

IMPORTANT

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Interview Transcript Title Page

Collection title:	AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive
Ref. no:	90

Interviewee Surname:	Sharp
Forename:	Klara
Interviewee Sex:	Female
Interviewee DOB:	13 May 1922
Interviewee POB:	Berlin, Germany

Date of Interview:	22 February 2005
Location of Interview:	London
Name of Interviewer:	Dr. Bea Lewkowicz
Total Duration (HH:MM):	1 hour 47 minutes

REFUGEE VOICES THE AJR AUDIO-VISUAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEW: 90

NAME: KLARA SHARP (WITTENBERG)

DATE: 22 FEBRUARY 2005

LOCATION: LONDON

INTERVIEWER: BEA LEWKOWICZ

[Interviewee's maiden name is Wittenberg, her married name is Sharp]

TAPE 1

Tape 1: 0 minute 3 seconds

BL: Today is 22 February 2005. We are conducting an interview with Mrs. Klara Wittenberg. We are in London and my name is Bea Lewkowicz.

BL: Today is 22 February 2005. We are conducting an interview with Mrs. Klara Wittenberg. My name is Bea Lewkowicz and we are in London. What's your name please?

CS: Klara Wittenberg, born Wittenberg.

BL: And when were you born please?

CS: On 13th of May 1922.

BL: And where were you born?

CS: In Berlin.

BL: Mrs. Wittenberg, could you please tell me something about your family background?

CS: Yes. Although I was born in Berlin both my parents come from Poland. My sister was even born in Warsaw, but I was born in Berlin. My father was in the textile business. But you know, the German law is that you are what your father is so, actually I was never German because my father wasn't German. And my father lost his statehood; he became stateless because when he left Poland to come to Germany. He was going to be drafted

into the army and he was married and had a child. So he went over to Germany but lost his Polish ... so he was stateless and I was stateless.

BL: What about your parents' background? Where exactly were they from in Poland?

CS: Not big cities. My mother was from Dobrzyn, my father was from Zielona. I think Dobrzyn was a little city but my father's was more or less a village.

BL: And their parents what were they ...? What were their professions?

CS: They were very orthodox Jews. My grandfather I think had his own synagogue and wrote Torahs and so they were quite orthodox.

BL: Do you remember his name, your grandfather's name?

CS: No, I don't remember.

BL: Did you ever meet your grandparents?

CS: No – yes, I did from my father's side. They were in Germany with us.

BL: I see, so your father came with his parents. When did he come to Germany?

CS: Well, my sister was just a few months old and she would be eighty-five, so about eighty-six years ago.

BL: So roughly in the '20s, more or less.

CS: Yes.

BL: Yes. And why did they go to Germany?

CS: Because he was going to be drafted into the army. And he was married and had a child already. My sister was already born. So then we all went over. But I think my grandparents were already in Germany.

Tape 1: 3 minutes 1 second

BL: So your parents met in Poland. Do you know how they met? Was it arranged?

CS: Yes. It was a shidduch, definitely, yes.

BL: Did they talk about it? How was it arranged, or who ...?

CS: Yes, well, you know, they did talk about it because my mother was actually older than my father and my father used to joke about it that they cheated him, they never told

him her age. Yes, it was definitely a shidduch because they were not even from the same place.

BL: And where did they start married life together?

CS: Well, they started, I think in Zielona, where my father comes from but then when my sister was born they left.

BL: And what are your first memories of growing up in Berlin?

CS: Well, you know, we lived together with my grandparents, which is always very nice for a child. I adored my grandmother because my mother was helping my father in business. So I had much more out of my grandmother than my mother and she was very orthodox. But my grandfather was very ill. You know, I only remember him when he had cancer. He died, I think, when I was eight. And being orthodox I wanted to go to the funeral. But the orthodox Jews don't take children to the funeral if the parents are alive. So I had to stay behind, which I remember I was very upset about.

BL: What was your grandmother's name? Do you remember?

CS: Yes. Mindel.

BL: Mindel Wittenberg?

CS: Yes. They are Wittenbergs, yes, which is actually a German name.

BL: And where did you live in Berlin?

CS: We lived in Wannsee [?] -Ost in Kurfürstendamm, in actually a very nice neighbourhood but not a Jewish neighbourhood. A very un-Jewish neighbourhood.

BL: And your father had a textile business?

CS: When I was born he had a factory, a knitwear factory.

BL: And what else can you remember from the house? You said it was quite orthodox?

CS: No, we didn't have a house, we lived in a flat.

BL: I mean, yes, from your home.

CS: We lived in a flat and ... oh, I don't remember much, as you know. It was an ordinary life – I went to school. We had a flat with a garden. It was on the ground floor and we had a garden and a veranda. It was quite nice. It was very well located. It was very near all public transport. I went to school then and first ... they had one first school

from six to ten, and then I went to the lyceum but there I was kicked out after two, I think, only one and a half years. I had to leave, and then I went to a Jewish school not far, which was a very modern school and there we had ... there is language every morning one hour, and we called the teachers by their first name. It was a very modern Zionistic school. So that was quite good after the lyceum where I went was very strict, you know, they were very ... And it was very difficult. You know, we had to say 'Heil Hitler' when we came in and had to sing all these Nazi songs. It was a very harrowing time. It was such a relief to go to this Jewish school afterwards.

Tape 1: 7 minutes 0 second

BL: Did you experience anti-Semitism in the Volksschule?

CS: Yes, very much. The children were very poisoned. I remember my mother came in, a child opened the door for her when she came home and the other one said to her, 'Don't open the door, they are Jewish.' Yes, I did feel it very much. I was eleven when Hitler came to power.

BL: What other things do you remember from that school environment?

CS: From the school? What, the lyceum or the Jewish school?

BL: The lyceum.

CS: Yes, this was very hard on me. First it was all right but then when Hitler came it was very anti-Semitic, very anti-Jewish and it was really ... I asked my parents to take me out because I just thought I couldn't stand it any longer but my mother said, 'Then wait till the year is out and then you ...' But when the year was out I was kicked out anyway, so it just worked out that way.

BL: Were there any other Jewish children?

CS: Yes, but very few. My sister was there too and I was there. Not a lot, we didn't live in a Jewish neighbourhood. The Jewish school was where I saw Hitler quite a few times because it was in a part where they had all these exhibition halls. And I had to go to the underground station, and sometimes when there was an exhibition I could when Hitler came to visit...

BL: Like a parade? That sort of thing? And do you remember what you were feeling then?

CS: I went straight, when this happened I went quickly into a house because otherwise I would have stood there and to do that (lifts right arm). So I used to quickly run into a house not to... and waited till they passed.

BL: So did you realize as a child there was a danger?

CS: Oh yes. Yes, I was eleven years, you know already.

BL: What was talked about at home at the time? Do you remember? Was emigration discussed at that time?

CS: Well, it was very difficult. My father, strangely, like some others, thought that Hitler wouldn't last, you know, it would be a passing thing. So then they waited and waited, which was of course not very clever. And then my father's business was... he wasn't allowed to do it any more. Then, when we thought about emigrating, my parents thought that I should stop the school and learn something practical to be able to make... to earn a living, so then I left the Jewish school. Anyway, the Jewish school was not allowed to go beyond a certain grade, you know.

Tape 1: 9 minutes 54 seconds

BL: So how many years were you at the Jewish school?

CS: I think I was only three years or so.

BL: What was it called, the Jewish school?

