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Klotzer, Charles oral history interview

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Interview with Charles Klotzer by Steve Hochstadt
Shanghai Jewish Community Oral History Project
Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Klotzer, Charles

Interviewer

Hochstadt, Steve

Transcribers

Beideman, Sandy

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Date

9/4/1993

Extent

1 audiocassette

Place

Chicago, Illinois

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Biographical Note

Charles Klotzer was born Lothar Gustav Gabriel Klotzer in Berlin on November 1, 1925. His father, Salo Klotzer, served in World War I, and was connected with the theater in Berlin. His mother Meta ran a toy store. Salo Klotzer was arrested in June 1938, sent to Buchenwald, and was released when Meta Klotzer procured tickets to Shanghai. The three sailed to Shanghai in March 1939 on the "Conte Biancamano," and Klotzer's sister, Elfriede, went to England on a work permit.

In Shanghai Klotzer attended the Kadoorie School, joined the Boy Scouts and the Tikvah Club. He worked manufacturing paint. After the war, Klotzer worked for Charles Jordan, head of the Shanghai office of the Joint Distribution Committee.

In December 1947 the Klotzer family came to the United States and settled in St. Louis. Klotzer wrote for several newspapers and then founded the St. Louis Journalism Review . He lives with his wife Rose in St. Louis.

Transcript

Charles Klotzer: I assume you want me to speak in English, yes?

Steve Hochstadt: If you can . . .

CK: No, no, I can. I feel more comfortable in English.

SH: Oh that's, that's better. I can do German, but it's harder for my students to transcribe.

CK: Well, back in Berlin my name was Lothar CK. L-O-T-H-A-R K-L-O-T-Z-E-R. As a matter of fact, I never knew it till later, my parents had given me two middle name, Gustav and Gabriel. So my ancestors, so it was Lothar Gustav Gabriel CK. Well, when Hitler came along, later, all the Jews had to be named Israel and the women Sara. So it became Lothar Gustav Gabriel Israel CK. But I've, so, just went by Lothar CK. When I came to the States, and I know it's jumping way ahead just to explain my name, I never liked Lothar, besides Lothario in American and a typical German name. So I kept it as a middle initial and adopted the name Charles, which has another reason why I liked it so much. So I became Charles L. CK and which I have been calling since '47 in the, in the States here.

I was born in Berlin, Germany. So was my father. My grandfather came from Krakow, Poland, on one side. The other side [unclear] German, my mother's. And his name was Abraham Goldberg. Which I also found out only when I was a teenager. Well, Goldberg wanted to immigrate to the United States, pass through Berlin which he liked, and in Hamburg he met somebody else, and I don't know the details, who had to get out of the country, maybe didn't want to be drafted, whatever. They went to a passport forger and Goldberg became CK, and CK became Goldberg. Somewhere in America is a Goldberg, who is gentile as a result. So Abraham CK went back to Berlin, which he liked and settled there.

My father was born there in 1880, grew up there. But in Germany, you don't become a citizen right away, you apply for it. My grandfather never did. My father never did. Neither did we. So we were stateless throughout our stay in Germany. Nevertheless my father was drafted in 1916, served in the war, was discharged, and he was drafted after he married to my mother and so on.

My father, his love was the stage, theater, poetry, performing, but never a business person in the sense ever able to do something. He knew all those people who were famous. He claimed that he was, my father had a tendency sometimes to exaggerate, to be polite about it. That he was one of the originators of the Run Through Berlin, Das Rennen durch Berlin. He never went, but he went along with a car, organized it. [laughs] He knew Max Reinhardt and other actors allegedly, and the Schiller Theater, which I just read they plan to close down, he said he performed in it, so on.

But he was thirty when he married my mother, my mother was a businesswoman. That time when she was about twenty, she, I was told, she was born 1885, so must have 1905, her mother gave her twenty German gold Mark or something like that. Told her where to open a shop and, "You're on your own now," become business woman that time. So my mother was, with a very simple education, very fundamental, not intellectual any which way, but down to earth, very solid, typical German attitudes really. Opened it and was very successful up to the Depression in

1925. Is that the kind of stuff you like?

SH: Exactly.

CK: Okay. My mother and father were completely opposites. My mother down-to-earth. If you would put me in a room with her and, they would, she would say, "I didn't tell the truth," I would say, "She's an imposter, that's not my mother, she would, it's just impossible for her to do it." My father, on the other hand, was a kind of actor [laughs] and [unclear] he was loved everywhere. He could, people mesmerized him and he did hypnotize people by the way and so on. They were obviously different, poles apart. I had a sister who was born before, she was born in 1916 and he was, before World War I, and I was born 1925 after World War I. And so we both grew up really as individual children. There was too much, nine years difference in doing it. I had an uncle there who was a physician. He was sort of high regarded. We had lots of other family there, too.

And we were economically lower middle class, we were always close to poor [unclear] not well off. Because when my father was a salesperson he did well, then he didn't do too well. My mother gave up her shop, she had to give up. In 1925 she always told me, "You were two weeks old and I closed up that shop and we moved to another shop." Again, lots of German shop owners at the time closed their shops, because you could never buy back what you sold during this inflation, it cost you ten times as much.¹ And they exchange whatever goods they have for X, from the farmers. My mother didn't want to do it, that's not right. She kept it up till she couldn't buy anything back and closed her shop up. My father [unclear] was, nowadays you'd call it so-and-so provider, in some ways quite selfish, in other ways, very good natured. Overall somewhat inconsistent in this way.

My primary personal relationship was with my mother very closely. So, but he was politically always very radical, very much involved. Not under his own name was a member of the Communist Party. And he was known there as Max. Nobody knew his real name, Salo CK. He knew what they would be doing, but nobody knew where he lived really and what he did. And he knew, and I have no idea what year it was, could have been after Hitler came to power, that some of the leftists wanted to hold up a bank somewhere to get money to finance their party activities. He knew about it, didn't participate, but for the state and the area I was told. And when it happened, the police immediately called and went around all the blocks and arrested everybody, including my father. But he had no evidence, they let him go, but as a result he had a police record. You were arrested, German meticulousness, you had a record. Which was fortunate in a way. Lots of little accidents which happen, like that we were stateless, my father tried to acquire Polish state, nationality. They said, "We don't have any record of you." He tried other ones, trying to acquire somewhere, not to be, be caught up, because we felt we knew what was coming. He was turned down, which was also fortunate, because many who were Polish youths were expelled into Poland and they perished over there. But early in 1938, he was arrested and sent to

¹ Klotzer added later that the toy shop was on Schreiner Strasse and the family lived behind it.

Buchenwald.

SH: Before Kristallnacht this is?

CK: Oh, way before Kristallnacht, among the first one.² In my recent visit when I was at Buchenwald and listened some of the lectures over there, there were ten thousand Jews arrested in a sweep and I don't know was it '37 or '38 that year, and that was intimidation that time to get Jews to leave the country. That was the purpose. Quite a few died at the time, too, there in Buchenwald.

But he was arrested, because he had an arrest record. And even some of our family members that, who were obviously Jewish, and said, "Well, maybe Salo did something, who knows?" *Mishpocha*, family. My mother tried to get him out, and she knew if we leave the country, we could get out. And she wondered long time. She was very energetic. She went around, trying to get it out and the typical story, the only place you could go was Shanghai, you didn't need anything to get out. There was one other place, and I don't know was it Ecuador or Bolivia, we could have gone, but it was very high up elevation and somehow my father already that time wasn't good, high elevation for him. Although he was at concentration camp. So we chose Shanghai.

My sister and I were registered for a child transport to England. But I didn't, no, my sister not child transport, a work permit. I was on child transport. There was, my authorization didn't come through. And finally they said, "You have to decide!" "Lothar's supposed to go," my mother said. My father said, "No," typical, I said, "My mother said," rather than, "My father said." He said, "No, he's going to come with us. Alone without his sister, he won't go there." I don't know a day, two, three days after I turned it down, my parents turned it down to England, my sister's work permit came through to England. They tried to reverse it, it couldn't. So my sister, week or two after we left for Shanghai, went to England. And that's a separate story again.

