five or six hundred dollars that my wife hid, my wife (laughs), my, my mother hid under the house outside in the yard, she went around and put, hide it, 'till the time that we had to leave. On the morning when we were all set to leave, she went to get the money and it was gone. Those are the preparations for the trip. So this must have been an awful blow, and I, I remember that. They must have talked about it afterwards, I may not have understood, well I was already six years old, you know, six, six and a half or something. So that was a blow and that was part of the preparations for the trip (laughs). That's all I can tell you about the preparations for the trip. Yeah, and she also cooked a lot of chicken and food, you know, to, to feed ourselves, and after two or three days she had to throw most of it out, because there was no refrigeration and it all spoiled and so we bought at the station as we went along, from station to station.

SH: What about all your possessions in your apartment, your clothes or your toys, or your books, or all the

furniture . . .

BK: I don't know, all that had to be left behind. We just took what we, probably some, must be suitcases, some suitcases, that all. Whatever they could carry, that's all they could do, practically nothing.

SH: Can you recall an emotion that you felt about leaving? Was, was leaving a disaster for you, or an adventure?

BK: No, no, no. I think I already had the sense that, that they were against us. Ah, this again, it's amazing how much one can remember under the right conditions. There was a friend of mine, a little buddy, a Russian boy by the name of Kolya. And I knew that he was not Jewish, that we were Jewish, and he was not. And Kolya didn't have to go. You know, I may be extrapolating a little bit. But, and besides the knowledge of this search by these men, the secret police, and there was talk even before that happened, of, well, that brings up a few other memories too. One summer there, when I went to summer camp, with the children's summer camp across the river, and the martial music that was played, the songs that we were taught, the, the huge picture of Stalin and Lenin, and being taught to, to speak of Stalin as "Papa Stalin", "Dyadya Lenin", Uncle Lenin, and the attitude of my parents towards all this was cynical and, you know, negative, cause they, so that was, I could sense something, this discrepancy already. You see, so the sense that we were leaving, I hadn't, I'm not, did not, don't recall any sense of sadness of leaving. Well, of course you know if you're a child with mother or father, wherever you go, you're okay, you feel pretty much at home. But I'm sure I had the feeling this was not a friendly place. They were trying to mistreat us, my father and everything. So it wasn't a sense of loss, it was a sense, in fact, singing that little song "Going to Shanghai", it was with a sense of anticipation, even at that early age. (laughs)

SH: Now let, now if we go back to the thread of our story you were, you just arrived, you were taking a boat to Shanghai.

BK: Yeah, it was a Japanese *maru*, or something, you know ships they call *tsingtao maru*, whatever, *maru* is a steamship. I don't know, it was so, gosh, it's amazing, you know, I hadn't thought of these questions, these questions arouse all kinds of memories that I hadn't thought about. Well, I played on the deck and, again I, oh yeah, I remember, you know, when the ship at, at the dockside there's usually decorations, they have flags or balloons or whatever it was. So, that, it was the same in Diaren, after all, it was just a regular trip for the ship. And I was trying to get hold of some, what do you call, streamers, and it was at the stern of the ship and I was holding, a couple of railings and I was holding onto the railings and reaching out beyond, over the water or something, and so, sure enough my mother was around the ship and pulled me from the edge. I don't think I was in danger, but you know how mothers are. So I was just playing like a normal kid I guess. Arriving at Shanghai I don't remember the details of arrival. I remember, (laughs) when we were already in the apartment, which happened to be across from the Shanghai American School on Avenue Pétain. Were you there when we drove by the American school?

SH: Yes, I think so.