CS: Theodor Herzl School. And then I left the school and I went to learn some trade, and I went to learn hat-making, you know. It was a Jewish concern, a Jewish woman. She had a very nice salon. She used to go to Paris to bring back the latest fashion, and I was quite happy she was Jewish, but then they wouldn't allow me to be there. She had to let me go. In the end she committed suicide; she just couldn't take it, this woman. And then being stateless, my father got a letter that he has to leave Germany or they will take him to concentration camp. And so we couldn't go, although we had family in America, the affidavit that they had wasn't strong enough. And there was also a quota, you know. So there was a Hilfsverein which is helping people. So they said, you know, it's very hard, we could go to South America but then we would have to become Catholic, which we did not want to. So then they said to him, the only way is Shanghai. All you do is buy a ticket if you can get it. So my mother said, 'I am not going to Shanghai.' So he bought a ticket to Shanghai. And then, four weeks later, my mother got the letter that she has to leave Germany or go to a concentration camp. So then it was impossible to get a ticket for the same boat and it was Lloyd Triestino, an Italian ship line, who went to Shanghai. So my parents had a friend who was married out. She was not Jewish, and he had two tickets for him and his wife but his wife changed her mind and said she will not go. And so he came to my father and said, 'You can get my ticket for your wife', which they changed the ticket. You have to pay something but they changed the ticket for my mother. And then my sister got the letter. I was the last one to... I remember when I went to the police station – you had to collect it – when I went to the police station to get the letter I knew exactly what it was, so he said, 'Open it.' I said, 'No, I don't need to open it. I know ...' 'Open it!' he said. He insisted that I open it and read what it said.

Tape 1: 12 minutes 54 seconds

BL: Which year was that? When did you get that letter?

CS: That was '39.

BL: So this was already after Kristallnacht?

CS: Yes yes.

BL: So maybe just before we go on...?

CS: Oh, the Kristallnacht. Well, you see, my father ... the thing was that the Polish Jews were thrown on the border. Poland wouldn't let them in and Germany wouldn't take them back. They were there. But they didn't take my father because he was stateless. So, my father was hiding. We had friends that were Polish but the man had been taken away. So my father was hiding there because we were expecting that they come and take my father. But they didn't take him.

BL: He was stateless because he had given up his Polish citizenship?

CS: Well, the Poles...Yes, because he was a deserter, he was supposed to go into the army. He lost his Polish citizenship. You could nationalize and become German but my father didn't believe in that. He said, 'You know they'll make me stateless any time they like.' So we were stateless. We had 'Stateless' pass.

BL: So your father, they didn't take your father, but he was in hiding anyway...?

CS: They didn't take him away. He was in hiding but they didn't come for him. So my mother had the ticket to go to Shanghai. And they had a ticket for me two months later and I had an aunt who also married out and I was going to stay with my aunt but I would have never made it on this because war broke out. The ship that took my parents to Shanghai never returned because then the war broke out. So they said to me I should go every morning to the Lloyd Triestino, which is the Italian ship line and maybe there is somebody who will return their ticket. Which I did, and every morning I came and they said, 'Try to cry a little. Maybe they feel sorry for you.' But anyway, three days before my parents were supposed to leave, I came to the Lloyd Triestino, he waved to me and said, 'I got a ticket for you.' Which was very lucky, and you know, he could have made quite a bit of money on that ticket and he didn't. We had to pay just the 10% I think which you pay for changing a ticket. But he did not take a penny over, which I thought was very nice.

Tape 1: 15 minutes 33 seconds

BL: Was he German?

CS: No, no, no, an Italian, but they were the Axis anyway. But the Italians were not really anti-Semites and all that. So I did get quickly ready in three days. And it was very funny we were on the boat – we were in different... my father had first class, my mother had second class, and I was third class on the boat.

BL: And where was your sister?

CS: My sister went to England. Here. That's how – why I am here actually. Because she met the man she was going to marry and she went as a domestic you know. Because, we didn't know... many were separated and then we knew she was going to marry him anyway. So she went to England. I could have gone with the Kindertransport to England but my mother wouldn't let me go.

BL: So just to come back, before we talk about the journey - about Kristallnacht. Do you remember Kristallnacht?

CS: Yes, I remember it very well.

BL: Can you talk about it?

CS: Well, my father had already lost his business. He was home. But when we woke up the next morning my father went out and he came back and he was crying with tears on his face. 'The synagogue, they broke in the synagogue, they broke everything in there.' It was a terrible thing. I was still working at this... and it was terrible, you know. It was very, very terrible when you saw all these shops broken in and in big white letters 'Jude'. Yes, it was a terrible thing.

BL: But your father was not ... that's when you expected your father ... No; you said your father wasn't there any more.

CS: No, my father was there.

BL: He was. So when did he go into hiding?

CS: Kristallnacht, yes.

BL: Yes. So he did go?

CS: Yes.

BL: Which synagogue did you use to go in Berlin?

CS: It's Joachim Friedrichstrasse ... You know, Rabbi Prinz was there. What was it called? I can't – Friedenstempel! Yes, Friedenstempel.

Tape 1: 17 minutes 46 seconds

BL: Was it an orthodox synagogue or...?

CS: Yes.

BL: And so when your father talked about the temple it was that synagogue he meant?

CS: Yes.

BL: And you used to go every Shabbat or...?

CS: Well my father did. We children used to go in the Holy Days you know like Purim and Rosh Hashanah and Pesach, you know, when Yomtov was...

BL: So was it after Kristallnacht that you really...?

CS: I belonged to – actually, this rabbi was really quite well known. He had a Youth movement which I belonged to so I did go to the synagogue for meetings. It was a little yellow thing we wore that was our sign from it.

BL: What was the name of the Youth movement?

CS: It was Rabbi Prinz Youth Movement - something like that.

BL: And what did you do, do you remember, in the youth movement?

CS: Well we went on – we had Hachsharah. There was one Jewish farm which was unusual where people – where youngsters went before they went to Israel to learn about farming and so on. So we went there and we had meetings. Yes, it was very nice.

BL: Was that something that your parents were considering, so you too would be sent on...?

CS: No my mother – if my parents would have gone to Israel yes, but my mother wouldn't let me go without her, no. So Shanghai was a four week trip. It was quite interesting, it went through Africa and Hong Kong and Port Said and it was quite an interesting trip. And we all wished it would go on forever because when we arrived in Shanghai it was very sad. When we arrived in Shanghai there was really nothing. They had what they call a *Heim* - a home you know. Well, my parents went into where the married couples were and I went into where the females - and it was you know like bunks.

Tape 1: 20 minutes 10 seconds

CS: And the toilet was a hole where you sit on. It was terrible and you didn't get hardly anything to eat you know. It was a very sad beginning. So I had to immediately

start to make some money. And I talked to someone and he said to me that there is a Russian bakery which has shops all over Shanghai and he's always looking for salesgirls. So I went to him with this man who told me that thing and he engaged me immediately. And he said 'You can start tomorrow.' And Shanghai was divided. You know the Japanese had taken part of Shanghai already, because the Japanese islands were very overcrowded so this Hongkew where we were landing when we arrived - the Japanese had taken this already. The Chinese had more or less destroyed it before they gave it up. So it was not a nice place to come. But that was Hongkew and then there was a French concession and a British settlement. Shanghai didn't really belong to the Chinese at all when we came, as a matter of fact the park in Shanghai said 'Dogs and Chinese not allowed'. They were really not treated very nicely by the British. And so...well I started in a bakery which was actually in the Japanese part - all Japanese, so it wasn't easy because the Japanese ladies did not speak any English or anything else. But I was quite popular because I was a German girl and they thought they were the Axis. Italy and Germany were the Axis. So I worked there but...and you know we... there were quite a number of Russian Jews in Shanghai because not all Russian Jews were communist. When the were communist revolution was the White Russians - there were a lot of White Russians of course in Shanghai but also Jewish Russians who did not want the Communists in Shanghai. And it was quite a rivalry with the White Russians - they didn't like our immigration at all. As we were more and more, the Jews won the overhand over them.

Tape 1: 23 minutes 4 seconds

BL: What were you allowed to take as luggage, do you remember?

CS: Yes, when we left Germany - no money. I think ten Marks and... no jewellery. I think we were allowed to take the wedding ring of my mother and some- very little. But we did manage to send - you know that's always the way, when you pay - we did send some suitcases. We had to go to Trieste where our ship was, and we sent some suitcases - smuggled out - there were always people willing to do that. And so we did have some and I remember we bought German cameras and things like that which were very popular and which we could make into money when we arrived in Shanghai - yes.

BL: So can you just tell me the dates of your journey? When did you board the ship?

CS: We boarded the ship in March '39, arrived in April '39.

BL: And what people did you meet on the ship?

