

THE PORT OF LAST RESORT - ZUFLUCHT IN SHANGHAI

Dialogue List

ANNIE WITTING

May, 1939. My Dear Friends, We see the children only at mealtimes. They are happy and animated, and we with them, especially since we could not find any rest in Berlin due to so much running around in recent times...

We will be able to represent two good companies in Shanghai and hope to make a living in the International quarter.

At every port representatives from the Jewish relief committees come on board and bring old things and cigarettes for frugal travelers.

Colombo, the capital of Ceylon, home of the famous tea. The children exchanged stickers from the Lloyd Triestino for pineapples and coconuts. In German money one pineapple costs only fifteen to twenty cents. A blessed land, this island of Ceylon...

Yours, Annie Witting.

A. J. STORFER

Gradually the trip comes to an end. The day before yesterday we were in Singapore. Tomorrow we will arrive in Manila, then Hong Kong, and Shanghai. From the experiences of this journey endless stories could be told. At the moment due to high waves my morning exercises are most interesting. All the best. Greetings to all. Storfer.

SIG SIMON

1939 was a time when a lot of Jews were picked up in the streets and taken from homes and sent to concentration camps. And my father had very good friends in higher places which one day tipped him off that his name was on the list to be picked up for transportation to a concentration camp. And sure enough that evening the Nazis came to the door and searched for my father which was gone, of course.

At that point, when they were satisfied that he wasn't there, they left with a remark that we will be back to pick up the Jew. Then later on that day my father got in touch with my mother and told her to pack a suitcase that we were leaving. And my sister and I were really too young to understand what was going on. My sister was 13, I was 11. Nevertheless, we realized that we were leaving what, I, at the time thought was a vacation.

FRED FIELDS

We thought Hitler would take the Jews, the young Jews like me, I was eighteen, would take us first, you know, and throw us in the front line and be cannon fodder. And I said: "I got to get out of here." And then my mother saw it, you know. She wanted to see and stay in Germany to witness the downfall of this mad man. And I said: "No, it's, it's too much, I don't want to." And she realized that it was important that I should go. So she made contact with friends and they said I should go over the "Grüne Grenze", you know, the "green border." In other words, somebody would take me over to Holland or France. And somehow I said, I don't want to stay here in Europe. This is not far enough. If war breaks out, he'll roll over, I mean over these countries. And so, where can you go. We had no money.

ERNEST HEPPNER

We had relatives in the United States. They were willing to provide us with a affidavit, which they filed with the State Department, that we would not become a public burden. That was not good enough. There was a quota. And my quota number, I think, was 67,000. And we were told it might take about a year and a half before our quota comes up. I wouldn't wait that long. I wanted to get out in the worst way. And I said if we don't find a place to go, I go over the border. So we looked for an alternate solution.

Everybody asked me, why was it so difficult to leave Germany? It was not. It was a free world that would not give us a place.

ILLO HEPPNER

The SS Troopers came into the house. Our apartment was on the fifth floor and the elevator was out of order. So, they asked the custodian, is there any Jews above the third floor, because they were too lazy to walk up. And since he had been tipped well throughout our stay there, he said, "No." And my father slept through it all. But, after that he decided that he did not wish to wait for our quota to be called for the United States, but rather go to Shanghai. But since I hadn't quite finished school, I was to stay in Berlin with my mother and we were to meet him again in the United States.

FRED FIELDS

Somebody came up in the middle, in the summer of 1938 with the idea, there is one place on earth where you can go without any paper, no permit, no affidavit, no special entry-permit, not visa. You just get there, that's Shanghai.

ERNEST HEPPNER

It would take about 4 weeks to get there, but the boats are all full. There's a waiting list, 6 to 12 months. The travel agent said to my mother: "I know you have some Impressionistic paintings. The agent of the German steamship agency is a collector," hinting. He got a couple of our paintings and a few weeks later came a call from the travel agent. A Jewish couple on board the Potsdam, the German liner, committed suicide on board the boat as it left the harbor of Hamburg and a cabin for two would be available. So it was decided that my mother and I go ahead. We are only allowed to take with us 2 suitcases each and 10 Marks, the equivalent of 8 American dollars. One of the worst moments was, when I said good-bye to my father and to my sister. I knew in my heart I would never see them again.

We entered from the mouth of the Yangtze we got into the Whangpoo river, the muddy Whangpoo and as we finally came closer to Shanghai, we were getting very nervous because on the right side we saw nothing but ruins, nothing but ruins. The whole coastal area were in ruins. We found out later on, since 1937, when the Japanese invaded China there was severe fighting between the Japanese and the Chinese forces. The Japanese controlled the harbor. And

later on we were puzzled, that it was the Japanese that actually permitted us entry.