BK: Yesterday? And in fact I saw my first resi-, house that I lived in yesterday. When was it? Driving by, it was, the number was above, 20, of the house that I looked at, was 21, 23, and that was about right and, and there were two sets of buildings adjacent, they were at an angle to the street. I'm pretty sure it was that

house, because outside there was a, there was a military training field beyond that, there was no buildings or anything just to the south of the house on that side of the street. And look out the window and see the French military exercising, going through the drills, and the marching band playing the specific tunes on the trumpet. So it was kind of fun, when we thought it was a nice environment and, then one day came when we heard shooting, what we thought was shooting, and my mother was quite alarmed and it went on, it was kind of erratic and sporadic, and she literally hid me under the mattress. I think she didn't do a good job as far as my macho image, feelings. Well then, my father went out to find out. It turned out it was firecrackers. (laughs) We, we lived in that apartment for not very long, before we moved to the, the second place was at that Y-intersection where, where I was looking for the second location of the Jewish community center, that was all built up. So we lived right in that house for, we lived from, must have been from '32 until . . .

SH: You remember the address there?

BK: Yeah, number 3 Rue de Lastre, number 3 Rue de Lastre. We lived, actually, in one apartment. There were two, two lanes, which was not easy to identify because now they're all, they're, it's walled in. And there are gates to each lane. So we lived, two, those same two families. So we lived in one apartment which was right across the fence, that, this, this, Shanghai Jewish Club, where I used to go and play ping-pong and play with my friends. And we could, the stage was in such a location, we couldn't see it but we could hear all the plays, and the acting and the singing and the music, and so forth.

SH: Was it the Jewish club that we visited today?

BK: No, no, that's not, that's, that club that we visited was established much later. But the one that was there must have been there, at least it was there in 1932 when we moved into that location. So, that was kind of a fun, fun place to be, as I recall. It was nice. Then I made friends with the family, whose father was a, a black American, married to a Chinese woman who had li-, two little boys with whom I got, made friends. They invited me over quite often. I found out what Christmas was from them. And this father was a fine musician, jazz musician, played the piano. And he was head of the band in Cath-, in the Cathay Hotel, in the Peace Hotel, that's, as you call it now.

SH: Isn't it, what was his name?

BK: Hegeman.

SH: Hegeman. Remember his first name?

BK: No. The kids' names were Bobby and Jerry. I don't, I don't remember what his first name was. And I knew them until, pretty much until, well, we lived in that location, or we moved to the, to a bigger apartment on the corner. First it was number 18 Rue de Lastre, the alley further away from that Y-intersection. Then we moved into, to the bigger apartment, where downstairs, the men, you know, there was the workshop, with large tables. And they would cut the lining and the materials for, for neckties, primarily.

SH: Your father . . .

BK: My father . . .

SH: . . . and his partner.

BK: . . . and, and Ochakovsky as his partner. And that's when they set up, Hollywood Neckties trademark. (laughs) Hollywood Neckties, how did they know about Hollywood? Well, you know (laughs), it's a good trademark. So they worked like dogs. Then the other man was kind of the manager of the whole thing. He would go on a tr-, as time went on, between 1932 or so until, until 1939 or 1940, that's where we, and, and during that time, there was all, well, there was a lot of tension in the, those, between those two households, because the, the women, not so much my mother, but my aunt, kept complaining that my father wasn't, my mother too. But she wasn't the type to, to complain. We knew there was inequity, that the, the other guy was, in, in the sharing of the profits and so on, was, leaned heavily in the other guy's favor. But he was the more dominant personality. And this, my aunt, my maiden aunt, was a nice person, but we always deplored the fact that she never married and she could have lived with somebody else instead of, well, you know how these family things are. I'd one, I had one mother too many. (laughs) Anyway so, but, but the squabbling got so bad that, that at the end of the '30s, let's see, these two men met as, when they were young, at the Warsaw Station in Warsaw, Poland. They were salesmen, trying to make a living. The other man then introduced my father to my mother, and that's how they got married. And they had this, quote-unquote, "Gentlemen's Agreement", as to how they would be partners. But the other guy, my father was, as I said it was a, a, worked very hard, but he didn't, he got the short end of the stick. So, they were partners, it turned out, for 23 years, until they finally got, got a written contract, a written agreement between the two. And when that happened, we moved out, my family moved out of the house. And that, so we moved into the Avenue Joffre location, the 1270 that I told you about, in the alley. (laughs) As far as I'm concerned, it was maybe my case of nerves that developed in those days, because we lived, they lived on the second floor; we lived on the third floor, and just to get from here to there, ah, it was murder, I, I, I just flew either up or down the stairs in order to avoid getting, talking . . .