CS: They were all refugees. All our people. There was nobody else. They didn't let everybody down at every port you know but the strange thing that since we had this stateless passport which they didn't even know what it was ... They usually let me down because they thought I was not German - I wasn't Jewish. But we did have - you know we had to put in our passports 'Sarah' and 'Israel' for men.

BL: But you had a 'J'. But you didn't have – at that time you didn't need a visa for Shanghai?

CS: No.

BL: You just had to have a ticket?

CS: Yes, but that changed you know. As people came in, our people are sometimes not very nice. It was the Japanese that let us in – and there was this Jewish man who got through to this man ... and said 'You know you can make money on this one. Don't let them in. They have to have a visa and you can cash in on the visa.' Which he did. Because my husband wanted to bring his parents out and he didn't have the money and he told them how much it would be to get the visas and he couldn't get it. He tried very hard. I wasn't married then you know. Then finally the man said 'Look, I'll give you one more week. If you don't get the money, the visas go to somebody else.' And he couldn't get it. He didn't give him the visas. He was later put on trial as a collaborator. I think it was the death penalty...

BL: What was his name?

Tape 1: 26 minutes 22 seconds

CS: Probst. And strangely enough, my daughter's married name is Probst.

BL: So who was he, the guy who was doing...?

CS: He was actually – he was quite a well- very educated man. He was a gangster, he wanted to make money out of it. The Japanese and him shared the money that they made. They came to my husband – then I was married. I married when the war was over. They came to my husband to be a witness because of this, with his parents. And he thought about it and said 'If he can live with what he did, I'm not going to go and be a witness.' So he didn't go, but they convicted him anyway.

BL: Of collaboration?

CS: Yes.

BL: So he was a German – he was Jewish?

CS: He was a German Jew, yes. Yes.

BL: Anyway.

CS: But we came still you know just to buy a ticket – it was only when you know a lot of – we were friendly - 20,000. You know the Shanghai people meet every year and have a reunion. I went with my daughter on the last one in San Francisco. And when the war

broke out between Japan and America they put the Americans and British into camps. And the ones that were neutral had an armband with an 'N' and they thought we were their friends being German and they said 'Will you celebrate our victories with us?' Till the Germans told them that we were not their friends, we were their enemies. But they didn't want to put us into camps any more case they had to feed all these British and Americans so they put us in a ghetto where we couldn't go out. But we had to fend for ourselves.

BL: That was two years later wasn't it?

CS: No - two years? We were interned for two years. It was later...

BL: Yes, so this is – we're talking about '41. Yes, from 1941 to 1943? Let's maybe just talk about that first period '39-'41, so you said you worked in a bakery?

CS: I worked in a bakery and my father tried also some business but it wasn't very good so, you know... On my day off I used to go... they had a roof garden on a cinema where they made – on the roof garden they made like a nightclub with dancing and food. And I used to go on my day off with my parents. And the owner asked me, 'How much do you earn in the bakery?' And I told him, and he said, 'Well you can earn much more if you become a waitress here.' So my father wasn't too happy about it but I said, 'Look I'll try!' So I did finish my job because that was very hard in the bakery because it was a long job, my father had to take me home because it was too dangerous to walk by myself. So I did take the job and work as a waitress and I did earn about three times as much as a sales girl in the bakery. It became quite popular this night club or whatever you call it. Because they said, 'The German girls have to work as waitresses and come from wonderful families...' We had quite a well-known band. I worked late but I had the whole day to...you know we only started towards the evening. And then I also worked as a croupier in a nightclub – in a casino. Shanghai had a whole road...you know, when the war ended the Japanese took the whole of Shanghai of course – where they had one casino next to the other and that of course was very good because when they win in the casino they give you a very nice tip. But I had to work from ten in the evening till six o'clock in the morning so that was very hard. But I did this for a while. I made quite a bit of money.

Tape 1: 31 minutes 8 seconds

BL: Who were the people who had some money? Who came to play?

CS: Oh, you know gambling is always popular – any nationality came to play. The Chinese – there were also Red Chinese and Japanese and neutral...

BL: So at that time there was quite a liberal atmosphere there in Shanghai?

CS: Yes, when I was a croupier – it was not in the ghetto. It wasn't the war yet between - Japan was not involved in the war yet.

BL: So the outbreak of war in Europe didn't affect you basically – 1939?

CS: No. no...

BL: And how did your parents manage? What did they do?

CS: My father didn't do too well in Shanghai unfortunately. He did some manufacturing of paper bags and paper business. Not a great deal. He didn't do too well.

BL: And your mother?

CS: My mother didn't work at all. But I helped them quite a bit.

BL: Did they have any other assistance from any Hilfsverein or...?

CS: No...no. No there was this home that we started out in where people who had nothing did live you know.

BL: But then you moved somewhere else?

CS: We moved out yes.

BL: Where did you move to?

CS: We stayed in the same ... Hongkew there, but we rented a very small flat.

BL: So do you remember some encounters that you had working as a croupier or in that nightclub?

CS: Well, yes it was quite nice. I mean it was more or less that they thought it was nice to have a young girl there standing. I used to take in the chips and mount them up. I had a Chinese man who paid out the sum. But you know it's a whole night, it's quite strenuous. And in the nightclub where I worked as a waitress..., the Lambeth Walk was popular in those days you know. The thing was we had a very good band which was a well-known German band – a Jewish band. And he used to call us in the middle and we used to dance and we all wore uniform. And we were about 12 waitresses you know. We had to dance with the Lambeth Walk. That was the show – the entertainment show.

Tape 1: 33 minutes 59 seconds

BL: What was the name of the band, do you remember?

CS: Ja, Weber - It was quite a well-known...

BL: Sorry what was it again?

CS: Weber. They were very good. Yes and you know we had terrific tips because they felt so sorry for us – you know - that German girls have to be waitresses and so on... I helped my parents quite a bit with that.

BL: And did you have any contact with your sister at all?

CS: No. No we didn't have any. We knew that she got married to...and then that stopped. We had to wait until the war was over. Then she had already a little...her son.

BL: So those two years in Shanghai the atmosphere was quite...I mean people were struggling but it was manageable.

CS: Struggling...very much struggling, yes, yes, yes. Because it was very difficult. The Chinese worked for nothing and it was very hard to compete for anybody. It was a hard life, not easy.

BL: Did you have any personal contact with Chinese or Japanese?

CS: Yes I did know the Chinese people. I knew this man who... He imported Coca Cola to Shanghai and he was doing very well but when the war broke out that was finished you know? And you know the Chinese have...His father...you know, they had these opium dens. They said when you get old you should take opium and make your life easy till you die. And it was then very hard for him to supply his father with opium because the business was finished. But they had land. So I said, 'Well sell the land.' And he said 'No, one never sells land.' We did have contact. We lived in among them. When we were in the ghetto the Chinese did not move out. They lived with us.

BL: So what happened exactly? Do you remember when war broke out?

Tape 1: 36 minutes 29 seconds

CS: When the war broke out first you know it started during the night - Pearl Harbour. We heard it. We didn't know what it was but that's how it started and we thought it was manoeuvres or something. Then the next morning the Japanese said 'It's war with America' which was of course for us very bad. but as I said they first thought we were their friends. So we didn't know what to do. It was very difficult to know how to behave and say anything. And they were quite sure that they were going to win the war strangely enough. When the Japanese Kaiser had his speech that they had to surrender they cried – you know – like babies. They were still thinking that they were going to win the war. I remember you know it was very hot. The war lasted longer than the one here. We lived very poor and it was terribly hot. And we used to put at night the beds out in... we had a courtyard because it was a bit better when the climate was not so hot and we had a little roof garden with just one bed. My father was on that roof garden at night because...And when the war was over all of a sudden – my father used to wear nightdresses, long nightdresses - he was standing there in the middle of the night and said 'The War is over.'

So we thought he had a bad dream we said 'Go back to bed.' He said 'The war is over!' I said 'Listen go...' so then I said 'Well, I must go up and see' and he was right because his roof garden looked into that home, you know, I said some people were dancing there. Because I think it was the Swedish Consul had phoned the home telling them that the Kaiser had surrendered so the war is over and they were dancing. And we thought he had nightmares. So we got dressed and went over there. And then the Japanese said 'The war is not over. Everything stays as it is.' But then the Americans threw down leaflets saying, 'The war is over and we are landing any moment.' And they did. Because during the war, when the war was on, our house was made out of glass and wood, it was very unsafe to stay there. So we had an entrance hall which was made of stone. So when the bombs came every morning at 11 o'clock, we used to go into that and lay down in that entrance hall. We had to extinguish all the fires because we had no electricity- no gas. We used to cook on coal - which even that was hard to get. So they used to come regularly the Americans at 11 o'clock and so at about 1 o'clock the bombing stopped.

Tape 1: 40 minutes 10 seconds

BL: At night or in the morning?

CS: No, during the day - not at night

BL: And when were the bombings - which years?

CS: Hm?

BL: Which year were the bombings?

CS: Well they lasted till the war was over in the end of August - so it was July - August.

BL: Can you tell me about that whole period, from '41 to '45? You said you were put in a ghetto, so was that different?

CS: It was very difficult because it stopped so many people from earning a living. They had...when we were in the ghetto they had two offices, with each one was a Japanese... I don't know what you call it. One was - would give you passports for one day if they thought it was something worthwhile or necessary. And one would give if you had a job outside the ghetto. If they deemed that for necessary you would get a month passport. And the one who gave the month passport was really a madman. I think they later killed him. And I remember my father wanted a day pass to go and buy his paper because he was doing this paper business. And he said 'You come with me.' And I said, 'I don't think that's a good idea.' But he said, 'No you come with me.' And we came into this Japanese - we had to wait there and queue - and he immediately knew what my father meant you know - he thought if he would see the young girl it would help him. He threw him out immediately. Now I told him I said, 'I know you....' When he went later by himself he did get one another day. But my husband - I wasn't married to him yet -

was lucky. He used to get a passport all the time. You know it was just a matter of luck. He was... really like crazy these two and just like the friends he took them. I had a friend who wanted a passport and every time he went there they gave him some slapping around and threw him out. So somebody said, 'You know he likes cakes. Maybe if you bring him some cake maybe he will...' So he came with this box of cake. It didn't help at all. He was thrown out.

BL: So that was a Japanese guard or ...?

Tape 1: 42 minutes 50 seconds

CS: Japanese, yes. No they were army officers.

BL: So how was the ghetto guarded?

CS: They had sentries standing on the border line you know?

BL: But could you leave?

CS: No, if you went out without a passport that was very dangerous. No I don't think anybody did...

BL: Were people punished?

CS: Yes we had people thrown in jail and once you went into jail you got all kinds of illnesses. Shanghai was full of illnesses like typhoid and cholera and... Yes, we lost quite a number of people.

BL: But nobody was shot? It wasn't a ghetto in a sort of...?

CS: No, but they had Japanese soldiers standing around. And... I don't think anybody dared to- But they did throw quite a number of our people into jail.

BL: So how many people were in that ghetto? All the...?

CS: Yes, we were 20,000.

BL: All the 20,000? And was there any work in the ghetto?

CS: Yes because you see we did...you know we had all kinds of...The neutral came to us. We had opera, we had theatre, we tried to - we had nightclubs, we had... you know.

BL: So who could come into the...?

CS: They could come in.

BL: Anyone?

CS: Yes, the Japanese and Chinese could come anyway. The others like Swedes or neutral countries – they had an armband with an ‘N’. They could come in - but we couldn’t go out.

BL: And in which part of Shanghai was that?

CS: Hongkew.

BL: Where you arrived?

CS: Yes.

BL: How large was that area?

CS: Well it was very crowded. Very crowded - because the Chinese lived there too.

BL: But they could leave?

CS: They could leave, come in and out yes.

BL: So did you live with another family in the ghetto or did you...?

CS: No we had just one room.

BL: And was there sanitation, was there water?

Tape 1: 45 minutes 4 seconds

CS: Well, the whole house had one toilet there... and you know bath - we couldn’t have hot water bath. The Chinese said you could buy hot water. You know you went in to give him —wasn’t very expensive – and then he came to us and filled the bathtub with – you know you have seen him with these things – one bucket here one bucket there and they filled the bath with hot water. And that was the only way we could have a bath. Opposite...in our ghetto was a jail - the biggest jail in Asia actually, where some of the British and American – they had a hospital also there. Some of the British and American from camp who were ill were sent to the jail hospital. When we went on the roof of where we lived - we could see them. They thought we had news - we thought they might have some news because we were not allowed to use a radio. Because the Japanese did not want us to hear, so it was too dangerous. They caught you having a radio and they would smash your whole thing...So we used to do sign language with the people...and then they made me First Aid, did I say that already?

BL: No.

CS: The Japanese said to me 'You are First Aid.' So when the bombing came because there were a lot of people that were killed. I had to put on my white *Kittel* and put a Red Cross thing over and go to that jail because they used to put the wounded – they didn't put them in the hospital - they were on the courtyard lying on the floor there. And our emigrant doctors went there to operate on them and help them. You know I wasn't a nurse, I don't know why they made me this. But all I could you know they were sometimes full of dirt and so I could clean them up, give them something to drink and prepare them for the doctor.

BL: Did you work in the ghetto?

CS: Yes

BL: What work – was that as a croupier?

CS: What?

BL: You said you worked as a croupier.

CS: No, the croupier was before. No then I was a waitress again. We had coffee shops and restaurants where the neutrals came and...

BL: What sort of...where did you work?

CS: I worked in a sort of...you could eat...it was a sort of nightclub and we had even a little band.

BL: What was it called that nightclub?

CS: I can't even remember the name. I can't even remember the name...

BL: It was similar, so you would work in the evenings?

CS: Yes, I used to start in the evenings.

BL: So it was a sort of semi-open ghetto where people could come in? You couldn't leave.

CS: Yes, yes...

BL: So it meant you had contact with people who were outside?

CS: Yes.

BL: So you were informed in a way?

CS: No we were not. You know because as I said we were not allowed to...yes the neutrals did tell us...yes, yes.

BL: You could speak to them?

Tape 1: 48 minutes 33 seconds

CS: Yes, yes.

BL: So that is interesting...

CS: Yes but it was very difficult because ... although the bombing was usually during the day, we had to black out, which was very difficult because where we lived it was only glass and wood. And if there was just a little slit of light they would come in and smash up your furniture and everything. So it was... It got so bad that we used to sit in the dark in the evenings. We were afraid to...

BL: Who would come? The Japanese? The army?

CS: Yes.

BL: So the other thing I wanted to ask, how often would people come and search the flat? The Army? The Guards?

CS: Yes they were in control all the time.

BL: So once you were on the street you could see these patrols or were they sort of only on the outside?

CS: No- no, you could meet them anywhere; you never know where they were.

BL: Was it a feeling of danger or was it that you knew what to do and what not to do and if you didn't do it you felt sort of safe enough?

CS: No you were never sure with them what they – you know - you never knew where you were with them. It was a very difficult situation.

BL: And you said in order to apply for that...?

CS: I was almost raped by one of these guards because...I was coming with a rickshaw and he stopped me and... The rickshaw coolie left immediately. And he said to put my arms up to search for things but I realised what he meant. So we had a little fight. I started screaming and eventually he let me go, yes.

BL: Was it a Japanese guard?

CS: It was a Japanese soldier who was just standing guard – you know?

BL: Was it a common occurrence? Did the young girls have problems like that?

Tape 1: 50 minutes 34 seconds

CS: Yes, it was not easy. Well, I could smell already he had been drinking. And they were very bad when they...you know, with drinking. They got drunk very quickly.

BL: So there was a feeling that you didn't know...

CS: It was – we were in danger yes. I didn't dare go out by myself or so.

BL: You said your father would come with you?

CS: Yes.

BL: You said before that there was theatre and opera. Do you remember anything of that cultural life?

CS: Yes, we had some quite well-known comedians, opera singers and actors. And there was a cinema where I told you, where I used to work. We could hire that cinema and have performances, yes.

BL: Do you remember anything – any...?

CS: Yes I saw quite a number of operas, operettas - yes.