#### JAPANESE DIPLOMAT

Declaration from the Japanese Five Ministers' Conference 1938. Our diplomatic ties with Germany and Italy require that we avoid embracing the Jewish people. But we should not reject them as they do because of our declared policy of racial equality. This is particularly true in light of our need for foreign capital and our desire not to alienate America.

#### FEMALE MISSIONARY

Notice from the National Christian Council of China, February, 1939.

The persecuted Jews of Europe are pouring into Shanghai. Forty arrived on the Lloyd-Triestino steamer in July; another forty in August; then eighty in September; and now each steamer brings them by the hundreds. At first, it was the professional men who came: doctors mostly, who, by a stroke of the pen were forbidden to practice their professions. Now it is the white-collar workers: grocers, cafe keepers, tailors, barbers, and young women who were secretaries, or corset-makers, or shop-workers. Most of them speak neither Chinese nor English. They land in Shanghai -- a blind alley.

#### SIG SIMON

We were met at the docks by a contingent of refugees that had arrived prior to our getting there. They had trucks ready. And we were taken on the trucks to one of the few camps that was established at that time. When we got there, we were fed noodle soup. And I'll never forget it, that was very uncommon for me to not have a complete meal. But nevertheless, it satisfied us at the time. We had no funds left of any kind to rent private apartments or quarters of any kind.

#### OTTO ISRAEL GRUBER

May 21, 1939. Two years ago war broke out between the Japanese and Chinese in which the quarter of Hongkew was completely destroyed. The local residents, mostly Chinese, escaped into the other parts of the Settlement and into the French Concession.

As emigration of the Jews grew more and more, and there were few possibilities for accommodating the refugees, the committee began to repair buildings in Hongkew in order to establish camps. Then some refugees began to buy and repair demolished houses themselves. Even though these Jews are mostly without means, an active life has begun. There are no problems from the Japanese who occupy this territory. The Europeans can freely come and go, but the Chinese only with specially issued passes from the Japanese.  
Otto Israel Gruber

TOBIAS FARB

April 28, 1939. My Dear, Since February 22 I have been in Shanghai, and feel wretched. The deplorable economic circumstances, and consequently the hopelessness of getting a job, the difficulties to get away from here some day, and the dread of spreading diseases, these each in turn add to inexpressible despair and drive us, who had to go through inhuman hardships already, to a complete breakdown.

The building where we are housed was a school formerly. There are 40 people in one room with 40 bunks. One washing basin for about 8-10 people. Food is monotonous. There is also tea that is smelling of carbolic acid as the water has to be disinfected every other day.

I hope you are well which is somewhat a consolation to me. I kiss you with all my love. Tobias Farb.

SIG SIMON

You got up in the morning. You went out to a common facility to wash yourself. It was cold water. There was no hot water. You stood in line sometimes with many other people with a rag in your hand which was your towel. If you were fortunate enough to have a bar of soap, you could use that. If you didn't, you didn't. You just used water. The

next thing you would have breakfast. And breakfast consisted many, many times of a piece of bread that was given you and tea. The tea was hot water which we had to buy. Three dips of water would be like a penny, and then be very careful to strain the tea so that you would have the leaves for tomorrow and tomorrow, and the next day, and the next day. That was breakfast.

ERNEST HEPPNER

There were committees that had been hastily established by Jewish communities that had come to Shanghai previously. There was a Jewish community got there after the Bolshevik Revolution around 1917. There were some 4500 of them there. Plus some 450 Baghdadi Jews that had arrived during the Opium War years. They had prepared some temporary shelter.

My mother and I stayed there for about two weeks, until we were able to find a furnished room after my mother was able to get a job with the committee that dealt with the newcomers.

ANNIE WITTING

My dear friends, Shanghai has four and one half million inhabitants, of which only 50,000 are Europeans. It is always wet, whether it is warm or cold. When it rains here one needs, by all means, high rubber boots because without them you cannot even walk on the street.

Furthermore, the danger of epidemics is very great. And despite the fact that we were inoculated on the ship against cholera, pox, typhus and paratyphus, one must be inoculated here again, and every quarter year.

We are in any case happy to be free people again and to have the chance to make a new life.

Yours, Annie Witting

FRED FIELDS

German and Austrian Jews who had no other place to go, went to Shanghai. Not because they were intrigued by

China, or by Shanghai. They didn't know much about it. But that was the only place, due to the fact that Shanghai became an International Settlement and it was a free port. The British, when they had the famous Opium Wars in 1845, insisted on a treaty to get a free harbor in certain spots. And that counted for the fact that since they didn't impose any restrictions of arrivals, you got there and that was it. That saved our neck.

ERNEST HEPPNER

Shanghai consisted of several colonial occupiers. There was the International Settlement. There was the so-called French town, the French Concession, where many of the Russian immigrants lived. And there was the inner city, the Chinese inner city, Nantao. And of course Shanghai was a cosmopolitan city, perhaps the most cosmopolitan city in the world. Also the most crime-ridden city in the world.

MAX BERGES

How can I make it possible for you to feel the specific atmosphere of this extraordinary city? The many smells, ranging all the way from the burnt incense in temples, to the carts, in which human excrement was collected for fertilizer. The peculiar sounds and noises, emanating from the great variety of people, from the poorest coolies to the wealthiest men in the world, from the lives of socially accepted taxi dancers to the puritanistic British society ladies. Shanghai was a fake, a phony, neither occidental nor oriental. And yet - God forgive me - she was the most exciting and unique city in the world. She was poison, and the old-time Shanghailanders were addicts who never could free themselves from being in love with her. Max Berges, refugee

FRED FIELDS

The number of prostitutes running around on Nanking Road, you must remember on the main drag was covered with girls, you know. And then they had these ballrooms with taxi dancers. You know, you went to a ballroom with five friends and you bought, let's say for fifty cents, thirty cents, 6 tickets and then you went to a girl and danced with

her and gave her one of these tickets. It was very popular. And we had very good bands, mostly Filipino bands. They played beautiful modern music.

You had nightclubs in the western part of Shanghai, past the Settlement which was Chinese territory and which was run by the Japanese but not directly. The Japanese had gotten themselves a puppet, a former Associate of Chiang Kai-shek by the name of Wang Sheng-wai. In this area there were quite a number of gambling dens, opium dens, clubs for transvestites, for gays. And I worked at this Maskee Nightclub. And I really I learned to see how the, what a gay nightclub was. I didn't even know what a gay club was, hardly, homosexuals. It was very interesting. There were very interesting people, very good looking British and German, mostly German and British people. And that was an interesting introduction to the night life.

#### ILLO HEPPNER

Germany invaded Poland on September the first, 1939. And it became apparent that maybe we should not wait. And my father let us know that we should meet him in Shanghai instead. Then, of course Italy entered the war and we could not go by boat anymore, so now we had to get rail transportation over Siberia.

We left in May, 1940, and finally landed in Shanghai sometime in early June. At that time too many refugees had gotten into Shanghai, so the Shanghai Municipal Authority required a permit. And my father was able to get it for my mother and me, because we were wife and child.

My father was a banker, and through his connection he had been able to transfer a little bit of money out of Germany into Switzerland. So he had some limited funds to draw on. And we moved into a European-style apartment building. Of course, into a very small apartment, but it had hot water and had steam heat in the winter, so we weren't really too uncomfortable.

#### WOMAN REFUGEE

Emigrants have made unbelievable achievements. Wonderful shops have opened and they are doing well. When you walk on Broadway here you think you are in Vienna or Berlin and forget that you are an immigrant. A large number of people have already built a nice existence for themselves and for some it definitely goes better than before. Refugee

FRED FIELDS

Since I was so interested in printing and writing I met somebody who was a friend of Mr. Storfer, and said he is planning to open up a newspaper. And I met Mr. Storfer who was a very intelligent, interesting man. He had been a publisher of books for Sigmund Freud and had published himself as he proudly told me. And he liked me and he said, okay, would you like to work for me. I said: "Oh, I'd love to."

A. J. STORFER

March 31, 1939. To Dr. Siegfried Bernfeld, San Francisco.

Dear Doctor...

The "Gelbe Post" is concerned with East Asian matters, but will take every opportunity to draw on psychoanalysis. In the first issue I have an article by a Japanese professor about psychoanalysis in Japan, and another by an English author, "On the Psychoanalysis of Chinese Written Characters." The main thing is that I hurdle over the financially difficult beginning of my magazine. I work 15-16 hours a day and sleep 4-5 hours. But the worst is still to come -- the notorious Shanghai warm period, which will set in in a month. I remain yours with heartfelt greetings, A. J. Storfer.

ANNIE WITTING

My dear friends, I have started several export businesses (lingerie, pork bellies, etc.). Furthermore I have sold unneeded crystal and I've bought American dollars. Then I also sold some sports coats for which I brought samples from Germany. The Chinese are very handy at copying and under the guidance of a European middle-man, they came out very fine.

The children are doing very well here. They attend a school in which instructions are only in English. The second richest man in Shanghai, Mr. Kadoorie, an Arabic Jew, established a club which is completely modeled on the English youth clubs.

The children go to theater and concerts, take excursions. And all this is financed by this Mr. Kadoorie. He wants the emigrant children to lose the inferiority complex that has been partly caused by emigration. Yours, Annie Witting

ILLO HEPPNER

There were concerts in the parks in the summer. There had a, of course, a symphony orchestra. They had very nice ballet, due to the fact that so many of the White Russians came to Shanghai after the Revolution. We had excellent ballet.

When I was then dating, I met my future husband and we were dating and there were Chinese dance halls. It was wonderful. There were big halls with big bands. And for the price of a glass of tea, you could dance all day. That was the cover charge. And we danced whole afternoons away. Sunday afternoons that was the place to go to.

ERNEST HEPPNER

I started working for a Russian-owned toy store, that was in the French Concession. It was a long, long walk from Hongkew. Until a small branch store was established down in Nanjing Lu, in Nanking Road, very close to the Bund. And I became the branch manager. I was a teenager, but I learned quickly. Connected with the toy store was also a Chinese-owned book store who dealt primarily with pirate editions. I made a little money in the book store. And the best part was that I worked with Chinese and got lunch. Our store was right next door to a Chinese money changer and I watched it every day. And when I had a few dollars left, I bought and sold dollars. And I was lucky, I always made a few dollars.

GERMAN CONSUL

German General Consulate, Shanghai. To the Foreign Office in Berlin.

From the recently arrived estimated 18,000 Jews, around 11,000 live in Hongkew, about 6,000 in the International Settlement and the rest in the French Concession.

Out of despair the Jewish girls are forced to go into the public hostess bars where they are trying to push out and undercut the Russian women who have dominated that field until now.

Among the approximately 250 Jewish musicians, a number of them find employment in the city orchestra, as well as in hotels and nightclubs.

In Hongkew the Jews have established an estimated 50-60 coffee houses and bars.

#### FRED FIELDS

Nobody liked to stay home. The little rooms, home, where maybe six or eight lived in a small apartment, with one toilet and maybe three apartments in the building. And they went out to the Kaffeehaus. That was where the action was. You had to go in order to drink a cup of coffee, and that in turn brought about more cultural activity. They had hired singers, actors, they started making up little skits in nightclubs and restaurants. And opened up a quite few nightclubs along Broadway and on the Hongkew side because that's where good money was to be made, you know. And it's interesting to note that this became known to the more adventurous in the international settlement, the younger ones, they came to see these shows and there was a lot going on.

#### WOMAN REFUGEE

Each morning we get up between 5:15 and 5:45 depending on our energy. By 7 papa must already be in the shop in order to carry the bread rolls with the boy. I stay home to put the room in order, and get the child ready for kindergarten. Then every morning I cook 30 to 35 meatballs that are sold for 10 cents each in the shop.

Aside from groceries and fruit, we sell homemade pickled herrings, grilled foods, red beet salad, etc. At 9 o'clock, papa comes home because the shop closes at 8:30. Then at last we eat. Finally socks are mended, laundry is ironed, and when we have time a letter is sometimes written. In any case, no evening do we go to bed before 11:30 and then we are of course dead tired.

Our clientele are 85 percent immigrants. Most likely we will never learn Chinese because we have no opportunity to speak.

A. J. STORFER

"Pidgin - English will nevertheless not be a subject in the schools of Shanghai." by A. J. Storfer

Of the nearly four million Chinese people in the city, the greater part will never even try to learn English. On the other hand neither the Englishmen and Americans, nor the other foreigners will learn the language of the natives. One should therefore make Pidgin English an obligatory school subject for foreigners and Chinese, and the Babylonian chaos of languages in Shanghai will be banished.

Representatives of the teaching profession rejected the unreasonable demand to actively participate in the murder of the language of Shakespeare. After all, if one cannot comprehend the soliloquy To Be or Not to Be, one could still understand that Hamletian question in Pidgin: can do - no can do.

FRED FIELDS

"Die Gelbe Post" was a paper really on a high intellectual level and unfortunately, the readership wasn't there. By that time I needed a good job so I somehow wound up becoming a reporter for the Shanghai Jewish Chronicle.

I could work with the Chinese printers and tell them how to make up the headlines, 18 point, and figure out sizes. So I became at this very young age of nineteen, twenty, a night editor. And here I was in charge of putting a paper together and they had all these very well known former writers. But I

was more or less, they had to ask me to give them a good spot in the paper and things like that. And satisfy the ad salesmen for the advertising where to place their ads. So, I had a fairly important job there.

ILLO HEPPNER

My father was able to start a business in the international settlement, doing books for people. So, he managed all right, you know, drawing a little bit on the Swiss money. For my mother it was devastating. She spoke French fluently, English very badly. She missed her mother and her sister and her surroundings. He was afraid to go out. So, our roles really reversed and whenever I explored, I would take her along. But without me she really didn't want to go anywhere. And I realized much, much later that she really was clinically depressed and she had a very, very hard time of it.

REFUGEE JOURNALIST

Shanghai Jewish Chronicle. Mars is the only spot in the universe where a Jewish emigrant can enter without a pass and an immigration visa. We heard this yesterday in a melancholic and amusing operetta which was performed at the Jewish Club. A dentist and his wife have a hard time adjusting to Shanghai. Then the emigrant falls asleep and dreams that he and his wife have landed on Mars. On Mars, at least in the dream, immigration, commerce, and love are free.

The bitter irony of this piece unfortunately mirrors reality. Six million Jews in Central and Eastern Europe are still suffering with no prospects of ever finding refuge in this miserable world.

FRED FIELDS

With my mother I tried to stay in touch as best as I could and as frequently as I could. And in the beginning when I was in Shanghai, of course, we had a regular correspondence. And she was careful, knowing the political situation better than most. She hinted about "this one left and, he disap---" She didn't say "disappeared," but she indicated somebody was

taken away by the Gestapo or the Nazis. I think the worst thing was when she reported about her former husband, my father, with whom she had parted in good company. She went to see my father off when he was taken away to a special collective station where they were sent by train to Russia where my father died, was killed. And the letters became more and more desperate. In the last letter she said whether I could help her to come to China. I was devastated and I tried, but, by that time the communication was so bad already and I could only communicate via the Red Cross, which didn't, wasn't too good. And this failed. And I was terribly upset about my father. My father was a sick man. At that time, he was about, just about fifty. And when I left him, I knew I would never see him again, which was a horrible thing to think. My mother, I was fully confident when I left on the nineteenth of December, 1938, that I would ever see her again later.

#### WOMAN

Report of The Committee for the Assistance of European Jewish Refugees in Shanghai for the first six months of 1940:

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee's monthly allotment of \$18,000 was reduced to \$14,000 in April. The task of operating with considerably less funds was made vastly more difficult because of the rise in the cost of foodstuffs and coal. The prices of these commodities went up from 50% to 150%.

Six camps and two hospitals are operated. As of June, about 11,000 people were assisted monthly, being given shelter, food and money. There is no future for refugees in China. Business has been disastrously affected by the wars.

#### SIG SIMON

Within the camp those that were fortunate to have a job, dressed and went to work. The rest of the people that didn't have any jobs, more or less, congregated in groups. They did have one radio in there which had short wave, which occasionally we would get news of the war. The Russians were doing this and the Germans were doing that. Listen to

that. And many would sit around a table and play cards. And basically that is the way you would spend your day.

ANNIE WITTING

All my dear friends,  
We have unfortunately suffered very much grief. That is, first I had a tropical dysentery for 6 weeks, and then my husband, especially heavy, for 14 weeks. And due to the dysentery, an inflammation of the heart muscle, which does not heal so quickly. Besides, he lost 40 pounds.

Expenses from the sickness were enormous, and my greatest fear was: How do I make it? The first thought when I got up in the morning, and the last thought before going to sleep was: Making dollars! Sometimes I don't recognize myself. Was I ever so sober? Yours, Annie Witting

A. J. STORFER

July 1941. Dear Doctor Wittels,  
For one long year I have not let anyone hear from me, and I know that this makes an ugly impression.

It was in the middle of August that the \$400 arrived by wire and I had every reason to see a rosy future. But I had not expected the unmerciful small-mindedness of my business competitors. Besides the two men who did night-duty felt compelled to suddenly report sick. I myself had to fill in at once, which had the outcome that right after the first night I suffered a severe heart attack. I was forced to liquidate the business within 8 days.

I am completely cut off from friends in Europe. But I also never hear anything from America. However this is, in fact, my fault. Don't think too badly about your devoted A. J. Storfer

FRED FIELDS

It was the night of the 7th, and my headline read something in German of course, that there's a good hope that they will come to some sort of agreement in Washington. And I couldn't save it, by the way. The paper came out with that

ridiculous headline. And all of a sudden at night I hear ush, a tremendous noise. We were pretty close to the harbor. And I hear what sounded like gunshots and bombing. And I called up my friend at Domei, the Japanese news agency, and he happened to be on duty. I said, what the hell is going on. Well, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. Who knows where Pearl Harbor was? And the Japanese occupied the International Settlement and French Concession. But basically there wasn't much change, I mean it was slowly.

ILLO HEPPNER

The hope of going to the United States was squashed for the time being. But we really didn't expect that this would last very long. We expected the American Forces to win at that time. And, for us actually, aside from the fact that the Japanese were there marching up and down with their bayonets, which was a little scary, personally I wasn't really affected by it.

ERNEST HEPPNER

The Jewish Community Association received word that Germany declared all Jews living abroad as stateless. So I pitched my German passport in the waste basket. As far as the Japanese were concerned, we were just nobody.

Furthermore, the rumors flew around in Hongkew constantly. One was, that the Nazis had sent a Colonel Meisinger, also called the "Butcher of Warsaw", Gestapo agent, to negotiate with the Japanese to murder all 25,000 Jews in Shanghai. That would be 18,000 of us, 1,000 Polish Jews, 4,000 or so Russian Jews and some 500 Iraqi Jews, Baghdadi Jews.

JAPANESE FOREIGN MINISTER

January 17, 1942. Subject: Emergency Measures for Jewish People. From: Japanese Foreign Minister Togo. Since Germany has deprived the Jewish people overseas of their nationality, German Jews will hereafter be treated as denationalized Jews. Those who are or will be made use of on our part will be treated in a friendly way. The rest of

them will be placed under strict surveillance so that any hostile activity may be eliminated or suppressed.

SIG SIMON

At 14 years, it was in my mind, that I can be much more productive in trying to earn some money, rather than to go to school and bring home nothing. So I worked by mostly day labor. That is throughout the time that the war was on. I was out each morning looking for work and that work that was available underbidding coolie wages was "Kohlendrehen" which means turning a wheel that would grind sand and coal dust and then to be mixed to be made into charcoal briquettes. Or since there was no electrical power to drive machinery they would build transmissions turned by hand. Some were rods which you would pedal like a bicycle. And there might be fifteen, twenty men on one row doing this and again creating power to power some machinery.

At the end of the day there was a good chance that inflation throughout just one day had changed the value of what we were paid that evening. But somehow it always was enough to buy us a sweet potato which the vendors on the street were selling, or a bowl of noodle soup, and eat up what we had earned that day. Then go back to camp and then crawl into our straw sack.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

February 18, 1943. The Imperial Japanese Army and Navy authorities, in a joint proclamation issued today, announced the restriction of residences and places of business of stateless refugees in Shanghai to a designated area as from May 18. By "stateless refugees" are meant those European refugees who have arrived in Shanghai since January 1, 1937.

FRED FIELDS

All those middle European refugees who arrived after 1937, which was very cleverly done -- the word "Jew" was never mentioned -- had to move into Hongkew. For instance, my uncle's cafe. Then he was forced to sell at very cheap prices their businesses, similar to what happened in Germany, for

instance, to the Jews who had to give it away when they were arisiert, for a fraction of the actual value.

ILLO HEPPNER

That was the watershed. We had to move into the ghetto and that was terrible. The only requirement that my mother had was that it would have a, a real flush toilet, not buckets. And, so, the only thing we could find was one little room for the three of us.

For my father of course, that was terrible, he had to close his office in the city. And then he still went on and kept books for refugee businesses in the ghetto. And sometimes he got paid and sometimes he got paid in goods. And I taught English to some people in exchange for food, and that was basically it.

FRED FIELDS

The Japanese were established the borders of the so-called ghetto, you know, where they very cleverly did not put the Japanese soldier, maybe in the beginning a few. But a refugee civil patrol was started, a militia, called Pao Chia. We were forced by law to do Pao Chia duty at the border where if you came through, I asked: "May I see your passport?" You see, they issued passports to go to the Settlement or the French Concession.

SIG SIMON

Ghoya was the person that called himself "King of the Jews". What it amounted to is he was of the Japanese group which administered or supervised all refugees. If you wanted out of the district, you needed a special pass which in turn he in his office administered. And this little guy was about four feet 8, 10 inches tall and felt his power. And he really abused his power in many different ways. He would jump on his desk and slap the daylights out of a person simply for saying a wrong word. My father and I stood in line one day waiting to go to his office. He wasn't there yet. And word comes down very quickly, he's coming. Well, he came and walked by us. And for some reason my father must have either made the wrong move. I still to this day, don't know why,

but he stopped in front of my father. And my father wore very thick glasses. And he made my father bend down and beat him in the face. Hit him in the face, knocked his glasses off and broke them. And that day, I stood there and swore the day will come where I'll get even with him.

WOMAN

From The International Committee of the Red Cross, June 15, 1943.

With reference to the situation of the civilian population in Shanghai, the worst distress exists undoubtedly amongst the German-Jewish immigrants, of whom at least 6000 are on the point of starvation and about 9000 more are not far better off.

For the moment the Jewish Committee has still some of the 3000 bags of flour left which was donated last July, but even that will be exhausted by the end of next month.

The fact that during the recent first cold spell 534 dead bodies were picked up in the streets after one night may give you an indication of the extent of the misery which prevails amongst the poorer classes of the Chinese population.

ILLO HEPPNER

Food was, at that point, becoming very scarce. We had to go to the market every day and we ate whatever we had. But then my mother got ill and got Bacillary Dysentery and died within three days, because we didn't have any medication. And, after this it fell to me to do all of this. And that was kind of a shock to find out to cook, to take care of the house, whatever there was, to take care of my father who was getting more and more despondent, being a fairly young widower. And the situation for me personally became worse, much worse.

SIG SIMON

Just about midway through the war conditions were so that the clothes that you had either brought or acquired in the meantime gave out and no money to buy anything else. So that even though in the wintertime it would come down to zero or below, you had no warm clothes and you might, I

might have worn a T-shirt, pair of shorts, no socks. In place of shoes I would whittle or cut out of a piece of wood I would find, the shape of a sole. Put a strap across the front part and what might be described as a slipper use that for shoes. They didn't last very long. Either the darn strap came off every 15 minutes or the wood would be too soft and be used up in nothing flat. But all this came much after we got actually in so low, that we sold every single thing we owned.

ILLO HEPPNER

People's nerves were on edge. Everybody seemed to be screaming. There were lots of family fights among the families in the ghetto. And, of course, you heard everybody else's fight, along with all other noises - the Chinese noise, the Mahjong tiles. What I remember most about Shanghai in that time really, is there was never silence. There wasn't ever a moment when it was silent.

ERNEST HEPPNER

That was a time when the Japanese advanced in the Pacific and the Allies were retreating. We had radio news, local news. We could get news from the Soviet Union, but we didn't trust it. And we had through underground channels access to short wave. So even that news was not very very good, that the Allies were retreating. And we couldn't even begin to imagine what would happen if the Japanese would win. We didn't even dare to think about it. So, to describe the mood, it was almost near desperation. It was getting worse and worse and worse as time progressed between 1943, 44. And then after Illo's mother had passed away, we decided, why don't we get married. It looked to us as to some of the other young adults, that we might not survive the war. We might not survive the ghetto. So we got married.

ILLO HEPPNER

A very good friend of my mother-in-law's was a Viennese dress designer and she offered, if we would find her some fabric, to make me a real wedding gown. And my mother had brought some white curtains from Germany and they

didn't fit any windows, so they were lying there. And she used that. And I had my mother's veil, so we had a very elegant wedding. I asked my father as a wedding present to buy me enough hot water from the hot water dealer to have a warm bath for the first time in years. Well, it was so wonderful to luxuriate that I was almost late for my own wedding. They had to pound on the bathroom door to get me out of there.

ERNEST HEPPNER

I moved into her room, with whom she had lived previously with her father and her mother. And her father moved out. And this room was just around the corner from the bakery where I worked. So at least I had something. I earned a little money and I got two breads per day. That was my, that was my pay.

ILLO HEPPNER

We had a very good friend who was a pianist, and we used to go to their room at night. There wasn't enough money for lights or candles, but we were sitting in the dark and he'd play in the dark. There were lots of things you could do.

ERNEST HEPPNER

We rejoiced when we heard American bombers in the distance, when they were starting to attack in Shanghai surroundings. And when they finally attacked the Shanghai wharves, I stood out on the window sill, because there were very often low-level attacks. And once I could even see the cockpit and I cheered them on. Until 17th of July 1945.

The bombers came over the ghetto and I climbed out of the window again, and we got hit. And I decided to go back to the bakery. Well there was nothing left. The whole lane was destroyed. I don't know how many hundreds and hundreds of Chinese lived in that lane and were killed. Not a single baker survived.

We heard we had become a secondary target because the Japanese had a munitions dump. They also had a communication transmitter there in our ghetto.

FRED FIELDS

About thirty-eight or thirty-nine of our refugee people died and hundreds, five or six hundred Chinese, and it was pretty bad, it was the highest time, höchste Zeit, because, if things got worse I don't know what would have happened. But things were already pretty pretty bad in the summer of '45.

ILLO HEPPNER

In the daily paper we found a little notice that an atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Well, what's an atomic bomb? We had no idea what it was, but, we felt that it must be pretty good if they're dropping some sort of bombs on Japan, so the tide must have turned. And, then, of course, one day the Japanese guards, or whatever you call them, army, they were gone. And then we heard that, actually, you know, there's going to be peace, which was just, almost unbelievable.

FRED FIELDS

We ran around and tore down the, the border signs at the border of the ghetto. We ran to the city. And then the first American troops arrived. They had been in the Alusians for two years. They hadn't seen a woman for two years. So you can imagine what went on in Shanghai. And, I got friendly with, with some Navy officers and that was our greatest thing to go to these Officers Clubs, being invited and having, eating decent food. Well it was wonderful.

SIG SIMON

The Japanese soldiers registered for repatriation. We found out where that was and two other friends of mine and myself decided we were going to try and find him. And by the third day, sure enough, he came. And he knew immediately what we intended to do. And what we intended to do was truly kill the man. We marched him back to our camp and much to our surprise we entered and the "Heimpolizei", the camp police, quote unquote, were furious. People gathered and said, this is undignified for us to bring the man in there for whatever reason. And immediately made us turn around and take him back out. We went out in the street with him and took him over in the field, in a bombed out field, and

were going to kill him. We knocked him around quite seriously. He would fall down and stand up again, come to attention, and look you straight in the face without any expression whatsoever on his face. And when you face a person like that, even though he may be your worst enemy or you're, the type of person that you just want to kill, you can't. I can't. We couldn't. Perhaps if I had had a gun, I might have at the beginning that we had him. But we had a knife. That's all we had. And we simply turned him loose. To this day, I ask myself, what takes place in a person's mind after all the hate I had for the man, after all the things I wanted to do to him. And then having the opportunity to do it and not being able to do it. And yet, today in the back of my mind I'm so glad I didn't. I'm so glad I didn't. To kill a human being is not the thing to do even if you hate him.

ERNEST HEPPNER

We didn't know about the Holocaust, until on some buildings, sheets of paper with printed names appeared and everybody started looking and trying to find names of relatives. And then the news finally filtered out, but we really didn't have the full extent for a while what had happened. We didn't know about Auschwitz. We knew there were some camps, where Jews were killed. And I started searching for my father, my sister, of course, never found out to this day what had happened to them.

FRED FIELDS

After the war, I got a letter from my mother, which was really devastating, in which she related that she was abandoned by two of her best friends. And she was very unhappy and started philosophizing about the fate of the Jews over all the last two thousand years and nobody will come to our help. And that she cannot understand that the British and American would not do anything to help them, and people disappeared and were killed and tortured and so forth. I never had realized that it was that bad. And I was fully confident that she would survive. The thought that my mother would perish and wind up in Auschwitz, it never occurred to me. First of all I didn't know about these camps. I was after all a newspaper man and knew more than most people. But the rumors were always flying around. But I know the Jews were transported to the East, that the conditions got worse and worse. But I had no idea that they

went to, so far as to have factories where they would burn them and kill them by the carloads and by the millions. That, I had no idea.

LA FRANCE

Shanghai Journal, January 20, 1946

A. J. Storfer. Shanghai has not yet forgotten him. He came out with the Gelbe Post and won -- with one stroke -- everyone for him, who in that time of dying culture, was seeking the sun of spiritual cheer, the shimmer of the sharpened word, the warmth of a deep soul. One week before the outbreak of the Pacific War he traveled away. Now we come to learn of his early death.

I came to know him in the year 1920 at the Viennese Cafe Central, at that time the literary cafe.

We sailed together to Shanghai after he lived for the last two months with me in my Viennese room. Brother, how do you like it on the other side? Do you have a room with a desk and a table lamp reserved for me? La France.

SIG SIMON

The British fleet came into the harbor. The American Seventh Fleet came in, bringing hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of GIs in. And the word came down that the armed services will hire civilians for certain jobs. The money was excellent. We made as much as 170 dollars in American money a month, which when we exchanged it was buckets full of money. And things just happened so quickly that we spent the money as fast and foolishly as it came in. I had suits made tailor-made, shoes made custom, shirts tailor-made. There was nothing that I could not buy and did.

ANNIE WITTING

My Dear Friends,

In these times we went through the hardest years of our lives, which despite everything, I would not have wanted to miss. As international and interesting as life has been in China, it will be nowhere in the world again. Now the wildest inflation in the country rules, along with a certain hatred of foreigners. China is ready for Communism and I fear very much that they will win the upper hand. The

educated Chinese regret very much that everything has come to this point. The foreigners are, for the most part, leaving their country and the Chinese know exactly how much they need the foreigners for business. We thought when we came to China that we could teach business skills to the Chinese, but in reality we have learned from them. Yours, Annie Witting

ILLO HEPPNER

Unfortunately, in retrospect the colonial life had a lot of attractions. But it wasn't to be that way because Mao Tse Tung came and anyway, we had made up our minds to go to the United States if we could get our papers, and the quota came through and we got our papers and there was no question that we would leave.

ERNEST HEPPNER

Finally we got word that we would be on a General Gordon, American Troop Transport. And word got around very, very fast, not that Ernest and Illo are going to America: "Illo and Ernie are going home!" And that's the way we felt about it; we are going home.

SIG SIMON

Rumor came out that the occupation forces will soon will be withdrawn and I figured that it's time to emigrate and got a visa and went to the United States. I grew up so to speak in hard knocks, was in no position to go to school and catch up. And the more I look at it today, the more I say to myself I would have possibly been able to take much, much more. The bad is buried by the good.

FRED FIELDS

I became a very cosmopolitan person. You were not considered a Jew. You were a German, French, Italian. And they all did business together, lived together. It was hard to believe that how we got there and that we, at the end of the world, and to an area totally unknown and foreign to us. And Shanghai will never cease to be a memory of amazement that there was such a place.

ANNIE WITTING

May 1947. All my dear friends,  
Is this all a dream or indeed reality? It has been four days  
since we have been underway and indeed on the high sea,  
withdrawing more and more from China for our new home,  
Australia. Around us the endless sea. We see flying fish and  
sometimes even sharks. The sea is steel blue, the top of the  
waves shine brilliantly. One comes to feel again like a  
human being, and no longer a refugee.  
Yours, Annie Witting.