SH: So both families moved to Avenue Joffre?

BK: No, no, no. I'm, I'm talking about the . . .

SH: Before?

BK: . . . Rue de Lastre before. No, both fam-, no, that was, that was a relief, to my mother and to, to, to me, too, and to my aunt and my fa-, well, my father was, he was too busy to worry about it. But he kind of was able to relax a bit, anyway. So, well, those were the days when the, pretty soon the war got closer. The, you know, the Japanese in the meantime kept chipping away at the, at the continent of, of China, chipping away. And between 1931, and by the time, by 1937 they were pretty close to Shanghai. And they fought Chiang Kai-shek's troops, and this is, you can get a lot of historical information from any one of the books. They were, they were engaged in battle on the outskirts and, and there were dogfights there. By 1937 we should, and fire, anti-aircraft, guns, but those were positioned on the outskirts, outside the International Settlement and the French Concession. So we were kind of, somewhat insulated, directly. But we could see the fires, and the dogfights and the, sometimes the shrapnel. And, once in awhile, in fact there was one, in one experience in particular where a plane, a Chinese plane, exploded in downtown

Shanghai, near the Great World Theater, that big square that we were in. So you know, it was a semi-, semi-wartime situation.

We had contact with the outside world. We had the British, and the Americans, and the French and all of them functioning as they have before. And the school, and I would go, go to school in, in a rickshaw and so on. And I suppose some days maybe we didn't make it, but most of the time, I don't remember long absences unless there was illness or something. We, we just functioned the best we could. And, well, travelled from here to there, wherever we had to, and fortunately, the family survived. There were not only, well the city survived. Th-, th-, it's incredible that there wasn't any more casualties and fires and deaths, and, you know that kind of thing. Of course, it got much worse when, after Pearl Harbor, at the time of Pearl Harbor in 1941. Of course, by that time I'd already been out of the, graduated from the Shanghai Jewish School, transferred to the Thom-, Public and Thomas Hambry School for boys, to finish up my, my high school education. By that time it was already 1940, and then applied to the Henry Lester Institute. Some other contemporaries went to St. John's University, the American spon-, supported, sponsored, university. Those who went into the, you know, the liberal sciences and so on. There was a French University, a very good one, L'Aurore, that's where Tukaczynsky went, to that one. Tukaczynsky, that's what we used to call Tekoah, slip of the tongue.² (laughs)

SH: That was his name then?

BK: That was his name then. (laughs) So, you know, we were kids growing up. We lived as, as normal a life as we could, going to school. And I worked hard. I was a good student. I always tried to do, always did my best. And I was pretty much at the top of the class. But yet, while I have memories, there was another fellow, who, Henry, ah, Isaac Laevsky, unfortunately, well he came later to the States and raised a family, and so on. He was a real entrepreneur. A real lively, now he, I felt this was a personal, personal aside, that I envied the guy because he seemed to fool around most of the time, and he, and I had a hell of a time holding my own against him. I was first, he was second, third, you know. It was just very, and, he was my, any resentment I may have had, he was the guy I, I fought with and had bad feelings. But I envied him basically because, and he was easy going with the girls and so on, and I was too, too shy and withdrawn a little bit. That kind of thing, I suppose we all have gone through something of that nature. And, well as, that was between '31 and '39. Okay, I, '40, well I got, became active in the Zionist organization, in the B'nai B'rith later on, that's already in the war period. I'm getting to December '41. By that time I was already enrolled in the Henry Lester Institute, that had a full, fully equipped for the job that they had to do before the war. Good labs and good instructors, and connection of the curriculum to the, to London University. Kind of an extend, for it was like an overseas campus pretty much. You know, the curriculums were very closely tied. The examinations that we had to take, matriculation or whatever they called it, Intermediate Bachelor of Science, I remember. It was all imported. And after Pearl Harbor, we had a little Pearl Harbor in, off the Bund here. And about the same time the . . .

SH: I don't know anything about it. Say something about that.

