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Rohe, Terry oral history interview

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Interview with Terry Rohe by Steve Hochstadt
Shanghai Jewish Community Oral History Project

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Rohe, Terry

Interviewer

Hochstadt, Steve

Transcribers

Thompson, Heather

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Date

6/17/1994

Extent

1 audiocassette

Place

Hancock, Maine

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Biographical Note

Terry Flettrich Rohe was born in Omsk, Russia, on August 30, 1917, in the middle of the Russian Revolution. Her father, Jacov Brick, was a pharmacist and her mother a dentist. Her family moved to China in 1920, living for a short time in Tientsin, and then going further to Shanghai. Her father worked for the Soviet Consulate in the trade mission and her mother opened a dental practice in downtown Shanghai. In 1927 he opened an import-export office on the Bund. He served as President of the Jewish Club. Her mother was a director of the Shanghai Hebrew Relief Society and Shelter House, which aided many refugees from the Nazis. Her parents flew out of Shanghai just before the Communists took over in 1949 and moved to Marseilles, then to Rio de Janeiro, and finally to the US.

Rohe attended the Thomas Hambry School for Women, and then the Shanghai American School. After attending the University of Shanghai, she took a fellowship to Linfield College in Oregon in 1937, and then did post-graduate work at Columbia University. She has had a long and distinguished career in television and film. At the time of the interview, Terry Rohe lived in Maine.

Steve Hochstadt: So please go ahead.

Terry Rohe: Okay. My, my mother came from a rather well-to-do family in Siberia, in Tomsk, Siberia, which was the intellectual center. It was the university city. And, and my father, my grandfather had a brewery which apparently made the most succ-, finest beer in all of Siberia. And he was sort of a playboy, and he had race horses. And, but he went to the synagogue every morning, but my grandmother always thought that was more of a social visit than anything else. And she was the one who really ran everything. And they tell me that she walked around with this huge ring of keys clinking on her belt. And she ran the brewery, and she ran everybody, and she ran the servants. And there were five children, the youngest was a boy and four daughters. And she believed that women needed not only an education, but a profession. And her idea was that if your husband wasn't good to you, you could take your children and leave him and support them. Consequently, my mother was a dentist, another sister was a dentist, another sister was a surgeon, and another sister was a concert pianist. And now that's my mother's family.

Hochstadt: What was the family name?

Rohe: Katznelson. And there are a lot of them in Israel now. And they're not necessarily all related, but apparently that's a very prominent name in Israel. And interestingly enough, about twenty years ago when I finally left New Orleans and came here, I was offered a job in New York City as a sort of a street reporter. I was somewhat of a photographer, and I did a series called "New York in Black and White." And I took black and white pictures of different neighborhoods of New York. But anyway, before I got the job I was interviewed. And the news director said to me, "We really need an ethnic person, we need a minority person. And I know you're Jewish, but your name isn't Jewish." It was Flettrich at the time, but Rohe is no more Jewish than Flettrich. "Your name isn't Jewish and you don't look Jewish. And we really need someone that we can put into that cubbyhole." And I said, "Well, I could use my mother's maiden name which is very Jewish. It's Katznelson." And his eyes lit up, and he said, "You don't mind changing your name?" And, "No, I don't care." So for two years I was a, a neighborhood reporter in New York, and my name was Terry Katznelson. [laughs]

Anyhow, my father's family, they were quite unusual because his father was a, a blacksmith, which is a very unusual thing for a Jewish man to be. And it was in a farming community, and they were the only Jewish family in that community. And my father's mother died when he was a child, when he was very young, and his father remarried and had two other children. And my father was always a very thoughtful, very sensitive young person, very good-looking. I'll show you pictures. And his mother, they weren't very well to do, but his, not his own mother, but his stepmother, realized that of the three children this one was, had the most intelligence and really would profit from a good education. So she would put money aside from her food money. And so when he graduated from high school, she had enough money saved so she could send him to the university town, to Tomsk.

And so he, he started going to school in, in Tomsk, taking some kind of science course. And my grandfather, I guess thinking of all the girls that he had, would have a sort of a scholarship every year for a bright Jewish boy at the university. And they had this huge house and so there was also a room for what, whoever the bright boy was. And that year, the bright boy was my father, whose name was Yacov Brick, which is not a very Russian name, Brick. It was never changed, but it was, his ancestry was German way, way back. It was Bruck, then it was changed to Brick.

And so my father came to live with my grandparents, and he and my mother fell in love. And when he was seventeen and she was sixteen, they got married with the proviso that my mother would go to college, continue. And so they lived at home with the family, and she went to dental school, when he continued and took pharmacy. And they had their first child. And there were lots of servants, so little Eva was taken care of by the servants. And my mother graduated. And then my grandmother saw that, helped my father open a pharmacy and my mother open a dental office. And then they were sort of adventuresome, and they learned that the land of opportunity was Turkestan, the frontier. And so they decided that's where they want to go. Maybe

they wanted to get away from the family, which was very possible.

So they went to Tashkent in Turkestan, and opened a pharmacy and a dental office there. They had their first child, my sister. And they were there for quite a few years, maybe five years. And then my mother had another child, a little boy. And he developed cholera, and he died in Tashkent. So they came back.

And I just have an aside about that. I went to Tashkent when I went the last time to Russia with a crew to do stories about Russian athletes. There was a, a young trapeze artist or something who was practicing, training in Tashkent. So off we went to Tashkent. And I was interviewing a sports doctor, an old, old man, sports doctor. And there'd been an earthquake in Tashkent a few years before that. And so I was telling him about my parents, and he said that there was, before the earthquake, there was a pharmacy in Tashkent with my father's name on it, Yacov Brick. And he remembered it well.

Anyway, so then they came back and settled in Omsk, rather than Tomsk. And again my father opened a, a pharmacy, my mother opened a dental office, and I was born in 1917, August 30th. I guess, just before the revolution started . . .

Hochstadt: That's my birthday.

Rohe: . . . or just afterwards. Huh?

Hochstadt: That's my birthday.

Rohe: You're kidding! August the 30th? [laughs] That is amazing, huh. Well, 1917, August, that would have been just before or just after the revolution? Just . . .

Hochstadt: Just before, well . . .

Rohe: Just before?

Hochstadt: . . . well, after February and before October.

Rohe: Okay, okay. Because I, somewhere I have a silver goblet with the name Alexander, Greek. Because Kerensky was the hero, and so they were sure I was going to be a boy. And so my father and my mother had this goblet, silver goblet made with my name on it, which was Alexander Brick. And of course then Kerensky. So it, yeah, it was during the Kerensky era.¹

Hochstadt: Right.

Rohe: And we lived there until I was about two-and-a-half, three years old in Omsk. And when my father was finally sent, my parents con-, my grandparents continued living in, in Tomsk. And things were, you know, they weren't great, but they weren't bad. And they thought things would change and things would settle down. And so my father had this opportunity, and I guess they were pretty adventuresome people, because they had gone to Tashkent. And then he decided to go to Shanghai. And so he went on ahead about eight months before we did, and then found a house in Shanghai. And my mother and my sister and I traveled by ourselves without my father. He was already in Shanghai. And we traveled in the *teplushka*. Do you know what that is? You saw "Dr. Zhivago"? Well, the caboose that they traveled across Siberia in, well that's, that was a *teplushka*. It's like a, a,

¹ Alexander Kerensky was head of the revolutionary Russian Provisional Government from July to October, 1917.

well, it's a caboose. And it was fixed up for our living. There was a stove and feather beds. And we were traveling for months.

Hochstadt: So attached to a train?

Rohe: Attached to trains. We would go as far as, and the, the thing is you must realize that in 19-, this would have been 1920, in 1920 there were still pockets of the White Army. So we would go as far as we could go, and then they would shunt us over to the side, and we would sit there until the, and mother tells me that the, they had two flags on the, on the train. There was a white flag and a red flag. And, but there are two things that I remember very, very distinctly. And I hadn't seen my parents in a long time before they came here. But these were the, these two images that I had. And when I tell my mother about them, she couldn't, couldn't believe that I had so vividly remembered that. One was we, when we were shunted aside at some point I remembered a, a soldier coming through our compartment, through our *teplushka* with a, a bayonet and snow on his helmet and on his shoulders. And he was running the bayonet through the featherbeds and the pillows and everywhere. And eventually they left. And I had this image. And when I eventually told my mother about it, she said that a prisoner had escaped and so they were searching for the prisoner.

And the other very vivid image I have is of, my mother knitted that whole time, and the other vivid image I have is of her with a knitting needle going between the floorboards of the *teplushka*. And what had happened is, this was her ring, it's platinum and it had three Siberian diamonds in it originally, and she lost one of the diamonds. And so she, and that I remember so vividly, her going up and down the boards looking for the diamond. And she finally found it eventually. She gave me the ring with the three diamonds. And I didn't wear it, 'cause I thought it was very precious. And, but when I went to Russia I thought it might be kind of, I should wear it to go to Russia. So I put the ring on, and I was walking near Gum. It was snowing, and I looked down at my hand and a diamond was missing. The same diamond, the same location, the one that she'd lost, and there was no way of looking for it. It was snow all around. And so when I came back, I went to a jeweler here in Ells-, Ellsworth and had him take out the other two diamonds and put this lapis lazuli in. And the other two diamonds I had made up into a ring and something else for my two granddaughters when they graduated from high school. Anyway, those are the two very vivid pictures that I have of, of that trip.

Then we went to Vladivostok where my mother's younger sister had married a very, very wealthy young man who, whose parents had cornered the lumber of Siberia or something. Uncle Grischa. And so we stayed there. I have pictures of, of myself with my little cousin in Vladivostok. That would have been like 1919. And then we went to Harbin for a while and then Tientsin. My father met us in Tientsin. We stayed there for a while. And I, oh maybe, maybe that was I, maybe he was supposed to settle in Tientsin for a while, 'cause that's where he met us. And I went to a French convent there. I was three by that time. And then eventually we came to Shanghai. And my mother opened an office very shortly thereafter in the French Concession. And my father had an office on the Bund. And, no, that was when he went into the private, no, his office was in the Consulate which was on the Huangpu, no, the Huangpu River and the canal, I can't think of the name.

Hochstadt: Soochow Creek?

Rohe: Soochow Creek. How do you know all that?

Hochstadt: I've been studying this a little bit.

Rohe: Yeah, Soochow Creek. Yeah, the Consulate was right on Soochow Creek. And I joined the Pioneers and wore a little red scarf and went to the meetings and sang their songs. One of the songs I, I then sang to that principal whom I met. And they don't

sing it any more, but it was about [unclear] , you don't, you don't speak Russian, do you?

Hochstadt: No.

Rohe: [unclear] about the, the pilots of, of the Soviet Union. Anyway, my mother was not too involved with the life of the Soviet Consulate. And by that time they had lots of friends, and mostly Jewish friends . . .

Hochstadt: What was your father's job exactly?

Rohe: He was head of the trade mission. He was the manager of the trade mission. And then the father of this man was the political, I have pictures of, of this man and my father, which is what I was going to inveigle you to come back and see. They're all in there. And he had, you know he worked with Chinese compradors, and, and had a staff of secretaries and a, a trade mission. And, and I don't know what else they did, besides I knew that they exported tallow and pig bristles to the Soviet Union, I don't know what else they did. Because I was only ten when my father left the Soviet Union, see, in 1927, I was born in 1917. In 1927 was when he, he left. And after that, that's when he had a, an office on the Bund, and he became, sort of import, export, and he had several accounts. Like he, he imported "Brillo" and several other American products, and he had a Chinese comprador, and, and, but by that time my mother was a very successful dentist and real estate operator. She owned apartment buildings and, and so we, you know, we did fine. We had five servants and we lived, we moved several times. And we eventually ended up at the Hamilton House. I don't know. It's . . .

Hochstadt: I don't know.

Rohe: . . . right off the Bund across from the cathedral, the Episcopalian cathedral. Did you, did you see that?

Hochstadt: No.

Rohe: Did you see the movie? There are two movies about Shanghai.

Hochstadt: I haven't seen either one of them . . .

Rohe: Huh? One about the little boy . . .

Hochstadt: "The Emperor," "The Last Emperor" . . .

Rohe: Not "The Last Emperor." The other one . . .

Hochstadt: I haven't seen that one either.

Rohe: . . . about the Japanese. I can't think of the name of it. Well, a lot of it takes place at the cathedral church which is also a, a school for boys which was right across from the Hamilton House where we lived. And I used to roller skate at the cathedral.

So then I went to a French school in Shanghai, in Tientsin. Then I went to a British school, the Thomas Hambry School for Women, which was in Hongkou for some reason. And then when I was in form three, which is the equivalent of the sixth

grade, I was transferred to the Shanghai American School. Mostly because by that time my sister was in the States, and my parents felt that they wanted to send me to college in the States, and it would be better if I went to an American school. So I transferred to the Shanghai American School, which was the school funded essentially by the Standard Oil people. A lot of teachers came from Teachers' College Columbia. They were sort of progressive. And lots, the, the school body was essentially kids from British American Tobacco Company, from Standard Oil, and lots of missionary kids from all around the interior. And they would stay at the school, it was a boarding school. And I guess essentially I'm fairly shallow and also kind of a Raggedy Ann. I'm very comfortable in whatever situation I'm thrown into it, I somehow manage. Consequently I never felt different. I never, I, you know, I, I, I have friends who lived with antisemitism, even in Shanghai. And I never experienced it. I had friends who were missionary kids. I had friends who, whose fathers and mothers belonged to the country club. My father was president of the country club for a while.

Hochstadt: Which country club?

Rohe: Jewish Country Club.

Hochstadt: The Jewish Country Club.

Rohe: Yeah, they had wonderful tennis courts and, and we played tennis. And then at five o'clock instead of having tea, we would drink shandy. Do you know what that is? And my cousins, because their mom was so, the, the two doctors I told you about, had a much, and also, I think because they're, they're deeper thinkers, I think they felt an antisemitism in situations, although they went to a Chinese university, too. There was a very good pre-med, St. John's, and they went to that university.

Hochstadt: So could I just ask . . .

Rohe: Yeah.

Hochstadt: . . . about your, your aunts. Did they also, they also come to Shanghai?

Rohe: No. One aunt died during the war, the surgeon. She got blood poisoning and she died. And her son was adopted by the Rebbetsin Rivachka. This, this aunt who was very religious. They adopted the boy. And they eventually came to Shanghai. My mother got them to come to Shanghai . . .

Hochstadt: Do you remember when that was?

Rohe: . . . and she, that would have been maybe '21, '22. Something like that. And then the other sister who married the very wealthy man in lumber, they emigrated to America. And he was an engineer, civil engineer. And she was a dentist, too. And she had a dental office in the Bronx right up until she died. And then Bella, well, my uncle, Uncle Ninya, the one who married the Rebbetsin, they eventually ended up in Israel with their two boys.

And then Aunt Bella was the concert pianist. And she married also a civil engineer. And he worked on the Dnieper Dam. And he had gone to school in England. You know, a lot of fairly well-to-do Russian Jews would send their children to France to school, or Germany or England. He went to school in England, and, this is the concert pianist's son, and, husband rather, no, son, no, husband. The concert pianist's husband, he went to school in England and so he spoke English. And when they were

building the Dnieper Dam, he became the liaison engineer between the Americans and the Russians. And then the Dnieper Dam, part of it exploded down into the Dnieper, and they, they sent the people who were involved into Siberia. And he was sent away and she followed him. And she left her son with some friends, and she went to Siberia with him. And in 1960, I met her wh-, the first time I went to Russia. Her husband had di-, yeah, her husband had died in camp, and she came back to Moscow. And she had been a concert pianist, but she had already started teaching at the Moscow Conservatory. And so when she came back she got her job back, and she was teaching at the Conservatory. And she had this son, this one son, whom she had left with friends. And when she came back, the boy had become a Communist. And he was a party member, and he was a scientist. And he was working on the atomic bomb or something. And, sh-, and I, I saw her. I, somehow my mother, she would sneak out her address. Anyway when I went to Russia, I had her phone number and they told me.

An interesting thing happened bef-, the first time I went to Russia. That was from New Orleans. It was with this group of International Trade Mart, International House in New Orleans. And I went as a journalist. And about a month before I left, I got a phone call. I was working as a, a news anchor at a television station in New Orleans. And I got a call from somebody who said, "I understand you are going to Russia, and I would like very much to speak to you." And I said, "Well, come to the studio." "Well, no." And I said, "Well, do you want to come to the house?" It sounded, you know, sort of official. And he said, "No, can I meet you for coffee at the da-da-da?" And, "Oh sure." So I met this guy. And he gave me his card, CIA. And he had as-, he asked me then if I would do some work for them. Very simple, I wouldn't have to do anything, just take a few pictures. And, and, he knew, you know, that I was Russian, that I spoke Russian, I was going with this group. And I thought, "Oh, how wonderful!" I saw myself as a Mata Hari, and I said, "Yeah. Why not? You know, I'm a good American, of course." And, I came home and I told my husband about it. He said, "You God damn jackass! Absolutely not! You're not going to do that! No way, you tell him to go fly the kite!" So I told the guy and he said, "Well, your husband's right." [laughs] So I didn't. But, and I'm glad I didn't because I might have gotten my aunt in trouble.

So I called, I called the number and I was told that maybe the best time to try to see her was, we were there for May Day, was May Day, when there were just hordes of people in, in Moscow. So I called her the day before and we were going to the Bolshoi Ballet. And so she suggested, we had never seen each other, she suggested that we meet in the little park in front of the Bolshoi. And I described what I was wearing, I was wearing a white leather coat and red and white gloves. And, and she said she would find me and meet me at a certain time. She, because she was a musician, she knew when intermission would be. So meanwhile, this was in 1960, when you know, people didn't have clothes, people didn't have anything. So I, the people I was traveling with, they're old friends, a lot of them, from New Orleans, and they collected stockings and warm clothes and sweaters and what have you. And I put everything on and put this big coat over it. And had the pockets stuffed with things and went to the Bolshoi. And then, at intermission, I started walking around. And this woman, well dressed, walked past me and said "Isinka", which was what my parents called me. And I said, "Yes." And she said, "Walk around a couple of times and then we'll, I'll pick you up and walk." So for the next four hours that's how we met. We went into subways and out of subways, and went somewhere, sat down at a bench, then got up. I mean, for four hours that's what we did. And at that point, that's when she told me that her son was an atomic scientist. And he was a wonderful boy. And she had a little grandson, and the grandson was being taught English. And, but she didn't want anyone to know that she had seen me, not even her son. And she did take some of the things, a few small things. And then she gave me, my grandparents had died in Russia, they stayed in Russia, and so she saw them. And she gave me grandparents' rings and things for, you know, to bring back to New Orleans, and then send to Israel. And, and that was the last time. And my mother tried to communicate with her, nobody, that was it. So nobody knows what happened. Anyway, where was I?

Hochstadt: We were in Shanghai, and your father had stopped working for the Soviet Consulate. But maybe you could tell that story about giving up, about how he should have been called back to the Soviet Union and that's the point at which he . . .

Rohe: Oh, right. Well, then after Chiang Kai-shek and the Guomindang marched into Shanghai, all of the Soviets were ordered back to Russia. And my father for many reasons was afraid to go. My sister was at school in the States. And also his friends were gone. They were, God knows, shot, sent away, whatever. And by that time Stalin had taken over, and the revolution was not what they thought it was going to be. So he did not want to go back. And he had a very good friend who was the editor of the North China Daily News, which was a prestigious newspaper, it was a British newspaper in Shanghai. And George Sokolsky, who was the editor, went to bat for my father.² And there was a trial, a Chinese court, the Guomindang Court. And he was able to prove, and my father was able to prove, that he never had anything political to do with, that he was just a technical person. So we were allowed to remain, but all the other Soviets, all our friends, all left to go back to Russia.

Well then, maybe a year later or so, the Consulate was reestablished. And of course, they wouldn't have anything to do with my father and he wouldn't have anything to do with them. But, and, we never knew this for a fact, but he knew, he felt certain that he was being watched. Somebody across the street where we lived. At that time we weren't living at the Hamilton House, we were living in a place called 3 Ezra Road, which was sort of a, a commercial area. And we had the whole top floor. And my mother had her dental office there, and my sister lived there. You know, again a big family thing. And, so he, he felt that there were, there were people that were from the Consulate that were following him. And then they stayed on all through the Japanese occupation, and were going to stay on in Shanghai, I mean, that was their home. And then the Communists, the Chinese Communists, were marching in on Shanghai, and my father was afraid of remaining. And, and we couldn't bring them here because the State Department or whoever felt that he was a *persona non grata*, 'cause he had worked for the Soviet government. So the only place they could go was Brazil. And so they, they went to Brazil. And they lived there from 1947 'til about '55. And finally, as I think I mentioned, through Drew, Drew, I gave the, not Drew Pearson.

Hochstadt: Drew Pearson, yes.

Rohe: Drew . . .

Hochstadt: You said Drew Pearson.

Rohe: I did, well I was wrong.

Hochstadt: I see.

Rohe: Drew Pearson's a columnist. No, he was a Secretary of State. Drew Atkinson? No?

Hochstadt: I don't know.

Rohe: Oh, that's terrible. He had a big law firm. He eventually . . .

Hochstadt: Dean Acheson? Are you . . .

Rohe: Dean Acheson! That's who I mean, Dean Acheson. Dean Acheson's law firm, right. And they worked and worked on it

² Sokolsky was political correspondent for the North China Star, and for other English-language papers in Shanghai during the 1920s.

and finally got permission for my parents to come here. And they came to New Orleans and stayed there for a few years. And then, then they decided to move to New York, because there is a bigger Russian-Jewish community. There was nobody in New Orleans. And eventually they both died in, in New York.

Hochstadt: You said they flew out of Shanghai?

Rohe: They flew out of Shanghai on the last plane before the Chinese Communists moved in to Shanghai. And they flew to Hong Kong and then Marseilles. And they stayed in Marseilles for a long time, until they got all the papers. And then they flew to Rio.

Hochstadt: Do you know whose plane it was, or what country's . . .

Rohe: No, I don't. I don't know. And then they eventually came here, but it was, it was very hard. They, you know, they had a rough time. Even though my father, when they got to Brazil with some friends, he opened a chocolate factory he knew nothing about, but his friends did. And in Brazil you had to cross everybody's palm with silver. And by the time they were finally able to open the factory, they had no money left, and so that went belly-up. And my mother opened a dental office in Brazil and, and worked there for quite a while, until they came here.

And my father, I wish I had it, I don't know what happened to it, he wrote, started writing the story of his life. And I, in Russian, and then he translated it into English, and I translated his English into English. And then I sent it to Doubleday, and they were very interested for a while. We worked and worked on it, and then it came to naught. And I don't know what happened to it. I don't have it. I remember some of the stories in it, but I don't have it.

As far as the Shanghai Jewish community, my parents were, were very much involved in the social part of the Jewish community rather than the religious, rather than the spiritual part. I, I don't know that they were atheists, I am, but I, I don't know that they were. But religion was just something that you, you know, we ate matzoh and, and went to my aunt's house for the two Seders at the beginning and the two last Seders. And because I loved my aunt, I'd go to synagogue with her. We had friends who were Russian Orthodox and Jews and French, and 'cause Shanghai was very much of an international settlement. And I, I have never, I have never pretended I wasn't Jewish, but I have never been involved in Jewish causes or Jewish activities per se. And I think that's pretty much the way my parents were. It was no big deal. Passover, the first night of Passover was always a big deal. And I'd come home from school and the house would just be, because my mother's office was in the house, and all of her patients would send her flowers. And I, I can still smell the narcissi and the spring flowers, and the, and the apartment would just be inundated and . . .

Hochstadt: Were her patients mainly Jewish people?

Rohe: All kinds. Jewish, Chinese, actually one of her patients, I have some earrings that she gave me. Or did I send them to my grandchildren? One of her patients was Rhoda Chiang, who was Chiang Kai-shek's sister. And she was, you know, Chiang Kai-shek was a Christian, and she was a Christian. And, and my mother was a dentist for, that's how I came to this country, actually. She was a dentist at the University of Shanghai. And I went, the Depression didn't hit Shanghai until later. It hit here in 1933, '34. It hit Shanghai in '34, the year that I graduated from high school.

And all of my friends that I graduated with all went to school in the States. And my parents felt that they couldn't afford to send me to school in the States. So my mother was a dentist at the University of Shanghai which was a Baptist, it was funded by the Southern and Northern Baptist missions. And it was in Huangpu, it was way beyond Hongkou, on the Huangpu River. And

so I went to school there for three years, took pre-med and lived there, lived with a, a, a family, a Baptist family, American Baptist family, Mr., Mr. and Mrs. Kelhoffer. I met Pearl Buck very briefly. She came through and, and missionary families would never stay in hotels, they would stay in each other's homes. And she was on the way to the States, so she spent the night with this family where I stayed. There was, I shared the attic with two girls, they were Russian. One was a Russian Jew and the other was Russian. The Russian girl was a secretary to Mr. Kelhoffer, who was the general manager of the University. And the other girl, Raichka, came from Dairen, and I don't know how she ended up there to study English. And she lived with, with me, and we had this whole attic. And she lived there at the University for about a year and, then that summer I went to Dairen with her, which is in Manchuria. And . . .

Hochstadt: This is the summer of . . . ?

Rohe: Summer of, let's see I graduated in '34. That would be the summer of '35. I came here the su-, I came here in '37. I came here two weeks after Shanghai was occupied by the Japanese. And I was very much involved with that. Because we lived at the Hamilton House, and at that time the Japanese had bombed the outskirts of Shang-, well, actually they, they bombed the Bund. And we lived right on the Bund. And that first time that they bombed, they didn't mean to bomb on the Bund, but there was a dogfight and they let go their bombs. And meanwhile, the streets were just clogged with Chinese refugees who were fleeing from Hongkou. And they were in, on Nanking Road on the Bund, and so thousands of them were killed.

Oh, I must tell you an interesting story, another interesting story. Anyway, a friend of my family's was Mark Gain, who was the correspondent for Washington Post and Domei Press, the Japanese news agency. And because we lived in the penthouse of the Hamilton House which is overlooking the Bund, they took over our roof, the CV-, SVC, Shanghai Volunteer Corps. They took over our roof as an observation tower. So Mark, because he was an old friend, and he belonged to the Cercle Sportif Français, and I played tennis with him, then swam in the pool, he, he would spend a lot of time with us anyway. But during this two week period, I left on the 31st of August, the day after my birthday. And the Japanese occupied maybe the 12th or 13th of August. So during that two week period he spent a lot of time with us, but there were a lot of journalists and volunteer people just on the next floor. And at the time that the Japanese bombed Nanking Road, he was with us. He had his camera, it was a Leica, and his, he had a Japanese cameraman, and he'd been killed. And when they started bombing, he ran out and grabbed me and he said, "You're going to help me." And so I ran out with him. And that, that's when I became a journalist, that day. And so he, he had a couple of cameras and he was shooting and I was shooting. And we were shooting all of this carnage. And my, my folks didn't know until I came back that I had done it. They never would have let me. And so for two weeks I went on, on his assignments. And so he gave me the pictures that I took. And when I came to this country, I, by that time the banks were all closed in Shanghai. Is this very disconnected?

Hochstadt: No, this is wonderful.

Rohe: Oh, the banks were all closed in Shanghai. And somehow my mother was, she was a very can-do woman. There was, "no" did not exist for her. She wanted to get me out fast, and so she got me a berth on a Japanese hospital ship that was taking the wounded, the Japanese wounded out of Shanghai into Japan. And she tried to get together as much American money as she could, and was able to get like \$30 together, which she gave me. And I left on the 31st of August. And I can remember standing on the corner. The Japanese, it was like a military truck of some kind, picked up the passengers. There were two other European passengers and me and the rest were Japanese. And we went to Nagasaki. And when we got there, they wouldn't let the three non-Japanese passengers get out. We had to stay in our cabins, and they'd pull down the blinds. Well, they didn't want us to see the number of wounded. But of course we peeked, and we saw all of these wounded getting off and also the little wooden boxes

were the cremated. And there were an awful lot of blood poisoning among their troops, because, I don't know if they did it before, I don't know if they do it now. But at that time the mothers would embroider, sort of belly bands for the young soldiers, embroidered beautifully with silks, and different colored silks. And when they got wounded, the, the color from the, from the embroidery would seep into the wounds. And an awful lot of them died because of blood poisoning. Anyway, eventually they let us off, and, I just realized it was [unclear] mother in Japan with whom I stayed for a couple of days. It was Ida. They had a house in, I guess outside of Nagasaki, 'cause I stayed with, I'd forgotten that. That's who I stayed with. And then finally I went to Kobe, and [unclear] the something "Maru", a Japanese, but it, the first ship that I came over on was a hospital ship. And then from Japan to Seattle I was on a Japanese, one of the "Marus".

Hochstadt: Now why did your mother, or your parents, or you think it was so important to get you out so quickly from Shanghai?

Rohe: Well, I was coming to school in the States, anyway, before.

Hochstadt: That had already been planned?

Rohe: Oh, yes, yeah. What had happened, well, what had happened was, in my junior year in college they started an exchange program, the first year. And the, the principal of the high school I had been to, I had gone to, had taught years ago at the University of Shanghai. And at the time that I went to the University of Shanghai, he became the president of this little Baptist college in Oregon called Linfield College. So he established an exchange fellowship because he had spent so much time in China. So he established an exchange fellowship with the University of Shanghai. And in my junior year, that was the first year that they started this exchange, in my junior year, they sent this young boy from Linfield College in Oregon to be the first exchange student. So there was, Lloyd Milligan was his name. And I, and by this time there was another Russian Jewish girl, Pisarevsky, who also took pre-med, who came to take pre-med. And there were three of us foreigners at the University. Well, the year, the following year, in my senior year, I was going to graduate from the University of Shanghai, but even before the . . .

END SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

Hochstadt: Please go ahead.

Rohe: There was an exchange fellowship going begging, and my mother said, "My daughter will go." And so I was eventually hopefully going to come to school in the States, maybe for a masters, or whatever, but I was very happy at the University of Shanghai. I became the doubles champion, and I was a cheerleader, and just had a great time. So my mother thought that was a wonderful opportunity for me to come to the States. So she arranged for me to, to go on this exchange fellowship. So, and, yeah, they, they were anxious for me to get out of China. First of all because all of my friends had left, you know, they were all going to school in the States. And they felt it was kind of tough on me, that I didn't go. And also they, they saw that things were getting pretty difficult, and they felt if I could leave, it would be good.

Hochstadt: Because of the Japanese? Was that the cause of the difficulty?

Rohe: Yes. Because they, even though they didn't occupy Shanghai until August, they were there, they were all around, they were in the outskirts. And, so that they knew that, that things were going to get rough. And they couldn't get out, but they wanted to get me out. But there was never any feeling of panic. I mean, Shanghai lived high on the hog and everyone was having a great time, and.

So I, I came as an exchange student. And first docked, first went to British Columbia, and then Seattle. And I was to get off the ship in Seattle, and the immigration authorities came on board. And my papers were all fine, but I only had thirty dollars. And they wouldn't let me get off, because you, I mean, now they, you know you can come to the States, no matter. But then you had to be clean and, and have some money, some way of supporting yourself. So they put me in a, like an Ellis Island for, on the West Coast. And there was Japanese girl who was on the ship with me. And she and I were taken off the ship and taken to this camp. And when we got there, it was essentially for young Canadian girls who came across the border. And there were two dormitories. There was one for Asiatics, and one for whites. And they put me in the dormitory for the white girls. And it was, and I knew this little Japanese girl, 'cause I'd seen her on the ship. And, and she was coming to, to be a wife to a Japanese farmer down in California. And so the first night, I, I couldn't sleep, because these kids were druggies. And they were just, they were off drugs and they were just going wild. And it was just horrible that first night. So the next day, and I thought it was a great adventure, I thought, you know, I, I didn't feel badly at all about it. I just thought this was one more adventure.

And so I went to the matron, and we were really behind bars. We had to eat everything with a spoon. And when we, they would march us out of the dormitory to the dining room there were not doors, but, you know, these gates that would clank behind us. And so I went to the, the matron and I said, "I had a very hard time sleeping last night, because these kids are really, they're having a hard time. And can I go stay in the dormitory with my Japanese friend? She's there all alone." And she said, "You want to stay with an Oriental?" And this really was my first experience of prejudice, truly. And I thought, "What's the matter with you? I've come from China, went to a Chinese university, I was the only non-Chinese there." "I wouldn't want to stay with an Oriental." And she was just so shocked with me. And she thought there was something terribly wrong with me, I probably was a Communist. Anyway, she eventually let me stay with the Oriental girl. And now, she left sooner than I did. Her husband-to-be took care of her, but I still had just my thirty dollars.

And so we started communicating with the President of this little Baptist college. And he was out of town, so it took, I guess I was there for about ten days. And finally school started, and he came back to town. And he said that I would be his ward, that he would take full responsibility for me. So then they sprung me. And I took the train and went to Portland, and started school. And with my thirty bucks. [laughs] And my fellowship was just for tuition, so I somehow had to get money to eat and to live. Well, they put me up in a sorority. They thought it would be great for the sorority to have a, this strange creature from Shanghai.

So I, I had a place to stay, but I still didn't have enough money to eat. And so I got a job waiting on tables at the school dining room, and, and I'd never, I had my own *amah* who, when my mother knew I was gonna come to the States where people did things for themselves, she, my *amah* was supposed to teach me how to make my own bed. And she would sit there, stand there as I was making my bed and weep, because "Missy shouldn't be making her own bed." But, you know, I, I did have a bad experience the, the first, it was a Sunday the first day that I worked. And I don't know why, but they gave me the football players' table. And there was a kid sitting at the head of the table who was really a asshole, just a, he was awful, and I had never waited on tables before, so I didn't do anything right. He didn't know who I was or anything, but obviously I was someone who wasn't doing it right. And he kept bugging me and, "Don't you know how to serve soup?" And I just got so furious, I had this tray full of soup and I just tipped it over on him. Well, the, everybody just got up and cheered 'cause they hated him. So after that, you know, it was okay. [laughs] I became the heroine of Linfield College for burning the, the manager.

Hochstadt: But was this a difficult transition for you from being . . .

Rohe: No.

Hochstadt: . . . pampered and, and privileged to . . .

Rohe: No.

Hochstadt: . . . to, working for your living?

Rohe: No, not, it really wasn't, because I just thought it was all, you know, adventure, life on the, it'll make a great book. I have still to write it, but. And then I, well a couple of bad things happened. I got fat. I had all these beautiful clothes that all summer long we had a tailor at the house who was, in those days there would be a, a street of nothing but woolens where you'd buy woolens by the yards, silks. And my mother and I would go there and buy all these beautiful fabrics for me to wear in the States. And then we had a tailor who would come to the house and he would sew and sew, and so I came with beautiful clothes. But that whole year when I was waiting on tables, you couldn't eat before you served the students. And what the other kids would do is they'd lather some butter on bread and they'd stuff it and then they'd eat. And then we could eat after everybody ate, so I did the same thing. But I gained almost thirty pounds that first, first year. And I couldn't get into any of my clothes, and I, I didn't have any money to buy new clothes.

But anyway, I did, I, I got several jobs at, at the school. One was waiting on tables, the other was working in the, well, he helped me in the President's office licking stamps and addressing. And then I found out that there were granges all around Oregon. It was a, a rural area and that they like, they paid speakers if people could come talk about various things. Well, Mark Gain, this photographer that I had helped those two weeks, gave me all the pictures that I had taken. And so I, I had this stack of pictures that, in there, and so I was able, I called the granges and told them that I could talk about the war in Shanghai. And so I, I got to talk at, at the granges. And I would, some of the pict-, they were black and white, they weren't slides, they were just prints. And as I talked I would pass them around, and they would pass them around, and then they would come back to me. And then at the end they would pass a hat around. I mean, this was right after the Depression, you know. And I'd come back with pennies and nickels and dimes, and that helped me pay for, for a few new clothes, because I was just bursting at the seams. And so that's what I did that first year.

And then that summer I got a job as a counselor on an Indian reservation, no, no, first before that I got a job picking fruit on an Indian reservation, picking strawberries. One of the sorority sisters in the sorority where I lived, her father was head of the Indian School in Oregon, and so before the camp started she invited me to come stay with her. And, and, and she picked fruit, and I did too, and that was my introduction. That was my first job in the United States, picking strawberries. And if you don't think that is hard work in those days. Now strawberries grow on plastic, then you know, you, you sit on your haunches and just move along with all of the dust. And so I did that for two weeks, and then got a job as a counselor at a camp in Oregon. And in the year following, then I got a job teaching school. Taught school for a year in Oregon, then got a scholarship from Columbia and then came East. So.

Hochstadt: Can . . .

Rohe: What else do you want to know? [laughs]

Hochstadt: Let's go back to Shanghai.

Rohe: Yeah, right.

Hochstadt: And tell me about this, the Shelter House and all, maybe starting . . .

Rohe: I have to show you pictures.

Hochstadt: . . . right, right at the beginning of your parents' involvement with helping refugees.

Rohe: Well, it all started with, with my mother belonging to the Shelter House and eventually becoming a chairman of it. And these, these were the committees of the Shelter House. This is in front of the, of the Jewish Club, the Jewish Country Club. This is my mother . . .

Hochstadt: Where was the Jewish Country Club?

Rohe: It was uptown. [laughs] It was in the French Concession. I don't remember the, the street. It was beautiful.

Hochstadt: Now, is this what would be called the Jewish, it was called the Jewish Club, it was the Russian Jewish Club? A nice house?

Rohe: Yeah.

Hochstadt: I've been there.

Rohe: You have?

Hochstadt: Now it's the music conservatory.

Rohe: Yeah, it was a mansion, actually, and there was some, some tennis courts and, wait, this is my mom right here. And these were all, they would give these teas, and these are all members of the Shelter House committee.

Hochstadt: Now the Shelter House committee is an entirely Jewish . . .

Rohe: Oh yes, entirely. Oh, totally, yes. And it was Russian Jews.

Hochstadt: . . . this is a Jewish group.

Rohe: Now this is my mother and dad when they came to New Orleans. This is my dad, this is my mother. Oh, I've got, I've got some early pictures right in the living room. Let me get them.

Hochstadt: I'll just turn off . . .

BREAK IN RECORDING

Rohe: Oh, and you might be interested.

BREAK IN RECORDING

Rohe: Here's my dad in his Consulate office. And, oh, here it is, the Shanghai Hebrew Relief Society and . . .

Hochstadt: And Shelter House, 642 Fu Shing Lu, which is Rue Lafayette.

Rohe: . . . Shelter House. And this is the Shanghai Jewish Community . . .

Hochstadt: . . . founded 1917.

Rohe: . . . Association. And this was this Methodist missionary who was crazy about my folks and . . .

Hochstadt: What was his name?

Rohe: His name is, wait, there's a letter from him somewhere. Ralph Ward, yeah, Ralph Ward. What was I going to get you? Oh, pictures of my folks. We were going to go soon.

BREAK IN RECORDING

Hochstadt: So this Shanghai Hebrew Relief Society and Shelter House was . . .

Rohe: It was essentially and originally for older people, that, you know, didn't have family. And, and then, because they had this organization, then when the need of the German Jews coming in, they became aware of that need. Then they transferred, they didn't transfer, they continued this, but they also started helping the German Jews.

Hochstadt: Now here in 1949, the President was H. Comerling, Treasurer was J. Zolowich, Secretary was B. Slosman. Who were the important people in this organization that you remember when your, when you were still there? You, you didn't have much to do with it or didn't really know . . .

Rohe: I'd go to parties and they'd have balls. And my father and I would always dance the first waltz. And, but no, I, I don't, see I was, from 1934 to 1937 I was living at the University of Shanghai with these missionary families. And I'd come home weekends

and I would, I would go to the Club on weekends and play tennis and have dinner and that kind of thing. But, I know [unclear] was a very, was a very prominent name.

Hochstadt: Now your parents were working for this organization. It says for 25 years they were members. This was in 1949.

Rohe: Yeah.

Hochstadt: So they started already in '24, or so. Do you know anything about, specifically about their activities with German refugees? Maybe after you left, things that they told you about? What they did?

Rohe: No. I just know that they, they would raise money and they would find them work and apartments and places to stay. But beyond that specifically I don't know.

Hochstadt: You had said that the first refugees, the German refugees who came were wealthier people . . .

Rohe: Yes.

Hochstadt: Can you say a little more about that? Did you meet any of them or . . .

Rohe: Well, I met two guys who were very good looking, excuse me, they were very Aryan looking. And they were very wealthy, because they'd already bought a car and, and they didn't, didn't talk about Germany. We went to a picnic place and I thought they were pretty cool, very good looking. And, and that was it. There were no more dates. My mother, I think she had met them and she wanted me to take them out, and so I did. But I was just so involved with school and my own activities. I played tennis. Well, for one thing I, I took pre-med and that's pretty tough. And I was on the tennis team, and I was a cheerleader. And I really didn't pay much attention. You know, I, I had a good life. And I'd come home weekends.

Oh, and then in my, my junior year? No, my freshman year, I fell in love with someone who my mother didn't approve of. Actually, that's, that's one reason. I forgot, you asked me why they were so anxious for me to come to this country. That was why. Because I fell in love with this guy from Tientsin, whose father was the symphony conductor in Shanghai. And Jack, and the, he and his parents were, his parents were divorcing, and he was living with his parents in Tientsin.

Hochstadt: What was their last name?

Rohe: Avshalomov. His father was the conductor and also the librarian. And I met him in Dairen that first summer. So that would have been my freshman, freshman-sophomore summer. And, and I knew his father. I, I, I had a crush on this older man. And, and I met him in Dairen on a, he was a champion diver of North China. And I, my first morning in Dairen, I had, I swam to the diving board and saw this guy's back, and it was peeling. And before I realized it I took a little piece of skin and peeled. I couldn't resist. And this guy turned around and it was a younger version of this conductor that I thought was just God's gift to women. And that was his son, so of course I fell madly in love with him. And his father was not only a musician, but he'd left his mother, he was living with a Chinese woman . . .

Hochstadt: And this is why this match was unsuitable from your parents' point of view?

Rohe: Yeah, oh absolutely. I mean maybe a businessman, but really a doctor or a lawyer, or, you know, a professional person. And this kid was working, he was working for a Jewish company in Tientsin. And they were, they were exporting wienie skins. You know, the . . .

Hochstadt: The skins for hot dogs?

Rohe: Skins for hot dogs. And he was an inspector, that's what he did. But he was a really a musician, the kid was. And he's, he, up until he retired he was the conductor of the Portland, Portland, Oregon Symphony.³ Anyway, that, I forgot about that. Sure that's why they wanted me to come to this country. I forgot all about that. They were frantic to get me away from him. And he followed like six months later.

Hochstadt: To Portland?

Rohe: To, well, he, he was able to get, this is such a crazy, he was able to get a scholarship to a music school in San Francisco. And he became sort of an apprentice to the Maine school, the conductor that, who. Honey, what's the name of the conductor for whom the Maine school was created?⁴

Robert Rohe: Oh, Pierre Monteux.

Rohe: Pierre Monteux? Can you believe it? So he, he was an apprentice for Pierre Monteux for like two or three years. And here, the school that, the Pierre Monteux School is right across the street. Life is funny, isn't it? I hate to chase you out, but we've got to go.

END OF INTERVIEW

³ Aaron Avshalomov was conductor of the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra in the 1940s. His son, Jacob Avshalomov, was conductor of the Portland Youth Philharmonic, 1954-1994.

⁴ The Pierre Monteux School for Conductors and Orchestra Musicians, in Hancock, Maine.