BL: What sort of opera? Do you remember which ones?

CS: You know a famous one – 'Merry Widows' and quite a number of them. It was very nice. I mean it was not ideal but they did what they could – but it was - yes.

BL: And people outside, people would come to those shows?

CS: Yes.

BL: What else was there, you said there was theatre as well...opera, theatre...

CS: Well they also had Chinese theatres there - yes.

BL: What other things – are there other things I haven't asked you from that ghetto time?

CS: From that ghetto time...well, it was a very sad time. Well it was a very sad time. People were very badly off and the winters were very bad because it could get very cold and there was no heating. And we had no gas and hardly any electricity. It was very hard.

BL: What was your daily life look like - a day? What would – how would your day be structured? You would get up...?

Tape 1: 53 minutes 5 seconds

CS: Yes well as I said it was – when the war broke out and we were in the ghetto – it was bombing every morning. So from about 11 till about 1 o'clock we were lying in this entrance hall waiting for the bombing to stop.

BL: But that was at the end, not at the beginning...

CS: Well the moment that it started the war, the Americans came bombing.

BL: And then in the evening you would go to...

CS: In the evening I worked.

BL: Was there any starvation? Did people have real malnutrition? There must have been...

CS: Oh yes, very much so. There were certain things...and they didn't have anything to wear – they had no clothes – no it was very hard, very hard time.

BL: Were there institutions or any organisations that helped?

CS: Well we didn't get – we didn't get any money from the Joint [Distribution Committee] or from the...I mean - No, it was very bad. I said you know the only one they let in was the Yeshiva from America but that only went to the Yeshiva.

Tape 1: 54 minutes 14 seconds

BL: Can you tell us about it? Was there a Yeshiva in Shanghai?

CS: There was a Yeshiva. They came – they were also like we – immigrants. There was a whole Yeshiva. And they were actually doing very well because somehow or other the Japanese let money in if an American brother or sister Yeshiva sent them money. And they even married girls who weren't orthodox at all but they married them because they were very well-to-do. So they said they would learn the dinim for being orthodox and I went to quite a few weddings from the Yeshiva bochas - yes.

BL: Do you remember the name of the Yeshiva, where did they come from?

CS: I can't remember really.

BL: No problem. So how big was that Yeshiva?

CS: It was quite a number I don't know how many but it was quite a number.

BL: And they married local refugees?

CS: They married non-orthodox girls who became orthodox because they were doing so well. They were in the money.

BL: So were there in fact weddings?

CS: Yes, yes, yes, there were weddings. I went to quite a few. We had this synagogue where also I got married then when the war was over.

BL: Where was the Synagogue?

CS: In Hongkew.

BL: What sort of synagogue was it?

CS: It was quite nice. Not a big synagogue but it wasn't bad; quite nice.

BL: Was that synagogue already there before?

CS: Yes, the synagogue was there.

Tape 1: 55 minutes 58 seconds

BL: Aha, so then Jews lived there before it became a ghetto.

CS: Yes Jews lived there – there were Russian Jews, yes.

BL: How did the Yeshiva...?

CS: They also had – the Chinese have – they say Shabbats and they say they are Jewish you know. And then they have black Jews, you know.

BL: Did they have kosher meat? Did the Yeshiva – did they manage to get kosher...?

CS: Yes they made their own shechita and did their own yes.

BL: So actually in the ghetto you could get kosher meat?

CS: If you had the money, yes.

BL: Can you tell me how you met your future husband?

CS: Actually when I was a waitress, my husband was in Dachau – you know he was in the concentration camp. Shall I tell you how he –it was quite interesting. My husband had a car, he was a traveller and a friend told him, a non-Jewish friend, said, ‘Don’t go home. They’re collecting the Jews to interning. Take your car and go. I don’t know where but go.’ So he took the car and he thought he would go to his friend, and take his friend and they’ll drive. So he went to his friend and as he came the Gestapo was there, and they said ‘Are you Jewish?’ And you couldn’t say no, because that was very dangerous so he had to say yes. They took him to the concentration camp, took him with his car and said ‘Who has a car?’ So my husband said, ‘That’s nice, I’ll be a chauffeur and I have a car.’ So they took it away of course immediately. And he was lucky: he went into the kitchen, so he could always smuggle some pieces of bread in his trousers for his friends. While he was in Dachau, he was allowed to write a little note to his parents and it just said – it was a very, very cold winter that winter when they were –‘Please send warm underwear.’ And they did. And he got this nice underwear and he said wonderful and he put it on. And you know you could not go to the toilet by yourself. If you had to go during the night to the toilet, you had to say ‘Toilet.’ And you then you had to stand there till there were ten. And then the ten, it wasn’t toilet it was just a...These ten were taken to the thing. He had to stand there, wait, he was one of the first...and it was too late - he couldn’t wait.

(Inaudible for the remainder of TAPE ONE)

Tape 1: 60 minutes 1 second

End of TAPE ONE

TAPE TWO

Tape 2: 0 minute 4 seconds

BL: This is Tape Two. We are conducting an interview with Mrs Klara Wittenberg. We were talking about your meeting your husband in Shanghai.

CS: Yes I met him when he came to Shanghai. He came where I was working as a waitress and he had a cup of coffee and then he asked me out and I went out with him. And I think that was the last money he spent. If I would have asked for a piece of cake he wouldn’t have been able to pay for it. And so I saw him – but you know it was a war and it was a ghetto and things. But then the war was over. He came to me and he said ‘Shall we get married?’ And we did. Yes and it was in that synagogue. By the way, when we all left Shanghai you know, when the communists were taking over we sort of donated this shul to the Americans but I don’t really know what happened to the synagogue. It was a nice little synagogue and it was quite a nice wedding. It was very – the freedom and everything was fine. At that time we thought ‘Now the war’s over - they’ve lost the war and everything will be wonderful’. But it wasn’t really. Because we couldn’t leave Shanghai you know. The American and British had all been evacuated because the communists were just outside Shanghai. There was no really resistance.

BL: The Chinese communists?

CS: Yes. But the Japanese were finished. They were shipped back to their country. And they were prisoners of war. The Japanese were finished with China. China belonged to China again. But it was Chiang Kai Shek who was the leader but Mao Tse Tung was taking over from him. And they were already outside Shanghai. And we were still not...didn't know...Shall I tell you how this was? You couldn't get a passage out because all the foreigners had left. And we couldn't go anywhere. We could go back to Germany, which I refused. But America ... my husband's quota wasn't... I could have gone with my husband but my parents couldn't go. You know, it was by quota and me being born in Berlin my quota wasn't too bad. And then actually my mother's brother sent us a permit from Australia but the Australians were really not nice people because they never let any coloured person into Australia and they were also anti-Semitic.

Tape 2: 3 minutes 0 second

So when we finally were called to the Australian embassy he said 'We have a permit for you to come to...' – it had been there for one year - they had never notified us. So he said, 'You can go with your husband and child but your parents are too old.' My parents were only 60 or 65 so I said 'Well, then you know what you can do with your affidavit.' And so then Israel was just declared a state in '48 –right? And they did send a man immediately – a consul to Shanghai – who said 'You can all go to Israel. We are hiring two boats to take you out.' And these were the first legal visas actually. 'But we take young people with children first.' So I said I would not go. He said 'No, we will not separate families. You can take your parents...we will take all of you.' So we did. We did register for the things and they and not the Israelis, but the Joint [Distribution Committee], I think, hired these two boats to take us out. And the one boat that we were assigned on ran on a sandbank by Manila, and was stuck. We were told what we could take; it was like a troop transporter – we were only allowed to take one suitcase and this, that and the other. And we were sitting already packed on this...I left everything. I had a Chinese nanna for my daughter. So whatever I had to leave I left to her. She could not understand that I wasn't taking her. She thought that I was a very bad person that I left her there - not take her along with ... So we were sitting there on tenterhooks because you could hear the communists outside Shanghai and one didn't know...We had waited once too long in Germany. We didn't know what the communists would do to us in Shanghai. But New Year's Eve the boat came in. They freed it from the sandbank – it came in on New Years Eve and they said 'Everybody on board.' So we went. It was a troop transporter. It was not a luxury thing. They didn't let us go through the Suez Canal, the Arabs, so we had to go via South Africa – cross the equator twice. And there was one child who had the measles and brought it on to the boat and the first one that got it was my daughter. So there was a little isolation thing on the ship where I had to go with her.

Tape 2: 6 minutes 10 seconds

And there was unfortunately a very abnormal child who had this too and she was very dangerous. I had to sit all night because she used to grab her, you know. My husband had

to bring the food up for us. So it was not a nice voyage. It was four weeks. And then we came to...Genova [Genoa]? - To Italy where they had another boat waiting for us which was even worse. And it was a Greek boat that used to do all these illegal runs to Israel. Of course at first he couldn't understand that he was going in broad daylight. He used to go at night, who took us to Haifa. But it was terribly crowded. We took even survivors - Holocaust survivors on - and the men didn't have any cabins. They had to sleep wherever they could and find a space. I was lucky because I had a baby I had a bunk. And then we arrived in Haifa. But it was also very hard going because they had just declared the state but that's all. There was nothing. It was very difficult.

BL: So you were back basically on a boat almost ten years after you were on a boat to Shanghai?

CS: Yes.

BL: So you left Shanghai 19...?

CS: We left New Year's Eve 1948-49 and we arrived in February in Israel.

BL: Maybe before we talk about that period let's just slightly go back and speak about the time of '40...After you got married - what happened then?

CS: Well after I got married it was actually quite a good time because it was a duty-free zone for one year. You know they didn't...my husband did very well actually. He did very well. He imported materials and he did quite well. So we lived very nicely then, for that time till the communists were coming.

Tape 2: 8 minutes 43 seconds

BL: How did your husband...? You said he was in Dachau. How did he get out and how did he get to Shanghai?

CS: Well Dachau...in that time after the Kristallnacht when they took them into the concentration camp you could get out if you could prove that you would leave Germany immediately. And his sister-in-law got him a ticket to Shanghai, so he got out then. But he lost his parents. Actually, the mother died in the concentration camp and five sisters and their families. But the father survived it. The father survived it but he didn't live much. You know my husband had a brother in Chile in South America. He went to the brother and I think he lived another year or so.

BL: How did your parents react to your marriage? Did they want you to get married or did they...?

CS: Yes, yes they got on very well, my mother and my husband -yes.

BL: And then you had a daughter? When was it...?

CS: I had a daughter – she's now 57. She was born in... wait a minute - '47- yes. I got married in '46 and she was born in '47. And I regret very much having... but you know I was always on the go and had to work. Now I'm sorry - I could have brought up another child.

BL: And where was she born? You said there was a hospital?

CS: Yes we had a Jewish hospital which was very nice and I was booked to have her. But two babies died just shortly before I was to give birth. So I said to my husband, 'Look, I'm not going in to that hospital.' I went into... actually it was a German hospital – really German nurses and... things - but it was very good. They were very good.

BL: And that Jewish hospital - when was that founded?

CS: It was there all the time.

BL: It was in the ghetto?

CS: Yes.

BL: And the doctors – the refugee doctors?

CS: We had a lot of doctors, yes.

BL: What was the name of the hospital?

CS: I can't remember. Yes the hospital was there, and when this bombing came in they brought all the doctors from the hospital. They used to come and tend as best they could. But they wouldn't even let them in to the hospital - the jail hospital – they had to be treated in the courtyard on the floor there.

Tape 2: 11 minutes 33 seconds

BL: And did that hospital have supplies and medication, I mean - were they equipped?

CS: Well not really very well equipped – we lost a lot of people with typhoid, with cholera, all sorts of... a lot of people.

BL: Did you get ill at all during your time in the ghetto?

CS: No I wasn't too bad. I had a chronic amoebic dysentery which was very hard to cure. I couldn't cure it at all in Shanghai. Then I tried in Israel and it didn't work either. But when I came actually to America it got better.

BL: And then you said after you got married it was a better period?

CS: Yes. Definitely. Definitely. It was a bit disappointing because we thought, you know, everything would be all right, we could go where we want, but it wasn't like that at all. All the old rules were still...you know you couldn't go to America if you wanted. Because when the Hungarian war...they did make a special effort to get the Hungarians out. But they didn't do anything for us.

BL: Where would you have liked to have gone?

CS: We would have gone to America - because most of my friends went to America.

BL: So most of those 20,000 Jews...

CS: Well some went - some went back to Germany because they used to give them what they called Rückkehrgeld - they would get a certain amount - it was quite a good amount of money if they came back by the German government so quite a number went back to Germany, which I wouldn't consider at all. And then they went to Australia, they went to America, to South America - you know it depended on where some had families.

BL: So by the time you left were there still many other refugees around or were there not?

CS: Not a lot. Well we had these two boats. That was the last out. We had a handful of people who stayed in Shanghai. I knew that there was a veterinarian who said, 'Well the communists need an animal doctors too and I'm too old to leave.' So there was a handful. Whatever happened to them I don't really know.

BL: How were they treated by the Chinese do you know?

CS: I don't know I never got any contact with them.

Tape 2: 13 minutes 59 seconds

BL: So when you left - the communists - were they already in Shanghai or not?

CS: Almost. But there was not...they just took Shanghai. There was no fighting. They didn't fight. They just took over.

BL: So it was - going to Israel was a sort of last...

CS: Yes, we were the last to leave yes.

BL: Did you speak any Hebrew at all?

CS: Yes I did because you know I did go to a Jewish school in Berlin where I said before. That was as a language we had every morning one hour Ivrit. And when we came

to Israel the children thought 'She's a strange child, she can't speak Ivrit.' - I mean she was only two years old you know. They thought she was not normal not to be speaking. So I put her in a kindergarten immediately to...they said that's the only way. It was hard for her. My daughter had it very difficult. She was born in Shanghai. She had a Chinese Amah. So she spoke in Shanghai with my parents German. With the Amah English and then we went to Israel where she had... but children learn quick- where she had to learn Ivrit. It took her only two months. .And then from Israel she had to go to America where she had to speak English again. And not only change the language, you know it's difficult for a child to be dragged around the world in different circumstances - different schools and different everything. But I think in a way it forms your character too. I think it made a better person out of her. She's a very good girl yes - very good.

BL: But you think it affected her?

CS: I think it does affect you when you have hard times, you know. Being spoiled you think it's all coming your way.

BL: What were your first impressions of Israel at the time?

Tape 2: 16 minutes 13 seconds

CS: Well you know I thought I'd come to my people and my country and I will never have this anti-Semitism and all this again, but it wasn't quite like this. You know they had a very, very hard life in Israel. There were hardly any families that had a flat to themselves - they used to share flats. So they sort of resented the newcomers. You know they thought 'they will come and they will get flats.' They used to say 'We have put our blood in this thing.' So it wasn't quite as I expected it. But you know, you can't really blame them. They really, really had hard, hard times.

BL: Where did you go in Israel?

CS: Well actually, my husband did very well when the war was over, so we had some money in America. So we did buy a flat in Haifa. We arrived in Haifa and stayed in Haifa because it was very nice - but it was very difficult. I mean, I had to stand - I spent most of my time standing in queues to get something for my child like an egg or a bit of butter or something. They really had nothing. It was very difficult.

BL: And where were your parents?

CS: Yes, my parents came with me to Israel. My parents - we were together in Israel. Now in Israel my father...There is a Kaiser-Frazer - they used to make cars - an American firm that made cars. I suppose you never heard of it but in those days...They opened a factory in Haifa for these cars, and the director of this factory was a relative of ours and he gave my father a job - a nice job which he liked very much. He had this little house there and it was a duty free one. He had this little house where he was king. He had to decide who can come in and who can't come in. So they said they wouldn't go any

more. When we were in Israel we had a call from the American Embassy that our quota has come – we can go to America. And my husband said he couldn't make it in Israel – we must go. So it was hard for me. My father said no – he's not going any more – he's staying. So they're both buried in Israel. But we left – we left for America.

Tape 2: 19 minutes 9 seconds

BL: When did you leave?

CS: We left in '62 – no, '62 I came to England. We left in '52, I'm sorry. We spent three years in Israel. In '52 I went via England to see my sister and then we went to America where we had lots of friends. A lot of Shanghai people.

BL: When did you re-establish contact with your sister?

CS: When the war was over you know there were these Red Cross letters of 25 worlds. And she came to Israel. There was a letter that she had a baby boy and all was well and then she came - she came to visit us in Israel.

BL: So you hadn't seen her for...?

CS: For the duration, from '39 - yes.

BL: So how was that reunion?

CS: Yes, it was all right.

BL: But at that point you didn't consider coming to England?

CS: No. When we went to America we went via England and we stayed two weeks in England - before going to America. You know, when I lost my husband, then I came to England to see my sister and I married ...I went back but we then got eventually married - her brother-in-law. So we were two brothers married to two sisters.

BL: So where did you settle in America?

CS: We settled in '52. We had a lot of friends there so...I don't know whether this is interesting. You see we were sponsored. My best friend – you saw the picture there – my best friend married an American. We were freed by the Americans and she met this Commander of the Navy which of course was not Jewish. And I was very much against it. But it was a big love affair and he did take her to...he had to go back to America and she followed eventually. Her parents were actually in South America. And then she married him. And he sponsored us, although I was so against the marriage but I must say it was a very happy marriage. He was very nice. A very, very nice man.

BL: What was her name - your best friend?

Tape 2: 21 minutes 54 seconds

CS: Conser – married.

BL: Conser?

CS: Yes, Conser – C-O-N-S-E-R. There was a time ... the Americans were very anti-communist and where my husband was born in Germany was actually Russia – later it became Poland - but right after the war the Russians had taken it. So he was under special investigation because they were so anti-communist. So he flew twice to Washington with this Commander. He said ‘You know I guarantee my life...’ he really speeded it up so that we got our permit - our affidavit to go to America.

BL: Did you meet him also at that time also when he was in Shanghai?

CS: Yes of course, yes. That’s where they were courting. Yes. I must tell you a little story. My husband had German customers in Shanghai, who were then prisoners-of-war when the war was over. And we got married and one of these customers sent him a big oil painting for our wedding. Tremendous size and I didn’t know where to put it because we had very small accommodation. And when she was courting this Commander of the Navy, he saw the picture and said ‘Oh, what a nice picture.’ So I said, ‘Would you like it?’ He said, ‘You’re joking.’ I said ‘No I’m not joking; if you want it you can have it.’ He said, ‘You know, I’m taking it.’ So he did – he took it on his ship when he went back and I never thought about it any more. And when we finally came to America he said to me, ‘Look here, I have to talk to you. You remember the picture you gave me?’ I said ‘Yes I remember.’ He said ‘Well I went home, I gave it to my mother and she put it in her lounge and one day somebody came and said ‘Where did you get this picture?’ And he took a catalogue...anyway it was a quite a well-known picture by a German artist and quite valuable...And he said, ‘You know I must tell you this is your picture, but you’ll break my mother’s heart if you take it away from her.’ So what could I say? You know he has taken such effort to take us there. I said, ‘No...you can keep it.’

Tape 2: 24 minutes 21 seconds

BL: The German family had probably taken it from a Jewish family, or...So there were also Germans – not Jewish Germans – also in Shanghai?

CS: Yes, oh yes. Shanghai was really international. Any nationality was there. They used to call it the Paris of Asia.

BL: So how many Germans were there? Do you have any idea?

CS: I don’t know how many but there certainly were...there was a German colony - yes.

BL: So after the war your husband had those German customers?

CS: No, he had them during – the whole time.

BL: Oh during the war?

CS: He had the whole time - yes.

BL: What did your husband do – sorry you said - during the war?

CS: In Shanghai with a partner they had materials and they had agents selling the material. They did very well. They did very well, actually. And you know after – when the war was over it was a duty-free harbour for one year so they could import anything without paying any duty for it and the country was starved of everything during the war so it was a very good thing for him.

BL: And what did he do in the States, your husband?

CS: Well, he did the same thing actually, he stayed in that business.

BL: And where did you live?

CS: We lived first in Manhattan – in New York, and then eventually bought a house in Long Island.

BL: And what was it like for you after all these years to settle in America?

CS: Well, you know I came from Israel to America and it was a sort of disappointing... but America grows on you, you know, the longer you stay the better you like it. It's a strange thing. And we had lots of friends. Where we lived in Manhattan in Riverside Drive the owner of this – there were two big houses – was related to one of our friends. It was hard to get a flat when the war was...when we came. You know, everybody was waiting to get a flat there so we were quite a community in these two big blocks of flats. But it wasn't a nice neighbourhood. It was on Riverside Drive near to Broadway where it was very black already then - not too far from Harlem. So eventually we bought a house in Long Island, yes, but it was nice there, Riverside Drive. It was always something that was going on - yes.

Tape 2: 27 minutes 9 seconds

BL: Who did you mix with? Were there other refugees around?

CS: Yes, Shanghai people...

BL: All people from Shanghai? So there was a sort of community of... did you join a synagogue?

CS: Yes.

BL: Which synagogue did you...?

CS: I can't remember. We had one also when we bought the house...well I don't know the name of...yes we always joined a...

BL: So you were quite happy in America?

CS: Yes, I was very happy in America.

BL: And did you do some work or...?

CS: Yes, yes I worked in America. I worked for...when Yvonne was still small. I never learned dressmaking, but I'm quite handy so I did alterations at home first to make some extra money. We had a nice flat and for the maid there was an extra entrance and a little - like a little flat for the maid. And I gave that to one of the Shanghai people and he was sort of my babysitter. I gave it to him very cheaply. So I could go out, you know, because she used to come home from school. And I worked for Lord and Taylor - that was a very nice department store. And went and became an alteration ... and then a fitter and did quite well there, yes.

Tape 2: 28 minutes 42 seconds

BL: And your daughter went to school?

CS: My daughter went then - you know the school was - as I said the Riverside Drive was not very nice. The public school was - here they call it a private but there it is a public school - so I had to put her into a Jewish school. It was actually not very orthodox - a Yeshiva school, where she was very happy and then they took her and brought her back by bus and I could go out to work. That's when I took the job. And when she came home she came home a bit before me, so my boarder was home to be there when she came home.

BL: And then, you said your husband died very young?

CS: He died very suddenly. Yes - very young...unfortunately. Yes we were married 16 years when he died.

BL: And at the time what did you think? Would you stay in America or...?

CS: Well I didn't know what to do then my sister said 'Why don't you come here for a while and see?' So I did rent and decided to...

BL: What was it like...?

CS: I did work when my husband died in America.

BL: What was it like to resettle again then after another ten years?

CS: It's not easy but I'm so used to re-settling.

BL: What were your impressions then, coming to England?

CS: Well, I must say now I'm here the longest time of my life has been spent in England. I must say it is very nice here – I wouldn't want to live... But eventually I might go back to America because it's my daughter there, you know? I am American so...otherwise I couldn't go because nobody would take me in medical insurance or anything - but being American I can do that. They have that Medicare plan.

BL: Do you have a British passport?

Tape 2: 30 minutes 52 seconds

CS: No, I have an American passport. I can get a British but I thought I don't need two passports. First you know I became American obviously. First America did not allow dual nationality. And I wasn't a born American so I would have lost my American - so I didn't want do that but now they do allow dual nationality because a lot of Americans and Israelis have dual nationality. Now I could get a British passport but it doesn't make any difference. It's so much easier to go to America with an American passport. I don't have to go through customs or through immigration.

BL: So you lived in quite a few places. How would you define yourself in terms of your identity?

CS: How would I – I'm nobody's baby! I don't know. I'm very happy here. If I do go to America it will be with a heavy heart. Because I made a very nice life here, I made lots of friends. And it's too late for me to start again.

BL: Where did you get married here? Where – in London?

CS: Yes, we were in Dennington Park in the Synagogue there, yes. That was my husband's...but then we changed here to Kinloss when we moved here.

BL: What was his name please?

CS: My husband's name was Sidney Sharp... He was married. He was divorced - When I married him he was ten years divorced and his wife died in the meantime.

BL: Yes, so which year did you get married?

CS: We got married in '62.

BL: So do you consider yourself at all British or American or Jewish?

CS: Yes, yes... Well. No, I'm very happy here, I must say.

BL: What impact do you think did your experience have on your life?

CS: Well in the end you know ... I count my blessings – I'm quite lucky ... With all that I count myself quite lucky to be where I am today.

BL: Do you think the uprooting...? You had quite a lot of uprooting...

CS: It's a lot of uprooting but it has also - you know everything has two sides – it has a good side and a bad side. It's not easy, but it also was quite interesting and as I say it forms your character. And in the end I mean – I came out quite happy. When I married my second husband he was also quite old - much older than me, so I knew that by law of nature I would be alone.

BL: What was his background?

Tape 2: 34 minutes 2 seconds

CS: He – actually they were also stateless the same as we. They come from Wyznacz. He was a furrier and he came – he came actually in '34 here to England. And then took the whole family over. And they still stayed in the same business. Their father had a furrier business in Berlin ... And we were furriers here you know. And he - my husband - prior to his death he had 15 years prior he had a very severe heart attack so I went to the business with him every morning.

BL: He had a shop?

CS: No, we were wholesalers. We were in Old Bond Street. And I took him and his brother in the morning to his business and I took them home afterwards. And I worked there, you know...?

BL: And does your sister live close to here?

CS: My sister's died – but she did live near here, just...Just in Hampstead Garden Suburb.

BL: So you were very close - two brothers and two sisters?

CS: Not necessarily. Not necessarily, no.

BL: But they worked together as well?

CS: The brothers were very close – yes they worked together.

BL: While you and your sister you had a sort of quite a long period without each other...?

CS: We did, yes. Yes – yes.

BL: How different do you think your life would have been if you hadn't been forced to emigrate?

CS: Who knows? One doesn't know. I would have stayed in Germany and spent the rest of my life there but...Who knows? Now that it's all ... I think I'm quite well off for having had all these experiences and come out quite well.

BL: Have you been back to Germany?

CS: I have – You know I have an aunt who married out – who survived. And I did go to see her. Because she was my favourite aunt. But personally – that's the only time I went back. I went back in '50...'52 – soon after we went to America. When I had my first money back from the – from the rehabilitation money from Germany then I booked a trip to see my parents and on the way I saw my aunt. But otherwise, I don't go to Germany. I somehow can't forgive them. There's such a lovely world; you can see so many things I don't need to go back ...I could have even gone, you know they would have paid my stay there and everything but I just refused that. I think if a nation was ... because now they all say they didn't know, and all this - but they knew quite well. No, I don't want anything to do with them.

Tape 2: 37 minutes 18 seconds

BL: Maybe you could tell me a bit about...You said there are these reunions with people who were in Shanghai.

CS: This reunion was very nice, I must say. They put a lot of effort in it. You know the people that do it are also not youngsters like me, and they arrange it very well I must say. They take over a hotel and they arrange all these – you know San Francisco is very...have you been? It's a very interesting town. There's a lot to see. So they arrange – during the day they arrange all these tours and in the evening you know you are together with them. And they have...You know we had one Blumenthal – Mr Blumenthal - who is now the director of the Jewish Museum in Berlin. He's a Shanghai boy. But he was a Treasurer of the United States – you know the dollar notes are all signed by Mr Blumenthal. And he came to give us a speech and brought us also a film from the museum. He's an excellent speaker. And then the American ambassador to China who lives in Shanghai came to our meeting and brought us the films from Shanghai you know what it looks like now. And that was quite interesting. No, it's very nice, these reunions, I must say.

BL: You went with your daughter?

CS: I went with my daughter yes. And you meet people that you haven't...and you know, I had a boyfriend - which never came to anything. But I saw this man and said 'It looks like him.' And it was his son - he did marry somebody else. And it was his son and he was a reporter and he said to me 'Can I make a film?' He did to me what you did, you know. I said 'Yes, of course!'

BL: So you met people actually who you knew...?

CS: Yes - People that I hadn't seen for years and years. And you know people...I'm looking for - one woman 'I'm looking for Klara Wittenberg.' I said 'You've found her! It's me!' Yes it was quite nice. Quite interesting.

BL: Did you talk about the past with your daughter at all?

CS: Yes, yes ...

BL: What sort of identity do you want to transmit to your daughter?

CS: Well I told her the...You know I have made my life story and she has this copy . Well...yes she knows...she has this film which you can make in America. I had a film camera and she made it into a video.

BL: Do you have grandchildren?

CS: Yes I have two grandsons - my grandson just got married...one year ago. They are - my family is very orthodox - very. And my daughter became orthodox because of that. She wasn't really but you know it's strange because she went in. I put her in America into a school which happened to be a Yeshiva. When I came to England the schools wanted to put her down because they said the curriculum was now so different. So I put her in the Hasmonean which didn't put her down - took her into the right...So it wasn't actually that strange to her. And her husband wasn't that orthodox, but when the first son was born he sort of turned more and more. And she became very orthodox in her own right - yes. So that's... whatever makes her happy.

BL: Is there any topic I haven't asked which you would like to add - anything?

CS: I can't think of anything else. No, I think not.

BL: Is there any message that you would like to give, based on your experiences?

CS: Well - I always say one must count one's blessings. One must not only always think of the bad things, one must thank for the good things that happen. Everything -

Even the worst things have a good side. And when you go through so much, like I have then you really appreciate - I count my blessings every day.

BL: Ok. Thank you very much for your interview.

CS: Thank you for having me.

Tape 2: 42 minutes 35 seconds

End of Interview TAPE TWO

PHOTOGRAPHS

Tape 2: 42 minutes 55 seconds

BL: Can you please describe this picture?

CS: Yes, this is my first school day. I was six years old, in Berlin. First school day.

BL: Which year was that?

CS: That was '28 – 1928.

BL: What was the name of the school?

CS: I can't remember. Joachim Friedrichstraße. It was just an ordinary school. I don't think they had a name.

BL: Thank you. Yes can you please describe this photo?

CS: I think this picture was taken by a friend of mine who was a professional photographer in Shanghai. And... Well it's me. I must have been about 18 or 19 years old, something like that.

BL: So in the early '40s?

BL: Thank you. Yes please?

CS: That is my wedding picture 1946 when I got married to my first husband.

BL: Where?

CS: In Shanghai - In Hongkew Shanghai.

BL: Yes please, can you please describe this?

CS: Yes. This is a picture in Haifa Israel where we went from Shanghai and my parents are on it and my first husband and Yvonne was three years old.

BL: Can you please tell us the names of your parents?

CS: Yes - Mr and Mrs Wittenberg; Nischa and Hirsch Wittenberg.

Tape 2: 44 minutes 35 seconds

BL: Yes please?

CS: Yes this is...I had family in Israel and this was my cousin who I think had a brit milla for her son, she finally had a son. And this is her whole family of them and us.

BL: Which year?

CS: Well it must have been...it must have been in Israel. I don't really know - it must have been in '50 - '50, I would say.

CS: Yes this is on the way from Israel to America. We stopped over for two weeks in London and this is my husband - my first husband - and on his left is my daughter and on his right is my nephew and in the middle is my niece.

BL: Which year?

CS: That is '52.

CS: Yes, this is a picture taken in New York in a night club with my friends. In the middle is me and my first husband and there is another two couples which are our friends. It must have been between - well we were ten years in America - so it must have been somewhere in the middle between '52 and '62. In the middle.

BL: Thank you.

CS: Yes this is in England with my second husband. I don't know exactly the year it was taken but it must have been quite some time ago.

BL: And his name please?

CS: His name was Sidney Sharp.

BL: Yes please?

CS: Yes this is my daughter, and her family in New York - My daughter and her husband and two sons - Zvi and Shlomo. And my son in law's name is Gerald Probst, so my daughter is Yvonne Probst now.

BL: And when was this taken?

CS: Well this is already a couple of years ago. They are already now - Now they look a bit older. But this must be about two years ago.

BL: Thank you.

Tape 2: 47 minutes 1 second

End of Photographs