BK: Yeah, yeah. Well, that morning, on December 7th, 1941, we heard explosions, that were somewhat

² After emigration to Israel, Tukaczynsky changed his name to Tekoah. See interview with Yosef Tekoah, Beijing, April 28, 1989.

unusual, you know, pretty massive. It turned out, the Japanese, now, there were the navies of various kinds, the French, the British, the American, all parked outside on the Bund with their, representing their nations. Warships of various kinds. And so the Japanese opened fire, and I don't know if they attacked with planes or, or not. But anyway they, they decided, this was appropriate time to take over. They hit, the war had broken out. They aren't gonna fool around anymore. They're gonna take, take over what they could. And well they were a superior force. There was, I just realized the, the name of the, the Japanese flagship, Izumo. And they had superior firepower and everything, and they took over. One somewhat humorous aspect to it all, there was a huge Italian tourist liner, 22-thousand-ton Conte Verde. You know, that had its route between Italy and Shanghai and other parts in between, and so on. And here it was, across from the Bund, on the other side of the river docked as the other ships were. So the captain dis-, now they were supposed to be allies, after all, they were allies of the Japanese. And the captain refused to cooperate, to, to give up his ship, or to collaborate with the Japanese, and he scuttled it in the river. And scuttled it and it sank with, into 60 feet of water and lay down, and was there like a beached whale with its bottom, you know, with its mass and so on, the structure facing the other side of the river. And we just could see, there was this huge thing as you go by, and that was that. And it lay there for, let's see, '41 perhaps to '44. In the meantime, the war was going on, and all the refugee problems that you've, you know the story of what happened in the meantime. The Japanese became short of metal. They stripped the streetcar tracks in the streets. Avenue Joffre had railroad cars and the tracks and it was all stripped by the Japanese. They stripped radiators from apartments, you know, if there's heating, radiators and pipes and all of that. They stripped . .

SH: Did you see that? That was right outside your house.

BK: Well, we knew about it. The street signs were metal street signs, were replaced with wooden street signs. Every, fences were stripped, I mean, every piece of metal they could lay their hands on within reason . . .

END SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

SH: You don't know that . . .

BK: It could have been Japanese soldiers, that could have been. I don't, I don't remember that, didn't pay attention. Anyway, there was this ship. In the meantime, I was going to school, the Henry, they changed the name, it's, I don't remember the, I used to know it, the Japanese name, it's something for the, Institute of Engineering for East Asia, Greater East Asia, or something like that. Okay, so at that time the British, French, Americans, all the allied nationals had to, they were ordered to, to go into, rounded up and taken to half a dozen camps around, outside, on the outskirts of Shanghai. We stateless people, families lucked out. They didn't bother us, we could live where we were living. Unfortunately for the European Jews, they had

to, they had to go through all that that you heard Curt³ talk about, and the others. And our house on Avenue Joffre, I may've mentioned to you already, was full of refu-, (laughs) by now we weren't, we didn't, they were the refugees and we were the permanent long-time Shanghai residents. So we had, and, I don't know, see the question came up as to, under what circumstances could those who were interned in Hongkew, could they come out and, well, we knew that they needed work permits. Occasionally, as Tekoah mentioned, some exceptional case, they could get living permits. But I suspect that people in my house, there were three, three young Polish men in the attic, and a young Polish family, a couple in one of the little rooms on the, we had this brick house with the two, two stories, two floors and an attic. And off on the side there was the kitchen, with a coal stove, it was a come down from the other place. My poor mother had to cook with a coal stove in the 20th century. And another, also a man from Austria who lost most of his family in, in Europe. They were living in our house. I don't know if my father charged them anything or, I don't know.

SH: Was it owned by you?