I went to, my mother managed to get, managed to get the various documents necessary, I have them at home, but I don't remember them, exit expulsion visa, all, all you need, *Unbedenklichkeitsschein*, nothing, all kinds of documents. And there was this catch-22. Some of the police offices Jews weren't permitted to go into, but then that same Jews were supposed to get those. She went anyhow. She remembered one police major, she went in the way desperate and told him off. And he turned around to the window, she told me, and cried, a German.

My father meanwhile was in concentration camp. He got in there, he was shorter than I was, one hundred fifty, one hundred sixty pound. He lost fifty, sixty pound in four weeks. Some German guard punched him with a rifle butt in the side and broke his ribs, which got blue and black later [unclear] but nothing was done about it. He kept in there. What in a way saved him there, and he thought it was another inmate by accident, they had to break up stones and carry it from one place to another. And next days carrying it back again to the old place. This kind of

² In June 1938, about 1500 Jews with police records were arrested and sent to concentration camps.

stuff. That somebody picked up the pick, too much into his back and punched a hole in the skull of my father. He was bleeding then and believe it or not Buchenwald still had like first aid stations. He was brought in with blood there and kept there. So he worked four to five weeks, the other five, six weeks he was in this first aid station, in Buchenwald still. And at night sometimes, some S.S. guards who may, we don't know it, shoot people during the day, brought crumbs of bread to some of the Jewish prisoners, he told me. This ambivalence, this guilt complex, whatever they had.

He had various minor stories. I remember one of them, when he, two of them I remember. Before he got out, one of the S.S. guards said, "You're going to be relieved tomorrow, but you are going to be inspected first." He had a big bandage around his head that time. They didn't just arbitrarily kill them, it was early '38 or maybe late '37. I don't remember. It must have been maybe early '38. They took it all off and just put like an adhesive bandage on top of his head. Said it's, "and you better work strong and straight otherwise you don't get out here," German guard told him. He did and he got relieved.

When he got relieved, he was brought by train to the German police station. When he went on the street he tried to get, he was very weak, tried to get a taxi, nobody, they knew exactly who we were. Nobody wanted to pick him up, anything to do with him. One taxi finally stopped for him, he went in there, brought him to our address, 53 Ruedersdorfer Strasse. Didn't want any money, and said, "Get out and I don't want anything," and washed off his taxi, you know. He came up to the second floor, my grandmother was home. He crawled up on all fours on the first floor, you know, and then was, stayed in the hospital. Now Kristallnacht was in November, when?

SH: Ninth.

CK: Ninth. I was born November 1st, Kristallnacht *Schabbas* was my bar mitzvah.³ Obviously I wasn't bar mitzvahed, synagogue was destroyed. Later on, weeks later, my father was still in a Jewish hospital at that time. He was an utter optimist. Everything will turn out to the best. Nothing could destroy his faith, not observant at all. But deep belief, much different than mine is, and he survived and did quite well, in terms physically and everything else later.

But it was my mother who got us out of this, she managed to go to the shipping tickets. They was to, broadcast or somebody mentioned a speech about when that, why didn't so many of these Jews take advantage of going to Shanghai, if they could have? There were no ships available. The Jewish community, we didn't have money to go, the Jewish community provided money for us to go. But there were literally not enough boats available to go. One Italian clerk in the, "Conte Biancamano" was a ship, began to recognize my mother. She came back every day, twice a day. He said, "Mrs. CK, I'll take care of you. You'll get some tickets." And she managed to get us tickets. Once she had the tickets and she got my father out, I don't tell it quite chronological, but you get the idea.

³ Klotzer later said that his bar mitzvah occurred in January 1939.

We packed everything up, I remember packing and then a German inspector came. I don't know from whom or what. We were, we had to write down every piece of clothing, whatever we have in there. Lists. And he inspected it before we closed up and sealed the suitcases. I'm not sure he sealed it, but I think he did. And that what we took home, took along. I remember we had a few German Mark on the train before we got to the Italian border. We went to Geneva, Genoa, where the boat, we took off. And I remember in the station we bought hot dogs, because my parents were afraid to have any money with them. They are smuggling money. So at the very final station before the Italian border, German guards came up. Said, "How much money you have?" And my father said, "I have none, but maybe *ein Pfennig* or dime in the pocket." "How can you live anywhere?" "Well, we don't really know, we expect some committee will help us." They were suspicious, but let us pass. And we crossed the border and the train stopped again.

And Italian soldiers came on there with their three-quarter capes and said, "Everybody relax now. You are out of Germany." It was under Mussolini. "You are out of Germany! Don't worry anything, you'll be taken care of." Atmosphere [unclear] . Went to Genoa, we didn't have money to get our package out of the railroad depot. My mother got nearly hysterical, because the Jewish community there in Genoa said, "Well, we don't have any money for these kind of things." And some, although they were bringing us to the ship. I, I was very young, I know I brought my mother a glass of water, anyhow she got whatever pennies they needed in Italian lira or whatever there is. And she got the luggage, we got on the ship.

On the ship over it was like a vacation for us. Here four weeks, traveling, relatively good food, you know, it was a vacation for me, ocean trip. And we always wondered that the waiter, the Italian waiter, who didn't speak any German, English, took care of my mother and my father and me quite well. Somewhat different, we never knew why. On the last day when we departed in Shanghai, he suddenly spoke German, and said, "Mrs. CK you are always appreciated, you never complained. [laughs] I had lots of complained about the food from others, you never did and I appreciate it." [laughs] It was kind of, little incident come back to mind. We know on the ship, too, there were some gypsies who fled or immigrated from Europe. And . . .

SH: Were they going to Shanghai, too?

CK: Good question. I don't remember. I don't remember, but I know they were on the ship on their way. So the first taste I got of America was we stayed half a day in Hawaii. [laughs] It was a beautiful surrounding.

SH: So the ship went that way. The ship went through the Pacific?

CK: The ship went, oh yeah, went through Yokohama, Hawaii. Yeah from Shanghai to America, you have to go through the Pacific.

SH: I see, but we're . . .

CK: No, no, no, I'm sorry, I am, I am mixing up.

SH: You're jumping ahead.

CK: I am jumping ahead again. Boat trips thirty, forty years ago. No, we went from the, right, right, absolutely, from Genoa we went through the Suez Canal. Bombay, I don't think we stopped in Hong Kong. We could never get off anywhere to Shanghai. What was fascinating was on Passover night we traveled literally through the Red Sea. [laughs] It was a weird experience. You look one side is Africa and the other is Asia, looking out there. But it's . . .

SH: Was anything done on the ship for Passover?

CK: Funny, I can't remember. But I know it was Passover, we went in April. We went through there.

SH: Were most of the passengers Jewish refugees?

CK: Quite a few. And I remember in Bombay, at least we were told, of course, we were in third class. There was second, there was first class. That we were told and I don't know how true, that Schacht was on board the ship traveling to India. And I remember looking over the railing and there was some limousines or something waiting. The guy got off and I heard, "There is Schacht." I don't know whether it was him, at least that was the rumor he was on the boat.⁴

And we couldn't get off anywhere, as Jews. They were afraid we would stay there, I guess. Something of the sort. It's beautiful to see Bombay at night. I remember that. Well, came to Shanghai and then you sort of, know, we went on trucks went to Hongkew, which was kind of devastated.

SH: Well, let me ask you, if I could, about preparations for leaving, once you all decided you were going to leave Berlin. What kind of preparations did you make?

CK: Personally, well, don't forget I was thirteen, youngish. I went to, first to general public school which, a gray-haired teacher, and first, no problems. Later on, I remember an incident where some of them didn't want to sit next to me. And the teacher said, "Why not?" "Well, he, he has gasses all the time." You know, it wasn't true. "He stinks, you know." And he asked me, "Is that true?" I said, "No, not true." And he said, "In my class, nothing of this sort will happen. You'll all behave. I won't have it." You know, it was '37, '38, you know.

I know I came home one day and didn't want to tell my parents, people called names or jumped people on the same street there, and some wanted to try to fight with me and, and finally I stood my ground and I knocked somebody down, I remember. I wasn't really very strong,

⁴ Hjalmar Schacht was the former Minister of Economics and President of the Reichsbank. In 1939 he was a Minister without Portfolio.

although to my other stupidity, I took up boxing for other reason in Shanghai later. But they left me alone a little bit. These were ten, twelve years old boy.

Another incident, I remember. Downstairs, we were living on the, what's called here the second floor, it was called the first floor in German. You know, different one. Second floor downstairs was a little cigarette shop where we for years we had bought. My father was a smoker. He gave it up later, but then was a smoker. And they embarrassedly and said, "Mr. CK, [unclear] would you mind buying your cigarettes somewhere else, where they don't know you? They see you coming in here." [unclear]

Around the corner was a grocery store in the basement, grocery store. My mother went there. And he was very trusting. For example, we didn't very often have money. And he wrote down in my mother's book in pencil what we'd bought. And she kept the book. He didn't keep it. You know. When we had it, my mother paid him. He said, "Mrs. CK you are so fortunate." She said, "Why?" "You are leaving. If I even mention that I would want to leave the country, you know what's going to happen to me, as a German. I know what's going to come here." He had a feeling, you know. Simple, middle-class little grocery store. You know, it was a feeling.

There's a pervasive fear, feeling of fear. And I haven't seen it brought out very much. If you were a Nazi, part of the establishment, you ruled. You weren't afraid. But below that level of the average person, which only the average German or maybe the average Jew can understand, what both had in common was fear. It was pervasive. When I saw a Nazi coming down on one side of the street, I walked to the other side of the street. My parents never told me, I just did it. To avoid it, you know. I didn't wear a Hitler youth badge. I didn't have a uniform. So I avoided this kind of stuff, you know. It's this element of fear was there, pervasive. Like you couldn't go to public parks, you couldn't go to swimming. You know, later more and more restrictions were there.

You asked what I did. I played with one or two people, nearby. And I'm sure there were, one of them was Jewish. I played with my cousins who came over. I played a lot of soccer that time, stayed longer at school. I went to Grosse Hamburger Strasse and also to, also to, forgot the other one, I went first with. I always kept somewhat to myself in those periods, but at the same time my parents insulated me very much from kind of the fearfulness around me. So, I don't have, for example, any lasting grudges or hate towards the German people. And we visited Germany actually, first time, I was giving a lecture quite a few years back. My wife was a native American. Couldn't wondering anybody who was gray-haired, what were you doing 30, 40 years ago? I don't have quite this feeling. If I have that feeling of what may, were you part of the beneficiaries or were you part of the sufferers? It's an automatic assumption that they are part of the oppressor class, you know, in doing it. The, the, it was my mother who arranged everything and had to sell things and had to pull everything [unclear] because my father was too weak. Gradually he recovered, but he was never an organizer either. She ran the family by example, kind of, by strength of will, you know.

SH: So some, many family things were sold, furniture and . . .

CK: Everything had to be sold, you know. Nothing, except clothing, we took along. Some of

them were [unclear] , we took along some of them, which I still have. But everything was just sold. But since we were never quite wealthy, there wasn't a lot to sell. It was furnishings and this kind of stuff we lived with, you know. My uncle who was a physician and perished in Theresienstadt, and my aunt too, they both lived together. He stayed too long. Finally in Shanghai we got a card, "Can you get us out?" By that time Shanghai was closed down, we couldn't do anything about it. We know from somebody else who was in Theresienstadt, in Shanghai said, "I was there when your uncle died."

SH: Were there some conversations or did you know about any conversations between your family and, say, uncles or aunts or cousins about whether they all should go to Shanghai and arguments about, "Well, now I'm not going," or . . .

CK: Well, my uncle, that means, different uncle, uncle of my, brother of my mother. They were more afraid of the Communists than the Nazis in the beginning. Many Jews were, seriously. She urged them and they said, "Oh, Salo was arrested, you know, he was involved in things," you know, "I'm a German. They won't, won't be quite as bad." They didn't quite believe it. Then it was too late, they couldn't leave. Her mother actually died of a natural death in '42. She was, they weren't arrested yet. Another incident and forgive me for jumping way ahead.

SH: No, it's fine.

CK: A while back on our first visit to Germany, I visited somebody the name of Cohen who wasn't Jewish. My mother had corresponded to Leopold Cohen, a cousin who had survived in Berlin, in Germany. Where he'd survived. We didn't know how. She had corresponded with his wife. When my mother died, I wrote once or twice, didn't get an answer and forgot about it. When I was in Berlin, I looked up the phone book, somebody did for me in East Berlin, that time there was still the wall up. And I called up, yes, it was her. We visit her in East Berlin that time. She said, that there were ultimately five hundred intermarriages, couples, intermarried couples left in Berlin. Last five hundred Jews in Germany. In '43 or '44 they were all arrested. And all the German gentile wives marched to the police. You know about it? And said, "We want our husbands out!" And they let them out!⁵ And they organized them into an Ammun-, Ammunition Demolition Corps. They had to demolish and defuse the ammunition. Of those five hundred, two hundred survived. Leopold Cohen [unclear] . They lived in the same house like Nazis, SS Colonels, everything else. Except for the last year of the war, I remember, they went to the air raid shelter. Last year they were not permitted to go to the air raid shelter. When we visited her, now her children had left for Latin America before the war, and so on.

When I offered, I said, "Do you want any help leaving the country, coming to the State?" I

⁵ In February-March 1943, the non-Jewish wives of Jewish men who had been arrested protested for a week in front of the building in the Rosenstrasse where they were being held. Eventually the Nazis released the men.

mean, I didn't know the woman at all, but we wanted to be of help. Said no, she was having a comfortable apartment under the East German government. She had television there. She was considered a victim of fascism. Free transportation anywhere. "And after all the Allies and the Americans didn't come and liberate us, it was the Russians." I said, "Remember Eisenhower and the Elbe?" She didn't want to hear about this, you know, and so on. So it was a very interesting conversation, which I taped at the time with her. And when I revisited, I couldn't locate her [unclear] . But it was a little sight-seeing about people surviving there.

Since my mother did so much and I was so young, thirteen, I cannot remember that, except packing up things, and getting ready, you know. And wondering and saying goodbye on the train station to the cousins and others. And one of them particularly, Gustav, saying, who were very close to our family one of theirs, typical between different families, were tensions and all that kind of crap, saying, "Don't forget me then here." And he was in Auschwitz and he survived. But died one year later after liberation because of TB he got in the camp or was injected, I don't know what and doing it. There's very little I can tell you really, in terms of, at that time what I did, except you know we got ready to travel, you know.

SH: What did you think about the prospect of going to Shanghai?

CK: Everybody was leaving. It was very natural. And so were my friends. It wasn't a question, "Oh, I got to leave!" It was, "Well, when are you going to leave?" That was, I think, what I remember about it. Not that I asked questions. It, it, was a matter of, seemed very natural, looking back. And I'm not sure I can remember my feelings at the time, you know, really. But it seemed exciting. It seemed interesting. And it seemed very hopeful. Don't forget, it had to do with my economic and my parents' economic situation. We were not well off. Actually since my mother's 1925 depression, we were according to German Jewish Berlin standards poor, you know. No, we were never really hungry, you know, but rather poor. And hey, there's hope. It's a new life. And it was exciting for my mother, I know. She was, we were not depressed leaving property behind. That's a very personal feeling. We went, my parents, my mother felt, of course, that she would never see her mother again. These, you know were, we were worried about my sister going to England, which has a side story, kind of fascinating.

She was, got a labor permit from a minister to come over there which she worked. My father had some relatives in England which he knew about and had visited in 1905. But left there earlier. So she, my sister, after she was in England for a while, decided to visit with them. Tried to find them, not visit with them. And she had an old address of a store, I don't know what store, haberdashery or whatever store. And she walked in there and said, "I know it might be crazy here, it's you know, it's twenty, thirty years later. But once there was a Danglowitz family living here, you know. Have you any idea who bought it or where they are now?" And the [unclear] owner, owner said, "Well, I know where they are. Why you want to know?" "Well, they're distant . . ." "Well, that's us. We are still here." [laughs].

So the minister relieved her of her contract to work there and she took care of an old grandmother or great grandmother who was in her nineties who everybody felt, she wasn't quite together, but my sister, who didn't speak any Yiddish, felt she just used a lot of Yiddish words that

they didn't understand. And throughout the blitz, she stayed in London taking care of this woman. And after the woman died, she moved to Llandudno in Wales, North Wales, I believe. And in '48 we got an affidavit for her to come over and [unclear] in the States and were reunited in the States where she later lived. And she has passed away meanwhile and had a family here. So we got together again, you know, and had contacts. But the tension, more for my mother probably than for me, although I was pretty close to my sister, so, of leaving her, you know. And my mother would never have left unless she knew exactly when my sister would leave for England, you know.

It was a new beginning for us. And that's a very personal, others had much more traumatic experiences, I'm sure, in terms of leaving. My uncle was a physician and for a while quite well off. Gradually due to the circumstances and the taxation by Germans, gradually it took most of it away. Had later financial difficulty, but which really only impounded by German restrictions and so on, you know. I know some of those things my mother mentioned to me, even Uncle Kaasi. Interesting, Uncle Kaasi. His name was Isaak, I-S-A-A-K, spelled backward is Kaasi. He wasn't called Isaak, he was called Kaasi. [laughs] Again trying, I guess, hiding his Jewish identity or not, you know, he was very liberal in his practices.

I went, what's called here actually a kind of a conservative synagogue, I went to a liberal synagogue in, back in Berlin. Not frequently my father wasn't, very God believing but not observant. My mother kept kosher, not because she was Orthodox or anything. You did this. What she grew up with, kind of. At the same time, I never felt religiously imposed or forced to do anything, you know, things. We didn't go regular to synagogues. Although my sister took me quite a few times. We had to go quite a way, you know were nothing nearby. Well, you ask some questions.

SH: Well, you actually covered in good detail your life in Germany. So maybe we could get to Shanghai and, and your arrival there and what happened then.

CK: Well, I have, when you asked me with, which kind of came a little as a surprise, to document it. I said, that's a perfect occasion, because my wife has asked me so many times to detail more of it. And I sure can con you out of a copy of the tape later on for my children. Although I've talked to them, they have stuff there. But having it all together at one time and . . .

SH: I'm happy to do that.

CK: And, at, at home it's difficult to sit down and talk, you know, you've got to look at a face [laughs] and talk.

In Shanghai I went to school. I was one of the earliest, I was in the most advanced, not advanced academically, the oldest class. And they didn't even know what to do with us. When I was through with school, whether we have another class or not. They decided not, there weren't enough there and some of the other people, Heinz Compart and others were all there. We went through school, what's called later the Kadoorie School, graduated. I became actor in a number of different things. One of them was a Tikvah group, which is a very unusual group. Which were,

now that was just at the end of the war and after the war, of 20, 30, 40 maybe young persons, young men, only male. We had two girls who were permitted to come to our, unusual group of people. Clannish, cliquish, but nevertheless very strong cohesiveness. One of them was a good friend of mine, Walter Eichfeld, passed away. He was a director of the first moon shot later here in America. The first, and if you remember, the first time the walker landed on the moon in the middle at 1:30 in St. Louis. I saw the pictures of the moon coming up and then they showed the Jet Laboratory, people dancing there. There was Walter! [laughs] and so on. There's another guy here, Leo Greenfeld, Sokal, he's a professor of psychology at Cornell,. [unclear] You probably heard of H.D. Blumenthal under Carter, except he isn't Jewish. His brother, who's in Israel, I understand, is Jewish. But he wasn't, but nevertheless he was from the same community.⁶

I grew up there in a number of activities. I was very active in the Sixteenth Boy Scouts. I was very active organizing it later and became scoutmaster, cub scoutmaster, and I have all kind of pictures. We did, somewhere along the line somebody said, "I was part of the scouts and you couldn't do much." We did a lot of excursion. We went across the river, we hiked somewhere and did lots of things, growing under the British tutorship. Mr. Gordon was a mercantile colonialist living somewhere in International Settlement in there. He was working for Marden or Marston, a huge conglomerate of British interests, exploiting everybody out there.

I, my father after, I don't know if I mentioned to you, we got about one hundred fifty . . .

SH: You said that, yes.

CK: Yeah.

SH: One hundred fifty dollars from the HIAS.

CK: Hundred fifty dollars from the Hebrew Immigrant Aid as soon as we got there. That was literally a fortune.

SH: Was that given to everyone who arrived or . . . ?

CK: Quite a few got it, quite a few. I don't know if everyone got it. We had the letter when we got there, we got the money. I don't know why we got the letter. I have no recollection of this. I know when I got there, I got either the measles right away after the first or second week, or scarlet fever, something. Three weeks I was in the hospital, it was an epidemic. Second time I had it, I got out. By that time my father, my parents had bought, had established a little store of cooking utensils and other things. Which they had for two months and then closed it, because their partner cheated them, they discovered. They discovered he sold when he wasn't, when they weren't there

⁶ Michael Blumenthal went with his Jewish family from Berlin to Shanghai. He was the Secretary of the Treasury under President Jimmy Carter. He now serves as the Director of the Jewish Museum in Berlin.

and they never saw the money, so that's it. And they sold this then for 20 pounds.

SH: They sold the store?

CK: For 20 pounds. Which was an equivalent of 80 or 90 U.S. dollars. They only had lost money, you know. The rest of the money, we had, yes, we had a little room like they described, reasonably good, sleeping there. We had somebody to clean up every day, for no money, some *amah* or other things. And we lived on Tongshan Road, 818 Tongshan Road. I mention this here. Two years and then my father never had found really somewhere else to connect. My mother didn't either. And when the money ran out, we moved back into a camp. And all together, I found recently a list, we had lived in eight different camps. Pingliang Road, Chaoufoong Road, finally in Seward Road.

SH: Do you know why you moved from camp to camp?

CK: One camp was, I don't really. One camp was closed down, Pingliang, I don't remember very well. The first two times, now one closed down, and I don't know why we moved really, the camps.

By the time I was about sixteen, seventeen I really ran the family. Although my father was alive, well off. But he performed, he was the actor. He didn't take care of the family. He was, wasn't capable, in spite of all intelligence to do it. So . . .

SH: What does it, what does it mean that you ran the family? What kind of things did you do?

CK: I made decisions, you know. With my mother together. But looking back, it, it wasn't that, today I'm going to make all the decisions. It wasn't. A natural evolvement, you know what happened with the family, you know.

SH: What kinds of, if I could ask, what kinds of decisions were there to make?

CK: Well, for example, during the war, it was before the war, '42. After I finished school, so how old was I then? Seventeen, seventeen, eighteen. It wasn't after, must've been before the war. And after I'd finished school, what do I do now? Do I work, you know, find work? And I decided I don't have enough skills. So I better learn bookkeeping, Pitman shorthand, etcetera, which was given in a Shanghai business college. But I didn't have any money. My mother decided, "I'm going to sell my wedding ring." I said, "No." She said, "Sure it's important, but it's unimportant." I know it was important to her. Well, we bought her wedding ring back in the United States, but she sold it and I went and learned Pitman shorthand, which came very handy. And bookkeeping, typing, which have been very useful in the business I am in now, very useful, still is. And I walked all the way over the Garden Bridge and walked back.

I don't want to sound too melodramatic, but the food supply was not sufficient. At the time I didn't know what it was, but I got dizzy sometimes walking forth and back. And I ate less,

because I wanted my mother to have more. I, I, it, it sounds a little embarrassing, you know. I remember stories and later I wrote some short stories about it. My mother loved coffee, who doesn't? I mean, I do. Except my wife, she's a tea drinker. And I remember her eyes following the coffee pots, but you didn't have coffee. Again, we were poor there, you know. So, in a way by agreeing that my mother would sell, if I had said, "No," she wouldn't have done it. I reluctantly agreed that was the rational thing to do at the time, you know, and I did and it was helpful.

After that, now when I was out of school there was one incident, I just, well, I remembered. There was a Komor committee, I don't really know the involvement any more, but if you applied for it you could go to the St. Xavier College, one in French where Catholic priests, somewhere in Shanghai. Somebody else who was here, Alfred Büchler, did and later taught at Harvard and other places. Well, I know, the first day I went there, first of all, everybody talked French. And they put me in class one. I said . . .

END SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

CK: I went there and they said, "Don't worry about it, that's the right class for you." I said, "I don't speak French." No, I spoke Ger-, English quite well by that time. "You'll learn it, don't worry." I went back to my mother and said, "There are all these Catholic priests. They talk in French. They are starting me all over again [unclear]. I'm never going to go back." On the one hand, I would have had an academic background leaving there as many others did. On the other hand, it was, taking my father's prescription for life, everything turns out for the best, that was his basic philosophy.

It was good because I worked, managed to earn money, which supported us financially. And as a result, I worked then for somebody who manufactured paint, Mondschein. I worked for three years for him. It was four or five blocks away from the Seward Camp, forth and back. Didn't have much to do, occasionally paint, and sell some paints he did, and we years later got the first Pittsburgh paint, which never settle on the ground, we didn't have to mix. I knew the, how inferior the paints were. But he had to pay and pay manufacturer back in Germany, took the formulas along, he had connection with some Chinese.

SH: This was a Jewish man, Mondschein?

CK: Yes, Mondschein. And I know there was once a real shortage of money, literally money, nobody had money! Well, this, whoever the Chinese benefactor came out like a cartoon character. You know rotund, big, bald-headed with [unclear] coming in. And I saw him giving a big bundle of money to Mondschein. He had connections. So I worked there and I earned three U.S.

dollars a month, which was a lot of money and helped us, and he helped, he bought tickets to a community kitchen. So my parents could have meals there and we could have meals there.

SH: Bought tickets and gave them to you?

CK: Yes, as part of the pay, kind of. You know, wasn't, all very informal, there was no structure to the thing.

And jumping ahead again. Then the war ended, suddenly, the day or week before the war ended, whenever Roosevelt died, we knew the war would end, because the Japanese newspapers came out with a big, black border announcing an honorable enemy had died. We had, we had been very concerned about the end of the war. We saw the Japanese digging foxholes all over the city, establishing bunkers with flak on various corners. We had had some bombings, Americans, you know, occasionally we saw it. We had dug, we had dug foxholes in the back of the Seward Camp. Put stones, sand, and the metal over it and every time we heard the sirens we went in there, five or ten various people. So, you know, before that we had always [unclear] "Oh, there are the American planes." You know, until we suddenly saw them explode [unclear] and we stopped doing that.

When the war ended, everybody started working for the U.S. Army who came in. Well, before they came in there were some soldiers came over, and very courageously when the Japanese were still there, sealed major buildings and said, "Allied occupancy, not to be opened." Just sealed up buildings, factories, all kinds of things. I later found out this was a very, they just came with an American plane after the war ended, landed in Shanghai and [unclear] "We are the," and did these things.

Well, when the war ended, everybody started working for the U.S. Army. I was looking for a job, and others. And I told Mr. Mondschein, "I'd like to work and you helped us through the war. Things have changed, if you give me ten U.S. dollars instead of three, I'll stay with you." He said, "Okay." And when the next month came up, it was still three U.S. dollars, I wait another month, still three U.S. dollars. Well, I start looking for a job, and I found one at the warehouse where, or godown, storekeeper, and I got 80 U.S. dollars.

SH: 80?

CK: 80 U.S. dollars. You know, it was a fortune, you know. So and he saw me looking for a job. He said, "Why are you looking for a job?" I said, "Well, we talked about it. You were not interested." He said, "You don't need to come back." I said, "I didn't plan to," you know. And later on we met more friendly, but it was a disagreeable ending.

I worked there and there were also a bunch of White Russians working there. In charge was a Britisher, still remember his face. And the, I worked the night shift [unclear] and I was very meticulous in keeping everything, compulsive and recorded. There wasn't even any record keeping! Well, some of the White Russian electricians, some plumbers didn't like what I was doing. They finagled and all of a sudden I was assigned to different route and my salary was cut to 40 dollars. And the White Russian was put in charge on the \$80 job.

Well, whenever the system bucks me, I don't go along, I try to change the system. I went up, down on Bubbling Well Road, where the Army had its headquarters. And I visited a colonel there and walked in there. I found out who was in charge [laughs] and I tried to talk to him. He said, "Who let you in here?" I said, "Doors were open," and so on. And I said, "I want to bring a complaint about this." "What," we knew, everybody knew they were antisemitic, the White Russians, colonel. "What reason do you have and what evidence do you have?" I said, "Well these are the incidents." They weren't major, I had no documentation and so on. He didn't quite throw me out, practically, "What authority do you have?" I said, "I am not a U.S. soldier." You know, [laughs] he was used to ordering around other U.S. soldiers. Anyhow, I didn't get anywhere. I stayed on my \$40 job until I left. But it still was a lot of money, but not the same kind of money I had made before. And so our life got better immediately, you know, with working there.

Then after a while we got laid off. No, I didn't work there. We got laid off. And I start working for the American Joint Distribution Committee, actually for Charles Jordan as his secretary. We got very friendly. And, as a matter of fact, on the farewell party when I was leaving, Charlie asked me, "Oh, I'm sort of sorry you're going to the United States." I said, "What do you mean?" "Well, I'm going to go to Paris to head up the European effort, I thought you would come along with me over there." I said, "I'm leaving next week and now you are telling me this!" Of course we went to the States.

And when I was later settled in St. Louis, he called me up or he wrote to me, I don't know, he wrote to me at the time. Whether I wanted to head up the Community Relations PR inspector in Europe for the Joint with him. That time, I had married, it must've been, I married '53, it must've been '55 sometime. And my parents were here. I said, "Well, how much, does it support my parents, my wife and me?" He said, "No, barely you, really," and so on. I said, "I'd love to." You know, I liked to work with the guy. I couldn't go there. But . . .

SH: Could you say something about the work you did with him? About what his work was.

CK: Well, he was primarily, he was in charge of the Joint. I took letters, very much, I wrote, whenever somebody was leaving Shanghai, I wrote letters to somebody, a Mrs. Posner, I believe it was, that so and so is coming, these are the documents. I arranged the documents. It was secretarial-clerical kind of things. I worked together there. I wasn't his aide. There was a Mr. Feder, who was his administrative aide, later worked in New York. Yes, he called me also to work for him. [laughs] And I said, that time I had been in publishing and I wasn't interested. But it, it I liked the guy very much and for years I didn't want to admit it, when I gave up my name Lothar CK and wanted to have another one, I accepted Charles L. CK. It took me about twenty years to admit that it was because of Charles Jordan. You know, I always liked the name Charles, of course, Charles Jordan was there, but I really liked Charles. It's, it's really out of reverence for this guy. Not that he ever did anything for me specially, but his personality and taking care of people, this identifying with others, which really impressed me obviously at the time and so on.

SH: From this job that you did, what insight did you get into the way these refugees were being brought to the United States? Or, you know, what did you see about that whole process that, that other people wouldn't see?

CK: Well, well, if I would have the job now, I would be much more observant than I was then. Don't forget I was 19, 20, 21. You know, you look at things differently at that age. People couldn't go, like we applied for Australia, Israel, America. And Bevin in England had closed England, had closed Palestine, Australia you didn't know when you would get it. United States came through, so I ended up here. There was a lot of shoving and a lot of trying to be the first. There was on the one hand a lot of cooperation, people helping each other, and on the other hand there was competition, also people maybe taking advantage of others. It was a mixed bag, you know, and people under stress probably act everywhere the same way. But they were not as cooperative and as beautiful as they are down here in Room 5 or [unclear] where we were and everybody cheers, you know.⁷ Generally, of course, people were happy to get out of, out of Shanghai. The Communists at that time, even in '47, were as far away, Mao Tse-Tung, as they are from here now. There was no feeling the Communists are coming. Most of them had less, when the Communists actually came, because nobody was even among the Chinese wanted to talk about it.

Where some of my friends learned the Shanghai dialect, I never learned Chinese, because I wanted to be the smarty that I am. I said, "Well, Shanghai dialect you only speak in Shanghai. I'm going to learn Peking or Mandarin dialect. I can speak it anywhere." The differences are amazing. "I" in Shanghai means "*alah*". In Shanghai dialect, in Mandarin or Peking it is "*woa*". [laughs] Very different. So by learning this one, I never learned Chinese, but talking to my teacher, was a Chinese, I took private lesson for a while. He said, "I'm going to tell you something, but you must swear me not to tell." He told me about the Fourth Army is coming, I think it was the Fourth Army of the Chinese Army, Mao Tse-Tung. There are Communists here, etcetera, etcetera. You know, it's going to change. And my view, it's the best thing what ever happened to China.

The corruption you see documented, and some were policemen, stop, it happened to me. I came back from a party with soda bottles or something. Young people from the school, they stopped me, "You have something you're not supposed to carry it." I said, "Well, smell it, it's nothing there, there no alcohol." "No, no, you'd better come along, prison." When you go to prison you might die there of typhus. So we negotiated how much and I paid them whatever and they let me go. It was constant, the kind of bribery going on there.

So, your question, getting back to it, how refugees, what insight I gained. Well, there was a parting. It was emotional. People who grew up together, after all it was quite a few years, had to part. "Will we see each other again?" You know. That was part of it. But generally people were excited to be getting out of it, you know. Looking forward to a new life somewhere else,

⁷ Klotzer here refers to the reunion of former Shanghai refugees which was taking place in Chicago at the time of this interview.

you know. I'm trying to think of specific people, you know, and it's, when I got to San Francisco, it was extremely difficult to leave there after living in Shanghai. We stayed there for two months. Trying to stay, we lived in a hotel paid for by the Committee. We decided to look for an apartment, my mother and I.

SH: You brought no money, you had no savings?

CK: We had no money, but we got, no, not from Shanghai. But what we had, became meaningless. Alright you had two hundred Mark. What is this, [laughs] two hundred dollars. You know, big, well, it was a little money, it wasn't much here, you see. So I looked all over for an apartment, we couldn't find one. If you think there is a housing shortage now, after the war it was impossible. So I start even working there in order to earn some money while I was still in the in-between stage, what we would do. This peanut factory, this guy with the cylinder, I worked, typed invoices.⁸ For a day, then I realized if I work, I can't look for an apartment. If I look for an apartment, I can't work. So I stopped working there. And then the Committee sort of little bit intimidated said, "Well, you can stay here on your own. Your parents get sick or anything, you're on your own." Well, it's not true, there were obliged for five years to take care of my parents, but, and you wanted to cooperate. I mean, they wanted to help. They didn't want to create another New York in San Francisco staying there, so they made recommendations for leaving. I didn't want to settle in the South. All the symbolism it stood for. Philadelphia was full of coal and steel, I didn't, at that time, now it's a beautiful city. Didn't want to settle. So by elimination, the center of the country is St. Louis. You could easily leave, it's not too far away. Don't forget we didn't fly. You went by train. You were in the center of the country in St. Louis. You could leave somewhere else. Besides, I had some notions the Mississippi, cafés, restaurants along the Mississippi. I don't know if you've ever been to St. Louis and saw?

SH: Once, very quickly.

CK: Muddy, sloppy there. It's disgusting. It's brown. There is nothing. There is a little bit down town St. Louis. No, there are no cafés [laughs] on the river. There is no riverboat, there are some boats that travel, but it is nothing compared what the images you had images from Europe about traveling. But this was the reason, I finally said, "I'll pick St. Louis." Literally, I decided. So we settled in St. Louis and got here.

SH: If I could just go back for a second.

CK: Yeah.

SH: These letters you were writing to Mrs. Posner, was she in San Francisco? Was she someone

⁸ Klotzer refers to Mr. Peanut, the symbol of Planters Peanuts.

who was, I mean, were you writing letters about people?

CK: Explaining who they were, what their background a little bit was, and when they are coming.

SH: When they are coming to San Francisco?

CK: Right.

SH: And what would she do then? She would try to fix them up?

CK: Then they, so they know when they would be coming and have somebody welcome them from the boat.

SH: I see.

CK: I remember one thing which is related to this not directly. When we got off the boat in San Francisco and there were some of my friends there who knew when I was coming, already waiting San Francisco. There was one man there. I had no idea who he was. He collared and took apart all young people getting off, high school or young college age, and said, "Whatever you do here, I don't care, you go to college. Without the label you won't be anything. You must go to school, keep this in mind." And he impressed me very much in doing it. When [unclear], when I settled finally in St. Louis, I was still in the hotel from the Committee, one week later I went to St. Louis business college, took a course at night. Which I never followed through, I went to other fields later. But he made at least an impression on me. I don't know on how many others. "You've got to get an education. Whatever you have now is not enough. You got," and he, that was his mission in life. He waited apparently for every boat there and got a hold of young people individually and just felt he had to say that. [laughs] Just a glimpse.

This Mrs. Posner, later in St. Louis I met somebody and I forgot her name what it is now. We talked what I did. She said, "I was the one you wrote the letters to. I worked for the U-, U-, for USNA. United Service for New Americans in the, over here. She got the letters which I wrote over there. [laughs] It was another little episode, we shared together here.

And, well, I came to the States. I, Committee helped us to settle in a place. I didn't like the hotel. I saw another hotel nearby a week later, which had kitchen facilities. They give us enough money to live there and eat somewhere else.

SH: Who's the they, who's giving you the money?

CK: The Jewish community in St. Louis, Federation, it was Jewish Family Service Agency. And after one week I moved out to another hotel. I said, "We can save money. We get all this money for eating this way we can cook." They were extremely excited. "You did this on your own?" I said, "Yes. It makes more sense." "You should have informed us first." I said, "I do what I want to do." [laughs]

SH: This was your parents saying that.

CK: I told, I was the one who was doing it.

SH: But they were surprised that you were doing this.

CK: Not only this, later on they established us living somewhere on Goodfellow Avenue, where we lived. Goodfellow, brings another episode to mind. My father's English was very poor. When we lived on Goodfellow Avenue, he remembered he lived on Goodfellow, he liked to walk around. And one evening when it was getting dark, he didn't know how to get back, but he wanted, if he was on Goodfellow he knows. So he saw some two young girls coming up there and saying, "I Goodfellow." He could never understand why they start screaming and running away [laughs].

I moved on Goodfellow in one address. I didn't like the place, I didn't like the renters. And I saw somewhere else and we moved to 1339 Goodfellow. Not only this. By that time they had gotten me a job. I earned some money. I went, I bought our own furniture on payoff. Moved in the furniture and when I came back I told the case worker, Jewish Family Services, what I did. [laughs] He said, he got so excited over it. "I can't afford it what you did! [laughs] I get a lousy pay, how can you go out and do it?" [laughs] I said, "What with the money you gave me and the money I earn, I figured out I can afford it." "But you are not supposed to do this again." [laughs]. First of all, you are supposed to, see they wanted to solve my problems and I didn't have any problems except economic ones and economic problems I'm used to settling on my own. [laughs]

Well, later on, we, I, I got a fellow named Sid Hurwitz, who is now a good friend of mine, socially, and we had a lot of arguments. I supported Henry Wallace, not Truman. Went to Jefferson City and saw Paul Robeson sing there and other things. And he was more for Truman, we had arguments about this, that was our session with the Family Service Agency.

Well, I worked as a bookkeeper somewhere, entering Social Security figures, they had no calculators at the time. It got very boring. So I decided and I didn't have any college degrees or anything at that time. I put an ad in a St. Louis Post-Dispatch that I wanted to work in journalism. You're not supposed to do this. [laughs] I mean, it's not supposed to be successful. I got lots of people who wanted to hire me as insurance salesman. I [unclear] . Plus one very poorly written, not poorly English-wise, but poorly typed letter from a young guy, he was 19 years old, living in Troy, Illinois, with a little newspaper. We met downtown in St. Louis. I told him my views on race and everything else which [unclear] . "I love it," he said, "I agree with you." And I said, "When I'm a Jew?" He said, "You'll be the first Jew who works in Troy, Illinois, and everybody will look at you." And they did. I came. His name was Paul Simon. He is now U.S. Senator Paul Simon. And Paul, we have stayed close friends. Had many conversations and he laid out his career exactly what he would do for senator and governor when he would run for President back in '48. And he nearly kept everything. He's an amazing guy. It's very unusual for a politician. He's very religiously motivated. His brother had some work for the hungry, a lobbying group for

the poor, Lutheran minister. His father was Lutheran minister in China, came over here, back, and Paul is very unusual. And we, we still are close friends.

And I worked for him from '48 to '51, until I was drafted in the Korean episode. I wasn't supposed to be drafted, because I had two dependents, my parents. Well, and Mr. Ben C. Finke, I'll never forget his name, called him up. "Why did I get a draft note?" I'm 26 by that time, I know nearly off the age, 27 was off. I have two dependents, I said. "Well, probably a mistake, come out." And he talked to me about other things. And we got, the conversation got heated more and more, finally he said, "Well, would you go down and lick up the dust in the gutter?" I said, "No, I would not do that." "Well, I saw Mrs. Roosevelt shake the hand of a nigger." Well, after I told him off, two weeks later I was in the Army, [laughs] didn't get any deferment.

In the Army, I was working Fort Leonard Wood. When I was transferred Fort Bliss, Texas, where I could choose between working on the newspaper or becoming a chaplain's assistant. So I became a chaplain's assistant. So for one year, two years in there, I went one year to night school, Western Texas College. And so I got a year's worth of college credit when I was in the Army which helped.

I had known my wife before, during and after. I'd proposed to her five years earlier when it shocked her, said, "No." I'm very stubborn. Five years later I married her. And we married in '53. Went to the, on the G.I. bill, graduated with a bachelor's, political science and then.

And decided the Jewish community really needs a Jewish newspaper, because the Jewish Light there is a house organ. I published it for nearly half a year. Difficulty, my wife was just getting her master's in social work. When the Jewish Federation, which I didn't realize what they were doing, came to be about two people Morrie Perlmuster and Sam Koprnick, said, "Why struggle there? Why don't you become editor of the Jewish Light and director of public relations for the Jewish Federation?" Good salary, paid off some of my debts. I didn't know they were really co-opting me and killing off an independent voice. It dawned on me years later, at the time I had no idea.

For one year I worked for the Federation, I couldn't stand it any more, partly. It was a mutual agreement to leave. People calling me up, "My picture is one inch smaller than somebody else's," and I had the calendar Jewish activities in St. Louis. "You can't publish this." I said, "They're Jewish groups. They are not participating in the fund drive." It was this kind of crap I couldn't stand.

So then for five years I was working. I started in public relation and advertising, personnel for a construction company, Fruin-Colnon in St. Louis. Very interesting and active in ACLU and NAACP and other things, but, which was, anybody could do it, be a member. I wanted to do more. So in 1961, '60, '60, actually I told my wife and she agreed, I said, "How about starting a Midwest magazine, political, social, cultural issues, covering Chicago, Kansas City, and St. Louis, and gradually grow and take on Iowa," other things and my idea, leftist, liberal and so on. I felt the 60's are coming. And put myself on a fellowship for one year to study the magazine field. Took longer, by June of '62 the first issue came out. For a while I had Hubert Humphrey as columnist and Newton Minow and . . .

SH: What was the name of the . . . ?

CK: Focus/Midwest. Started in '62, by '68 we had never broken even. We didn't have any money, we had used up all our insurance and whatever else we had. And then in 1968 we finally said, "Well, we've got to do something else." I didn't want to give up the magazine. So we acquired a small typesetting system that time, stand alone, it was called I.B.M. system, to save money on the magazine. Well, to jump ahead now, the company, Focus Graphics, working, I had thirty people working for me. All the latest technology we have. No printing, but everything short of printing. And, and which is doing quite well. I never intended to get into a damn business, but I'm running one now. [laughs]

Well, '68, in 1968 I started with Focus Graphics. In '68 also the Democratic National Convention took place in Chicago. And after the Chicago papers lied what happened there, they said the students beat up the police and so on. Some Chicago journalist like Ron Dorfman and others said, "Hey, you better watch your own paper." And they started publishing the Chicago Journalism Review. It was the first one. When I saw it, I thought, hell, that's a beautiful idea. Organized some journalists in St. Louis and we started the St. Louis Journalism Review. So I had two publications which didn't break even, both on a bi-monthly basis. By '83 it became just too much. I merged them both in St. Louis Journal and made a monthly out of the Journalism Review, actually ten months a year, two months are overlapping, which I still publish now. And doing it, we have done this one since '70, so 23 years and Focus/Midwest from '62 to '83, we published doing it. In this way I keep sane and I don't need to preach on street corners and get arrested for loitering.⁹

SH: Is there any connection between these liberal views that, that you've, that have motivated your work life and your time in Shanghai? Is there a connection there? Well, maybe I should, let me ask the question differently. That's too, too specific. Do you see a psychological or intellectual or political result for you from having been in Shanghai instead of having been in Germany?

⁹ In 1996, the St. Louis Journalism Review was donated to Webster University in St. Louis, which keeps it completely independent.

CK: Well, it's very, very difficult to answer. It really is. I cannot put my finger on this one. No doubt that psychologically reaction to the Nazi period and others, you know, must have influenced me. Although I was insulated at the same time. All my three kids, who had experienced no Nazi persecution, were Americans born here, all that still in the 60's. [laughs] They are still living there. I hope they never grow up in doing it. One is a dancer/choreographer. One is a social worker in California. And the third one's in physics, doing things. I just grew up naturally, my point of view. I never thought it's leftist, liberal, radical, which American [unclear] it is. But it maybe only because you ask the question from an, from an American cultural point of view. In Europe, my point of view in some countries would be middle of the road maybe. You see, you have no left publicly expressing itself in America. What you have in America is a leftist middle of the road. That's what you see on public television. Remember the freeze movement? You know who was the spokesman for the freeze movement on public television? McNamara. He endorsed the freeze movement. So they got him. The original freeze leader never appeared on television. They didn't want them. But McNamara was acceptable. So that became the left, the guy who bombed Cambodia. You know. So you have in America, going from the middle to the right, the left economically you never hear. So your question then is, well, even conservative Republican want racial harmony, they want racial progress. That isn't liberal any more. Except they don't do anything about it, [laughs] you know.