BK: It wasn't owned. We had to, I know for sure we had to have key money to, to come in with some, some of whatever it, I have no idea how much. See, there was a settlement between my father and the other partner because of breakup in the bus-, separation, clear-cut lines in the business. So he got something in the settlement. So he used some of that money as key money to get a place to live. It was already, and, I can, thinking back now, it must have been a hell of a time to try and get a place to live, because the refugees were already in town. So that's why we had to kind of compromise as to the quality of the quarters. We had a stove, a coal stove to heat the place. It's, as you see it gets damp here, and this isn't even winter. So, as far as I'm concerned it, it was our, our home. So we had 3, 5, 6, and then other of German Jewish family. Well, we were close friends, and they'd come in and, the house was full for, for dinner, for lunch, and then my mother did most of the cooking, as, I don't know if she any assistance from, well, from my aunt, assist-, well, my aunt was busy with the tailoring part of the . . .

SH: She participated in the business?

BK: Yeah, she was the key. She was in charge of the workshop. That's when we were, you see, the nature of my father's work changed a bit. I, and then in the meantime the old man got sick and I, that, yeah, he died. So my, nature of my father's business was changed. And I, so he was trading more or less. And then inflationary times set in, too. It was a very difficult time. So people would buy boxes of soap and hold onto them, and then sell them. Frankly I don't even know what the scope of his, his work was. I know it was, we never starved, but I know that he certainly wasn't as, I know Tekoah's people had, were of, of substance, even when they came to the city, because they, they were one of the few families who could, bought these, these big apartment houses. I hope it doesn't, this is private, well, they were fortunate. There were very few who could afford to do this sort of thing. Anyway. So we, we managed to survive. There was always food on the table, and so on. And besides my mother was always very helpful to people; there were so many peddlers! Refugees who brought, they many of them brought their belongings, their household. So they would sell what they, what they had, little by little. I don't think we, well, in fact, (laughs) I still have a set of silver. You know, forks, knives, spoons, that are black with age. We don't, we

³ See interview with Curt Pollack, Shanghai, April 22, 1989.

hardly use, but we, I have it from that time at home in the, that's, and they would sell tablecloths, or various household, various things that you could use or that you could So there was a lot of peddlers, and, that come to the door. And invariably my mother would ask them in, give them a cup of tea and soup or something. She was an angel for that. We never turned anybody away. And so, and so then I, as I said, during that time, I would get on my bicycle and go from Avenue Joffre all the way across Garden Bridge into that East Seward Road and then back. And that lasted 'till 1944 when the Japanese were in bad shape. And they gave us all certifi-, graduation certificates in Japanese. I still have it. The only thing I can read is my name on it. We, we were taught Japanese for two years. I may have mentioned it to you before.

SH: No.

BK: Yeah, And I kind of enjoyed it, because it was a, it was a modern Japanese which had an alphabet, and had that you could write actually. Although *kanji*, the, when I say *kanji*, that's the Chinese pictographs, were, you know, identifiable in both languages, although they're pronounced differently. We didn't learn *kanji*, but there was enough of the modern Japanese content. There were two different alphabets: one is a more cursive one, and one was more, called *hiragana* and *katakana*. Someday you'll And so we studied two years' worth of it. And we could write some, could speak some. Which I, you know, it's too long ago and, and I forgot. But the rest of the subjects were in English. And the Engli-, the Allied instructors were replaced with Japanese. So we had a certain amount. It wasn't, it was better than nothing. You know, kept us, kept us busy. But so that was the end of that in '44. In the meantime, now we get back to that beached whale on the, that ship that was there. So in the meantime, they started to work on it, I suppose they had to gut it, or whatever they had to do. And, and then attach poles on it, maybe a couple of hundred, so that they could lift it up. And then one day, I wish, it, it would be nice, beautiful if I'd had pictures of that. Some, I wonder if some, anybody has. They mustered up as many boats of all kinds, and motor boats and launches and anything that, that moved on water. And they had like a tug of war. Each of these was tied onto a mast, to somewhere at an angle to begin the leverage, to give them enough leverage. And they gradually they raised this vessel, the hulk. Maybe it was, as I said, there was nothing there. After they raised it there was no superstructure exactly, just probably the decks and so on. And it, and it was close enough to the Bund. And it was secured, tied around the building. I can point out one of, on the French Concession. They had chains around the building to hold that ship up. It was like out of Lilliput Land, you know, out of Gulliver's Travels. And it, it was kind of, going, seeing that develop day to day and week to week. Took them a long time to get that project off the ground. It was amusing. (laughs) And they finally managed to get it, right it up and make it seaworthy. And then this, that, the war by that time, the war was almost over. And there were frequent air raids by B29s of the surrounding area. And, and the story goes, and I think, I talked to Jacoby and George,⁴ and they have a similar story. That this ship that was, they were going to tow it out to sea and take it to where they had to go, either to Japan or to wherever. And they, it was, became like a freighter, with the story is that much of the stuff that they cannibalized, you know, in the city, metal and so forth, was loaded up on that ship. And as it went out into the China Sea, it was sunk by an, by American bomber. That story persists. Whether it's true or not, it's nice. It's kind of a story of, with a sense of, of conclusion, of the proper kind of conclusion, if that's the term for it. So now I didn't, to be honest with you, and I wonder why sometimes, I never really went into Hongkew, maybe once

⁴ See interviews with Sasson Jacoby, Beijing, April 24, 1989, and George Leonof, Shanghai, April 19, 1989.

or twice. There was an episode where a radio station was bombed in Hongkew, and we, we, there was a sense of rallying around, trying to help out those who were in Hongkew. I may have gone once or twice on something like this. So I was not close to, oh, I just remembered another, another man, who'd actually, he spent a lot of time in our house. But he also had lived, he also managed to, he managed to get out of the ghetto, and stayed with us. Yeah, I remember. He, he was trying to flirt with my maiden aunt, and just didn't get anywhere. (laughs) He proposed to marry her. The other man, there were two men who were after her, gee. Anyway, she lived to be 80 years old in San Francisco, and never had the joys of, of marriage or anything like that, poor, poor kid, poor woman. Anyway, so there was some contact but it was indirect. I knew that there was a lot of suffering and so on. I was busy with, until '44 with just trying to keep up with things, and going back and forth. You know, a whole day, it's easy to spend a day like that. And besides, yeah, I played the piano. I mean, I spent, I, I, it could, an hour or two, a day. I started to take lessons at 14; I really loved it. And I had lessons through my 19th year. So whenever I've, I want to get away from the world, I play the piano. I practice the piano.

SH: Did you have a piano in your home?

BK: Yeah, we had a piano at home. So, I think that's how I maintained my own personal sanity, I suppose, in this. And I, it was, this was a joy, I loved to do that. Anyway. So then that's pretty much all of it, unless you have some questions, I mean.

SH: Oh we just have a few more minutes. But, so what happens after 1944, when you're not in school anymore?

BK: Yeah, well, then you got, I got pretty busy with, with Betar, the Zionist group. I was very active on that.

SH: Doing what? What kind of things?

BK: Well, we had meetings, we had pep talks. We had, we had to write, I remember I had to write an essay, what I, expressing my beliefs in Zionism and what we should be doing, and, you know, we were preparing for the day when we could get out of this rathole and, and build up the state of Israel, form the state of Israel. It was a perfectly natural thing to do. As soon as the war was over, see, and before the war we were, we had, we, we were active in B'nai B'rith. B'nai B'rith was, was a very respectable organization in town, you know as I may have mentioned. The, it had the senior lodge. It was, had an aura of something magical, and was tied into, after all, this was what, what Jews did in the United States. You know, if you, if you belonged to B'nai B'rith then as soon as the war were, we had, we had a link established right away. We had lots of literature, and material of all kinds, and how to run a chapter, and what to do, what projects to have. It had a lot of meaning to us. And then, of course, the Zionist literature as well. So we were getting geared up for, of course people like Tekoah, what he was an, a pure example of what can happen, when a combination of interests, circumstances, a sense of leadership and dedication and you get, you get, you get Joseph Tekoah. There were some like that and some, the rest of us were more, were, just more average. (laughs) And then I must tell you, as soon as the war was over, we hit the B'nai, the Betar, we belonged. You know what Betar is? Betar is, now, the conservative wing of the Zionist movement, was