I don't, my views may sound liberal or radical, they don't sound liberal or radical to me. They sound, how can anybody else think something differently? [laughs] If you are for some progress and humanity and helping others. I feel that we are responsible for each other. Whether you live next door, or live in China, Russia, or in Thailand. We are all one human race, and borders really have little meaning to me. Maybe that's where my background of traveling comes in. I'm pretty well assimilated in America and think as an American in many ways.

And, one example, take right now all the discussion about the Mexico-Canadian-American trade pact you know. Many on the left and liberal and labor are opposed to it. But the net result will be that Mexicans will be helped and our standard of living will be a little bit lower. What's really so bad about it, if you think about it from a humanitarian point of view? That somebody else's living standard will go up. Because ours is, in spite of all the depression, still pretty good here. We need a more equalization of income and resources throughout the world, if we want to survive, all of us. So, it not, yes, I believe all of these things had an effect on me. It must have had. But I can't say, I suddenly changed. Now this made me this. And I was always the same, you know.

SH: Well, if I can ask the question in a different way. Do you see any results for you from having been in Shanghai? What legacy do you think you bring from, from that Shanghai experience?

CK: Personally, I had some experience, for example, when I got beaten up by White Russians. I would never have done it in Berlin or probably in America. I said, I've got to defend myself. I

wanted to learn judo. Nobody knew judo. A friend of mine was a boxing instructor. He was also a dance instructor. And I started training and became part of a boxing team, which gives me quite some . . .

SH: Is that with Leo Meyer?

CK: Leo Meyer was the general gym teacher. No, it was Max, first was Rolf Levine who isn't here, and then later Max Buchbaum, who isn't here either. I think he went to Israel, died later. There are several people here who were boxers on the team.

SH: Now I met a man named Max Ackerman who was a boxer.¹⁰

CK: No, I don't remember his name. No, he may have been. There were quite a few people on [unclear] I saw quite a few. See really attending here are only three hundred. There was, you know.

So, that experience though, for example boxing, I can relate to, because it gave me a certain self-confidence. I still feel today at being an old-aged and gray-haired, as if I can take care of myself physically, if it, it never has come to such a circumstances. But there's a certain physical self-confidence I still have from that experience. That I can relate to. Which I know I didn't have before, you see. I also enjoy ball room dancing. My wife and I go very often. And I enjoy that and that gives me a certain confidence. I am playing a lot of table tennis now [laughs] competitively, and going out of town and playing. Not that I'm such a great table tennis player, but sufficient to participate in competition and so on. And I enjoy it very much. It gives me a certain confidence. You see there I can relate to specific experience.

But the eight, nine years in Shanghai, the one thing maybe if I would have more sheltered life is, that I had to take care of my parents and my family, if we would be a well-to-do family and more normal children. That experience probably would have been different. I would have followed more. Oh yes, I go to school now, yes, mom, dad. But I was, whether I was conscious of it or not, I was running things, taking care of them, supporting them. It was natural. It wasn't something I was forced to do. What else do you do? Of course you do that. You see, it, it is a more personally, family-centered experience which I can relate to, which had an affect on me. Rather than saying the experience there. All this experience to me was still looking back, hey, we are saved here in Shanghai from Germany. We're still, yes, it's difficult and was very difficult, some of the periods, you know. But it, we knew somehow it was temporary, somewhere in the back of our minds. We talked it, what would happen, who knows, but something will happen. There was a certain, in spite of all the complaining, faith in the Jewish establishment and structure. Something is going to be done for us. This dependency on the social environment, on the Jewish environment. They're not going to forget about us,

¹⁰ See interview with Max Ackerman, Shanghai Jewish Community Oral History Project, Los Angeles, June 7, 1990.

something's going to happen. You know, that was there.

And I very strongly feel the Jewish identity. You know, which I'm very much rooted. And the Jewish precept of support for each other, not only among Jews, but humanity as a whole, springs from this kind of conviction which I feel strong about, you know.

At the same time I know, I have sort of giving up solving the problems in this world. I know by now I can't do it. But in specific areas, we can have an affect. I believe very strongly in individual actions and committees, organizations, although I belong some. So rather than establish a national journalism review, I aimed specific at St. Louis Journalism Review. All the media in St. Louis know the Journalism exists, we can write about it, they read us. They may hate our guts, but they, everybody reads us, publishers. Not everybody, four or five thousand readers, but sufficiently people that we can have an affect, and we have changed things. Sometimes silly little things, like papers that publish the horoscope without it a disclaimer that this is just for your entertainment and is not factual. After we poked enough fun at them, they're edited, like many newspapers, but many newspapers do it. And other things much more serious, you know. When years ago in Focus/Midwest, we accused Truman of belonging to a racist club. Nowadays people will excuse, "I didn't know it," Truman that time said, "I do in my private life whatever I want." When Newsweek questioned him and when Midwest/Focus asked the question he didn't respond to us, Newsweek picked our item up. The criticism from Missouri about a Missouri President. And he said, "Nobody will tell me what to belong to," or something of the sort. It was that time when he was President. So you can have an effect, little things, you know. I'm sure you heard about the butterfly effect and quantum physics. I believe in that strongly, literally. That little things can mushroom ultimately. So there I take some satisfaction, you know. And I want to be effective. I don't want to waste my time, so I'm taking up too much of your time now.

SH: No, no, this has been fascinating for me.

CK: [unclear] It's, it's, I enjoy doing much more I think than, Rose fully supports everything I do, my wife. She took a year of high school typing. So when I start the typesetting, she start helping me and we thought, isn't that great. We worked the first fifteen years out of my home. Publishing and the typesetting, she could help, and slowly so did the children. Well, then she got caught up and she was much involved in the typesetting and running the business. Six-, fifteen, sixteen hours a day as I am and doing it. So she never really got back to social work and that's a permanent regret she has, I know, and talked about many times. And now she feels her profession has maybe passed her by, although I don't think so. Living in daily experience can be just as important as academic ones, but she is, without her I couldn't have done all these things. Without her, so I'm, her background is as a native American quite different.

Her mother came here after the 1848 German revolution. They were German Jews who came over here. And her father came from Poland and her name, or from Lithuania, Vilna, and when he came down his name was Fibozensky or something and the immigration officer couldn't quite understand it and abbreviated it to Finn, F-I-double N. So I'm married to an Irish wife now. [laughs] And the rest of the family came, except that all the others name, name Finn

you know over there. So she is Finn.

It, politically, socially we rarely talk about the issue, because we all agree, you know, with all the magazines and other things we are doing. But it has been fascinating, you know, looking back, some of the things which happened, you know. Some of the things I would have done differently, to be differently effective in things I am doing. But as a whole I'm, I've been accused of being stubborn. I consider it consistent, whatever you want to call it. And . . .

SH: Is there some, some final thing you would say about your Shanghai experience as you, as you look back on it?

CK: It, for a while, I regretted not enough was written about it. [laughs] Fortunately, and I welcome all the things written, because while it, for the person involved it's their life, you know. The one thing which has never been quite answered for me. You know about, I'm sure about the Japanese idea of creating a Jewish state that the Russians wouldn't attack us by Rabbi Tokayer, whatever.¹¹ Well the, the twenty thousand Jews who came to Shanghai, was, could go there, and the Japanese let them in because of that assumption or whether they came there anyhow. And later and I heard it was cut off by Jewish community requests at Shanghai and I think, that's still muddled in my mind, just a bit of information would be interesting to find out. Now, I think if anything, I feel strongly about, as leaving Berlin for Shanghai, leaving Shanghai for the States, surviving in Shanghai, in no way could I have done it on my own without communal support within the community or from outside, you know. And the least we could do is repaying it. Trying, not that I'll succeed trying to make this whole world a little bit better place to live, I think. That's the only way I can repay it, doing it.

SH: Well, that's a nice way to end, don't you think?

CK: Yeah. [laughs]

END OF INTERVIEW

¹¹ Klotzer refers to the book The Fugu Plan: The Untold Story of the Japanese and the Jews During World War Two, by Rabbi Marvin Tokayer and Mary Swartz.