formed by a, a man named Jabotinsky,⁵ either a Polish or a Russian Jew. And he wrote a book, just as Theodore Herzl wrote his, his book on, whatever it was called Altma, Land of Israel, I don't remember exact,⁶ but, this man, Jabotinsky, put down his philosophy of it. And it was kind of a pretty monolithic, authoritarian type of philosophy. It was the right-wing philosophy. And he claimed that the land of Israel included, included the entire Jordan. It was a, just the same as, or at least as we interpret, to have been the extent of the empire at the time of David, at the, at the maximum extent of the state of Israel, of Biblical Israel. That's what we were after, nothing less. And then the very handy slogan, "A land without a people for a people without a land." You know, that's a beautiful slogan, where. And, and we, we were taught about what Theodore Herzl tried to do. He tried to get Uganda for us. He tried to, you know. But even he was convinced that only the land of Israel has a natural, historical, Biblical, indelible tie to the people of Israel, and that's what we have to go for. And, well, it seemed compelling. And here we were stateless. It's a, a fantastic match. And we, by that time, the war was, we knew what, began to find out what horrors happened in Europe, and so on. So, so most of us, at least if we didn't get, at least wanted to go there.

SH: So most kids your age were Zionists.

BK: Were Zionists. Okay, when the war was over then B'nai B'rith came to, we were active in B'nai B'rith. But a conflict developed because the leaders of Betar, now Betar is the abbreviation of Britt Trumpeldor.⁷ Now Britt Trumpeldor was a hero, a Jabotinsky-type hero. He fought in and died in the early years of the 20th century, defending a settlement there and so on. He was one of the early pioneers. So he was a hero, and we established, so the name of the organization, of the Zionist organization under Jabotinsky's philosophy was called Britt Trumpeldor, in his honor. But for short, Betar, that's, I think I'm correct in saying that. So we belonged to, I could show you, you may have seen a picture, I'll show you, if I still have a picture, in the album, where we are lined up. We had training. We marched around and held banners, and sang songs, and saluted the flag and so on. But the leadership of Betar felt that those who were true Zionists had no business belonging in B'nai B'rith. Because of the monolithic concept, monolithic. So, some of my friends and I, we, we thought this was not what we liked. We didn't like this. We, we wanted to have a choice, an alternative, or to belong to both. I don't remember what Joe did. But I wouldn't be surprised if he was part of the monolithic concept. And that's when this, early split occurred in the, in our ranks. And that's when it dawned on me, after all I was already, I was already 20, 21, 22 years of age, you know. That I didn't care for that kind of Zionism, at least, sure, Zionism in general and everything else. But we don't want a dictatorship. And I, there was some resistance there. We had debates, discussions and so forth. So, and then as, when the war was over, I got my, the, the document, blank document, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Affairs and, immediately through this man who was from Austria. His two sons went to Israel, Palestine in the meantime. So right after the war we could correspond with him. So they helped to establish a link, help to apply to Haifa Technion, apply to Haifa Technion. And they acc- I

⁵ Vladimir Jabotinsky (1880-1940), Zionist activist, soldier, writer, linguist, founder of Jewish Legion in World War I. Betar was founded in Riga in 1923 as a Zionist youth organization.

⁶ Katz probably refers here to Altneuland (Old New Land), a Zionist novel of 1902, by Theodore Herzl (1860-1904), writer and playwright, founder of political Zionism.

⁷ Actually Betar stands for Berit Trumpeldor, named after Joseph Trumpeldor (1880-1920), a soldier and Zionist activist, who was killed in battle with Arab soldiers.

think it's almost time to go. Where I was accepted on the condition that I, well, that I start over again. It means that two or three years were wiped, would be wiped out because I didn't know the language. And if I'd pay 1000 British pounds. Well, that's, was the biggest deterrent, because we didn't have a thousand British pounds, or anything like that. And it was such a long shot, was, a thousand, in the meantime I applied to other universities, Berkeley among them, British Columbia, Nebraska, I don't know, whatever I could (laughs) get hold of. And fortunately I was accepted at Berkeley on a junior status. So, and there were quite a lot of people in various disciplines who were accepted there and other places. And that's how I left in '47.

SH: Why don't we stop there?

BK: Okay.

END SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW