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Blocker, Mia oral history interview

Steve Hochstadt

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MIA BLOCKER

ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

JUNE 28, 1989

Interviewer: Steve Hochstadt

Transcription: Michelle Kim
Steve Hochstadt

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Mia Blocker: Now, over here. Away from the . . .

Steve Hochstadt: Okay.

MB: . . . air conditioning. Okay.

SH: All I'd like you to do is, Granny[1] told me a lot about life in Vienna, but when it came to the, the trip from Vienna to Shanghai . . .

MB: I wasn't there.

SH: . . . and your trip to England, she didn't say much about that. So I guess what I'd like you to start with is, is your trip to England and then your trip to Shanghai.

MB: Okay, all right. I was, I went, okay, I was sponsored by, let's see. Oh golly. What is the name of those people who, let's see. Not, okay, not Mormons. I'm trying to think. Okay, they're pacifists. What's the name?

SH: Mennonites?

MB: No! No, no, no. I'll ask Wade.[2] (pause) Okay, all right. They were, you know, apparently, you know, the Quakers arranged, you know, for children to leave, to leave Austria and they arranged families for them, and since I was a doctor's daughter, they arranged for a physician's family.

SH: Was this all arranged after Ernst had left?[3]

MB: I have no idea. It must have been. I really don't remember. Because there was several arrangements that were supposed to be made. One of them was Janiu, you know, who died, okay, he wanted me to come to Belgium, where he had some Baroness or other and if I'd gone there, of course, I would have been a dead duck. And then there was even some talk of my going to the States and it turned out the ship they were talking about got sunk. So, you know, it was just as well. Anyway, so you know, that's how I got to England and I lived there for two years.

SH: This is when? What year? How old you were?

MB: '38, '39. I was 10, going on 11. Lived in Norwich, Norfolk, went to school there, learned English. And then when the war broke out, let's see. Okay. You know, after two years I went to Shanghai. You know, this is when, okay, this is, the war broke out in

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[1] Mia Blocker is Steve Hochstadt's aunt. Granny and Grandad refer to Amalia and Josef Hochstadt, Mia Blocker's mother and father. See interview with Amalia Hochstadt.

[2] Wade Blocker, Mia Blocker's husband.

[3] Ernst Hochstadt is Mia Blocker's brother and Steve Hochstadt's father, who left Vienna for the US in 1939.

September, oh golly! I really don't remember, Steve. But, anyway, I took the last boat, the last Japanese boat that left England to go to Shanghai.[4] And the Suez Canal was closed at that time, so it took three months to get to Shanghai via the Cape, you know, Africa. Is it recording?

SH: No, it's fine.

MB: Yeah.

SH: And that was when? 1940?

MB: It must have been 1940, yeah, '40, '41, you know that was, okay, the Japanese war, let's see, let me stop and think. When did the war broke, break out in the Pacific?

SH: December of '41.

MB: Okay, December '41. So that must have been 1940 then. Okay.

SH: And then tell me about going to school. Tell me about the school you were in again.

MB: What school?

SH: The first one, the Girls, Public School for Girls.

MB: Oh! Public School for Girls in Shanghai. Well, when I came from England, you know I'd gone to a private school there, and, you know, there was, the Public School for Girls was the school in the International Settlement. There was a Jewish school, but, of course, you know there was no way that Grandad would have, you know, considered my going there.

SH: Why is that?

MB: Because he did not believe in a Jewish education, that's why, he was not a religious person, an observant person, and so, anyway, you know, I managed to get in there and, let's see, Four Lower. Let me think what that was. Okay, went in Four Lower, which would have been the equivalent of, trying to think what Americans called it. Four Lower. Four Upper. Five Lower. Five Upper. Sixth Form. Okay. Let's see. Twelve, eleven, ten, nine. Okay. Started what is equivalent of the eighth grade. Finished school.

SH: And you said you were one of the very few refugees who were in that school?

MB: Right. There were only, there were only two other girls. One of them was Trixie Braun, who's now in Los Angeles. And the other one was called Ratsy something. I don't remember what her name was.

SH: This was in your grade or in your whole school?

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[4] This was the Suwa Maru.

MB: Oh, no. In the whole school. They were about three years ahead of me, and there was one other girl who was a refugee girl, she was one, okay, she was on the same boat. Lisl Gutfreund. But she dropped out after a semester, so you know, she just quit school.

SH: Why weren't there other refugees in this school?

MB: Because it was an expensive school. It was an exclusive school, you didn't, you had to be admitted. You know, you didn't just go in and say I want to put my child in, unless you had a sponsor or you knew somebody. It was a private school. You know, what, what more could I say?

SH: Was that difficult being different than the other students?

MB: Not particularly. There was no, I, I wasn't different from anyone. Once you were there, you were just part of the crowd. The only difference, you know, being that, alright, I was near the top of the class and the people who are usually the smart girls aren't popular girls, so they, you know, you just sort of band together and you, this is where you have your friends and they're still my friends today. No difficulty.

SH: And then when you finished that school, you went to St.John's?

MB: St. John's University.

SH: Tell me something about St. John's.

MB: Well, okay, before St. John's, when I finished school, I really liked the idea of going back to school and I took a commercial course. And I . . .

SH: This is what year now?

MB: This is during the war. Let's see. Well, let's count again. 19-, when was the war over?

SH: '45.

MB: Okay. We're talking probably '44 when I graduated. I was 17. Okay. Let's see, 1927 is when I was born, well, you add 10 years is 37. Yeah, '44, okay. And I took a commercial course and I thought if I had to do this, I'd slit my throat, so this is when I crammed for a week to take the entrance exams. You had to take an entrance exam. The fact that you were third in class, you know, didn't count. So you had to take an exam in science, math, and English. And you could afford to flunk one. Well, I knew I was going to flunk math, because I didn't have any trig. So I just crammed for a week, read the biology book, got in. And, you know, stayed there until I transferred to UC Berkeley.

SH: So that was two years or three years?

MB: No, I was there for three years and . . .

SH: And did Berkeley accept credits from St. John's?

MB: Yes, indeed they did. I lost, I lost, let's see, I lost a semester and that was all. St. John's University was run, was sponsored by the Episcopalian Church and it's the twin to the University they have in Beirut, the American University. You know, they're both exceptionally good schools. And people who transferred there, you know, within three years, would get Ph.D's in Berkeley and the same thing in Chicago. So you know, it's not coming from a hick school.

SH: Who are the teachers?

MB: Americans mostly. Some Chinese who were educated in America. But it was an American university.

SH: Granny told me about the, about living with the Fadlallahs? Is that right?

MB: Lalkaka.

SH: Say it again. Or maybe if you could spell it.

MB: Yeah. L-A-, let's see, let me get a pencil. I'm not very good at spelling, you know. Good God! Fadlallahs, alright. (pause) Okay. The man's name was Lalkaka, L-A-L-K-A-K-A. He was a Parsi millionaire and he also happened to be a patient of Grandad's. And when the Japanese came and most of the refugees went to Hongkew, the, it so happened that somebody took a fancy to our apartment and we had to leave, and we did not have to go to Hongkew because Grandad arranged that we did not have to, and I think it was the fact they really wanted to keep a few physicians in the Settlement.

SH: "They" being the Japanese?

MB: Yeah, they being the Japanese. Because there were, oh you know, half a dozen of our friends who never did go to Hongkew, you know, including Preuss. You know, just again, it's a question of pull and various other things. So, Lalkaka had essentially what you'd call a mansion[5] and he felt that having a personal physician, you know, at his beck and call, he was an old man at that time, he was in his 80's, would be to his advantage and so he, we had, you know, three or four rooms, plus a bathroom, and in my, Granny shared the kitchen with Lalkaka's daughter-in-law, whose name was Damrie. Okay. D-A-M-R-I-E. And so that's where we stayed until the war was almost over. And then Granda-, Grandad went back to our apartment, and he, which was completely unfurnished. Apparently what the man did . . .

SH: The man was Japanese?

MB: The man was either Korean or Japanese, and he had a store, a little store in the same building, and he used to come in through the back window, you know, that roof garden. He never used the front door and there was no furniture in the apartment. And Grandad said, "Well, the war is almost over and my son is in the American army and if you don't get out . . . ", and he didn't have to say any more, because the man, you know, just disappeared, and

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[5] The house was on Gordon Road.

so we just moved back in.

SH: Now, when Granny told that story, she said she did that.[6]

MB: Oh God no! Granny never did anything. Okay, it turns out if it hadn't been for Grandad, we would have really been in trouble, because Grandad could see that as soon as the war began there'd be shortages, so every time he went out, he would come back with toilet paper and soap and, you know, just necessities, so we really never did without anything. And towards the end of the war, the people were profiteering, you know, black market profiteering and various things, and Grandad and Dr. Preuss got together and they thought "everybody is getting rich but us, so let us, you know, get into the business." So they bought several cases of tuna fish and, oh, it was either tuna fish or salmon, canned salmon and some kind of canned jam. Anyway, there were like maybe half a dozen cases. And of course the war was, you know, the war was quickly over and there we sat (laughs), you know, salmon and jam. But, anyway, that was his one, that was his one little effort, you know, at trying to make money. So, no, Granny did nothing. It turned out we had a cook and Granny used to have fights with him and then he would leave and he'd go home. And then after two or three weeks, of course, you know, Granny decided she couldn't possibly get along without servants, so Grandad would go back, would go to his house and, sure enough, and there, the boy, you know, the cook, who was called "boy", you know, was just waiting to be called back. And, you know, and he'd come back, and after six months something would happen and Granny would fire him and so, okay. That was the situation. No, Granny was totally dependent on Grandad. She never did anything on her own. So, he was very protective.

SH: So when you were living at the, at Lalkaka's, this was not undercover in any way?

MB: Oh no, no, no . . .

SH: Was it perfectly open . . . ?

MB: It was a perfectly, heavens, perfectly open thing. As a matter of fact, we had one very interesting incident. Grandad, somehow or other, met some Japanese officer. You know, I don't know what the situation was, whether he was consulted as a physician or what, I, I do not remember. But this man was very homesick and he made a point of coming at least twice a week on a visit, you know, and he'd have a cup of tea and he would sit around and say, you know, how good it was to be with a family. And, of course, we all died, because we really didn't want him around, but on the other hand, you know, what could you do? So, you know, it was just one of those, you know, personal situations. And no, he, okay, he had very few patients, you know, he'd have like office hours in the afternoon for a couple of hours, and he was, he organized a sort of first-aiders. Okay, somehow, you know, he got a group of young people together, including me, and he would give lectures and it would be, you know, like St. John's or whatever the Red, you know, what first-aiders are called. And we'd have lectures on how, you know, to put splints on and bandages and that kind of thing. No, there nothing happened, it was all open and above board. No harassment or anything like that.

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[6] See interview with Amalia Hochstadt.

SH: And you think that there were half a dozen other . . .

MB: Oh yes, yes.

SH: . . . refugee families from . . .

MB: Dr. Preuss was one of them that I know and, let's see. Oh, there was a couple of dentists, Schiller, okay, Schiller, they left, they had no children, they were Austrians, and the reason I remember them is because they played bridge together. And then there were the Brauns. And, okay, Braun was a dentist. Schiller was a dentist. Preuss was a gastroenterologist. Then there was another doctor and I'm trying to think what his name was. All I remember is his wife died of cancer. But no! There, there were at least, you know, half a dozen, maybe more, physicians who never did go to Hongkew. And, you know, and Wade really supposed the Japanese did that in order to leave some physicians on the outside. You know, if, in case there were any health problems or whatever. You know, who can tell?

SH: Who were Grandpa's patients?

MB: Mostly Europeans, a few Chinese, a few wealthy Chinese. Bankers. And as far as Europeans were concerned, Italian Embassy, some Russians. You know, I, I have no idea, but you know they, they weren't, listen, he did not have a price. He had a quote "society practice." You know, people had money and so he really did not have to work very hard.

SH: Were Granny and Grandpa able to bring to Shanghai much money?

MB: None at all. I think they probably came there with, you know, at most a couple of hundred dollars, which I believe was lent to them, again by some ex-patient, he was a, he was Dutch.[7] And he was not Jewish, and I'm trying to think, you know, I was, okay, you know, I just have a vague recollection. He was, okay, he died in one of the camps and he was the one who gave them money, because they couldn't take any money out. And, okay, first Granny and Grandad went to Italy and they stayed with the Szemeres. The same thing that, you know, your, your dad did. And then when he, when your father, did, did you know that?

SH: Yes, that he went there?

MB: Yeah.

SH: Yes.

MB: And you know, when they couldn't keep him any more, they sent him to Portugal. And then, you know, when, then he went to the States. And I must say that when Medi[8] came and visited us, he did not acknowledge the debt that he owed her. Okay, and maybe

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[7] His name was Professor Teldes.

[8] Renate (Medi) Szemere, a friend of the family.

your mother was aware of that, because that was really very shameful, had it not been for Medi, your dad would never have made it to the States. Okay, they were, okay, Medi herself didn't have all that much money, but her husband's family were shipowners. It'd be just like owning the President Lines. They had Lloyd Triestino. So, she had, you know, pull. And she, she did, as I said, if it had not been for her, your father would not be here today. Whether he's aware of that or not, you know, heavens knows. But . . .

SH: So how were Granny and Grandpa able to, to set up this rather wealthy lifestyle again in Shanghai, after they weren't able to . . .

MB: It wasn't wealthy lifestyle. It was a middle-class lifestyle. You know I, I don't know what you mean by wealth. Because in Europe, okay, they belong to the, in Europe you have, you have the lower class and then you have the middle class and then you have the upper class, and the upper class is usually aristocracy and people who are immensely wealthy, and just because you're a physician, now by American standards, you know, you might be upper class. European standards, you're definitely middle middle. So it's, it's a question of, you know, being put in the right category. And it was just a question of building up a practice. You know, they met people and got invited out and they sent patients and Grandad was a charming man and, you know, that's how, how a practice grows.

SH: But they were also able to save things like silver by sending them to England. Is that with you?

MB: Okay, the, some of the silver, well, Granny left something like 80 kilograms of silver behind that Mitzi, you know, who was my grandmother's servant, and Mitzi was, you know, let's see, she probably started out, you know, being 18 years old and, you know, stayed with, you know, my grandmother forever. And if there was a family party and she was needed somewhere, she would go from, you know, our house to Egon's house[9] or something like that. But she was really a member of the family. And she apparently got all the silver and I think essentially that's what she lived on. You know, once, you know, my grandmother was deported, you know, she'd just sell it off bit by bit, you know, who knows? It doesn't really matter. But no, the only thing they salvaged was the dinnerware set that you have. And, incidently, it'd be the greatest mistake to try and split it up. You have a daughter and that goes to your daughter and it doesn't go to your son. He can, he can get, marry somebody and she can bring the silver in.

SH: Why do you, why should it go to my daughter rather than my son?

MB: Because that's the way it usually does. It happens, okay. You know, your son is, you know, he can fend for himself, but it's the daughter who gets the family possessions and not the son.

SH: As a dowry you mean.

MB: Yeah, well not as a dowry but, you know, that's the way it goes generally. And if you split it up, you know, what, what use is having four place settings, you know, for one of

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[9] Egon Peretz was Mia Blocker's maternal uncle.

them? You know, it's worthless. So you just give her the whole shebang and let it go at that. And besides which, if you give it to your son and he gets divorced, it's going to be lost, because then his wife will get it, so it will go out of the family. That's why you give it to the daughter.

SH: So they essentially started over in Shanghai.

MB: They started over. Right. At first, apparently they lived in a boarding house for about a month until they found the apartment, and they had, you had to have quote "key-money", which meant you really had to buy it. And so they bought the apartment and they had some very good friends. Their name was Geberman. They were Russian Jews and one of the boys, I think, is a big wig in Israeli politics. He was a Zionist and he went to Israel from Shanghai, so, you know, that's, you know, I'm sure he was a, you know, he's some kind of prominent government official. And, you know, they were very helpful to my mother and my father and you know, getting him set up and after that, of course, you know, he just did well! I know there were lots of doctors who were starving, but then that's true everywhere. It's a question of personality and various things, but we did alright. We weren't wealthy. You know, I don't know what you call wealth. You know, we did not consider ourselves wealthy. Good Lord!

SH: When you had, was your social life organized around the people you met at school, at, either . . .

MB: Yes.

SH: . . . at the public school or St. John's?

MB: Yes, yes, my best friends, my best friends, you know, okay, my best friends today still are the people that I met at school. One of them is in Pittsburgh and, you know, she went to school also in Berkeley and got a degree there and that was, okay, her maiden name was Anna Smilianski, and she married in Berkeley. Got married to an Israeli, whose name was Braverman, went to Israel, came back to the States, got divorced, married to somebody else now. And she's the, okay, the supervisor of, in a lab in the hospital in Pittsburgh. And her name is Anna Radler. And she was born in Harbin, Russian-Jewish, okay, non-observant. And the other friend of mine, Zika, is in Sydney. And oh! One thing, okay, which is neither, okay, which is neither, you could switch that stupid thing off. Talking of . . .

SH: Should I do that?

MB: Huh?

SH: Should I do that?

MB: Oh, I don't care! You know, this is just garbage I'm talking about now. You know, this commercial course that I told you that I took, you know, where I thought I'd slit my throat. Well, when we were in St. John's, of course, okay, there was Zika and I, because by that time Anna had transferred to the States. She was the first one at Berkeley. And of course Zika and I were used to getting good grades and here we took some tests in a psych, in a psych course and we got 90 and, you know, we assumed that it was par for the course. Well, it

turned out it was an aptitude test. And if you scored above 50, you were completely unfit to work in an office, you know, as a secretary or whatever. So here we made 90. Well, what it, what it meant, that neither one of us, you know, was made for, you know, taking a letter "Dear Sir". And when Zika left Shanghai she was a, she was studying to be a concert pianist. And when she got to Australia, that in those days, that was, okay, whenever the Communists came 1947, '48, Australia really was not very culturally inclined. So in order to make a living, she became a secretary and after one year she said she was completely suicidal. You know, not that she failed as a secretary, but just doing the kind of work. So she became active in a little theater group and today she is the, essentially the director and the manager and everything else of a respectable theater in Sydney, and I asked Geoffrey about it and he said, "Oh yes, you know, it's a very well known place, you know, they give classes in acting and put on shows." It's a hundred and, I don't know, a 150-seat theater. So that's, you know, what she did. It's kind of interesting.

SH: Can you tell me how you managed to come to the United States? All the process of getting visas?

MB: Yeah, okay. Well, really what I did is I applied for an immigration visa.

SH: This is after the war is over now?

MB: Yeah. When the war was over, applied for an immigration visa, and when I went to the American consulate, they gave me a physical. And they decided that, okay, they found I had a congenital cataract. That I would, okay, quote, the doctor decided, the American, that I was going to, might go blind and therefore be a burden to the state and therefore denied, you know, giving me a visa. So, consequently, I turned around and I applied for a student visa, and applied to Berkeley, applied to Stanford, got accepted at both and that's how I came.

SH: So the student visa was rather easy to get once you got into a, a place?

MB: Yeah. Student visa was no problem.

SH: And what did that mean? That meant that you could come as a student, but then you should leave?

MB: You could come as a student, you could come as a student, but, you know, supposedly when you finished your studies, you had to leave again. But the theory was that no girl who was, you know, who wasn't completely unattractive, you know, would fail to find someone to marry her. So, you know, there was really no need to worry about that. Besides which we had, oh, friends in New York and they probably would have done the honors, you know, if all had failed, so it really wasn't that much, didn't worry about it.

SH: Done what honors?

MB: Well, would have married me!

SH: I see, as a kind of a false marriage?

MB: No, not, not even as a, look, you know, you mightn't realize that, but I was not totally unattractive. I was not a raving beauty and, as I said, I don't know of any girl who came here on a student's visa who didn't get married. So, you know, it was just, you didn't even worry about it.

SH: Why did you pick Stanford and Berkeley?

MB: Okay, I liked the West Coast for the climate. Then I was an English major and it turned out actually, the best universities in those days were University of California, Columbia, and Harvard. They had the top English departments and since I had friends in Berkeley, I chose Berkeley.

SH: Friends who had been also to Shanghai and gone . . .

MB: Yeah. Who had gone there and, you know, and so that was, okay, Otto Schnepp was in, in Berkeley.[10] So was my friend Anna and, you know, maybe half a dozen other kids from Berkeley, I mean from Shanghai. Well, the University of California is one of the top institutions.

SH: No, I understand. But there are many good institutions and . . .

MB: Not as good as, not as, not as good as Berkeley was in those days. Stanford was nothing, that's why I turned it down. Stanford in those days was just a sort of country club-type school like USC, you know, a, a nothing school. It's changed, okay, when you had the, now, of course, when you had the loyalty oath, all the people left, the good people, lots of good people left Berkeley and went to Stanford. So it's not the same institution that it was. But at the time when I came here, Stanford was nothing. And, you know, money-wise it didn't make any difference, because I had to pay out-of-state tuition, so whether it was Stanford or Berkeley, tuition was the same.

SH: And then how did Granny and Grandpa manage to come over?

MB: Well, they had, when they first came to Shanghai, they had applied, even possibly then, for an immigration visa and of course there was a quota system, you know, you had to wait. And they, had the war not broken out as soon as it did, they, actually they would have been in Australia today, because they had applied for an Australian visa and it was just a question of months before that was going to come through. And then, you know, the war broke out, so that was the end of that. So, you know, after the war, they just simply, you know, reapplied for, you know, on the quota and waited until their turn came and came.

SH: Did it matter that you were here or that Daddy was . . .

MB: Oh I, I don't think that, of course, I'm sure that helped, but I don't think that, you know, really was a prime thing.

SH: It was just a question of waiting a turn.

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[10] See interview with Otto Schnepp, Los Angeles, June 7, 1990.

MB: Yeah, waiting a turn. You see, and that depended on where you were born. And, you know, some of the quotas, now if you were, for instance, if you were, oh, I don't know, if you were born in China and you happen to be a western-, a westerner, you see, on the Chinese quota, chances of coming in were very good. Because there might only be, I don't know, a hundred people ahead of you. And you know, if you came from, okay, what, where did they come from? They came from Romania. So again, it depended how many people had applied and so many people were allowed each year and so there . . .

SH: So they were on the Romanian and not the Viennese . . . ?

MB: No, on the Austrian. No, it depended on where you were born, okay, and the, it was Austria that time. So it was not a Romanian quota. No. And they had an Austrian passport, just as I did. And you say social life, it turned out, okay, in Shanghai, of course, it was a question of status. You know, I was known as Dr. Hochstadt's daughter. So, you know, that opened all kinds of doors.

SH: Meaning what? What, how would that, that . . .

MB: Well, okay, for an example, after the war was over, or was that even during the war? No, that was, before the war was over. Let me try and think. That was shortly before the war was over, or maybe right after it. The B'nai B'rith spon-, okay, there was such a thing as the AZA, which was the young men and then they had the B'nai B'rith young women, and they formed a charter group. And the charter group consisted of a dozen young ladies. And they were more or less chosen, well, they had to come from a quote "good family" and all that kind of thing. Well, I happened to be amongst them, and we did good things. We, we sponsored dances for Jewish servicemen and, you know, Americans. Well, we'd go down to Hongkew and we'd be Lady Bountifuls, you know, we'd pass out candy to the poor kids or something like that.

SH: Whose poor kids?

MB: The refugees. Okay. Somehow I did not consider myself a refugee as such. You know, okay, just didn't know the people and had very little to do with them. So that's really what it amounted to. You know, I lived in a different world. As a matter of fact, when we thought we had to leave the apartment, Grandad went down there and he looked for some housing and I remember we found one house that had, it was either a two- or three-story house. And I thought it was charming, because I'd have my own room and, you know, all the privacy in the world and all that kind of thing. Well, Granny was not very happy. And, you know, of course, your grandmother is the biggest snob that ever existed. So, and you know, we never had to go to Hongkew. But it turned out they did have a bombing raid and I think by mistake a couple of bombs were dropped on Hongkew. We're not talking of tremendous damage, you know, it was just maybe one little bomb dropped by mistake. Well, that little bomb happened to hit the house that we picked out. So, you know, so much for fate. And . . .

SH: There's some, I don't know how much time you have left.

MB: Well, when the buzzer goes, we can always, you know, continue. I've got two and half minutes. Okay. Because I've got a, well, let's see, this is 2:00. I can give you fifteen

minutes, then I've got to get rest and go down there.

SH: Are there incidents, events, or, or things that really stick in your mind about, about your time in Shanghai that, that would show something of life there?

MB: Well, what do you mean something of life there? When you . . .

SH: Something of your life there.

MB: Like what? You know, I'm not quite sure I understand your question.

SH: Well, just some, some things that really stick in your mind as, as strong memories.

MB: Oh yes. The strong memories are that you, okay, the Chinese masses just hated foreigners and by foreigner I mean any Westerner. So, the thing was that, you know, if you were a Westerner or foreigner and if you saw another white man, it didn't matter whether he was Russian or Lithuanian or you name it what, you felt sort of an automatic kinship. It is "us against them." I imagine that's something that blacks must feel that in this country. Because when you're in a mass of, or sea of Chinese you just feel that way and, of course, you know, you'd walk down the street and you'd have the little urchins running after you saying, "Nakoning pisay". You know, sort of "foreign devil."[11] So there was no, okay when you talk of Chinese masses there was absolutely no love lost for, you know, Westerners. And if you think there is, that's just sheer propaganda and nonsense. Because the Chinese are like the Japanese. You know, they like themselves and they don't like anyone else. Now, the only time I really began to like Chinese was when I was at St. John's and you met an educated class of people. So that was an entirely different situation. And, you know, there's communication there. And, of course, the Chinese who went to St. John's, they were quite Westernized, again they were children of affluent homes. And I think probably that had something to do with it. But, you know, it's a good place to be away from. It's not my country and that's the way I felt. You know, all my, you know, all the friends that I had, we could hardly wait to get out of there. But we led a very Victorian and a very, we all had a very sheltered upbringing. Turns out when you went to school, you were not allowed to have make-up. The first time I wore lipstick was to my high school graduation dance. And . . .

SH: The school didn't allow it? The school didn't . . .

MB: The school didn't allow it. And in those days, you know, you simply, there were certain things, as I, you simply did not do. A young girl did not go to a bar with a young man unless she were engaged to him, because if she did, she'd be essentially a, you know, a fallen woman. And Shanghai, if you lived in the Settlement or in the Concession, and if you went to a movie house, chances were people would see you. So if you held hands with somebody, it would take one day before it got back to my parents. "Oh, I saw your daughter Mia and she was in the show and she was holding hands with a boy." So in a way it was a sort of small village mentality, even though it was, you know, in a sea of two million. But, you know, you had a privileged life which you don't do in this country, unless you have a

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[11] In Shanghai dialect, "nakoning" means foreigner, and "pisan" is a curse.

lot of money. And apart from that, it's, it was a colonial existence.

SH: Did you have other experiences with Chinese which, evidence of this dislike of Chinese or Westerners? When you mentioned the kids running after . . .

MB: Oh, yeah. That, that you have in the street constantly. Th-, th-, that's a constant thing.

SH: In what way?

MB: You walk down the street and you have little kids chasing after you. Or, you know, a rickshaw coolie calling you names. If you understand Chinese, they have nothing good to say about you. And, there's no question that, you know, and the Chinese just hated Westerners because they felt that, you know, Shanghai was being colonialized and then you had this thing about the parks, that Chinese and dogs weren't allowed to go in. And that, of course, didn't endear any Westerner to the Chinese. So, you know, there was a lot of friction.

SH: But you had a Chinese cook in your house.

MB: Oh yeah. The fact that you have Chinese servants, you know, if you're used to servants, they, you know, they're just part of the furniture. You don't consider them as people, you know, they're there. So, of course.

SH: Did you have other Chinese servants besides the cook?

MB: Yeah, we had an amah who did the washing. And then when, you know, Granny feuded with the boy, he, you know, he would leave and then she might hire a couple, you know, a cook and an amah. But usually, you know, when we had the boy, his wife would come and do the washing. And then if there was any really hard work to do, then you'd hire somebody and he was known as a coolie. And, you know, it was a question of rungs, you know, hierarchy even amongst the servants. So, and there was nothing unusual, if you had a hund-, okay, let's, let's put it this way. Before the war in the early, you know, in the late 30's, if you made a hundred dollars U.S., you could easily afford to have two servants. You could have parties, you could have a case of Black Label whiskey during the month, and you would still be out ahead in the way of money. So . . .

SH: A hundred dollars a month.

MB: A hundred dollars a month. And that is what an English policeman got paid. And it turned out a lot of the English policemen, they were really low-class individuals in England, who were very unhappy about what was happening in China and the fact the war broke out, because they knew if they went back to England they would be nobody, whereas in Shanghai they would have a very nice apartment. They would be able to send their children to private school. They would have servants. They could have parties. The wives could dress beautifully. All on a hundred a month.

SH: Did the servants live in your apartment?

MB: No. The servants came in the morning and left in the evening.

SH: Was that the usual thing for . . .

MB: Yes, generally. You know, there might have been other arrangements, but the apartments just weren't large enough to, you know, give them a bedroom or whatever. No, they'd come and they'd leave. So.

SH: Tell me about the intersection there between Seymour and Bubbling Well roads. Was that an important, was that an important intersection in the Settlement or . . .

MB: Not more important than any other intersection. It just happened to be an intersection. It was a trolley stop, it was a bus stop, and it was a tram stop. But other than that, it was just an intersection, there was nothing . . .

SH: Because the two roads are important.

MB: Seymour Road, okay, Seymour Road going to where you had the Synagogue really became kind of slummy.[12] And going the other way it became Avenue du Roi Albert. And in the French Concession, you know, maybe half a mile down. And, but, you know, there was, I can't think of any particular importance. You know, you'd go up through some other intersection and you'd, it was just an intersection.

SH: But Bubbling Well Road is the major . . .

MB: Bubbling Well Road is a, was a main artery. So, you know, in, in the Settlement.

SH: One other, who, who else lived in the apartments above the cinema?

MB: Okay. Only whites. No Chinese were allowed in those apartments. And there was a reason for it. When the war was over, and, you know, it's not just being sort of, you know, ra-, you know, racial or something discriminatory. When the war was over, of course, you know, Chinese moved in. It turned out the apartment had steam heat and, of course, hot water, which was part of your rental. Well, as soon as the Chinese moved in, they decided they really didn't want to pay for steam heat and they didn't want to pay for hot water. They'd make their own hot water. So, you cannot have an apartment house with some people paying and some people not paying. Or then when you go out the kitchen, okay, there were back stairs. The Chinese started keeping maybe a couple of live chickens there. Well, you can't keep a chicken, you know, without smelling and dirtying, stuff like that. So it was a question of two different cultures. It was not a question of, you know, not letting the Chinese in because they were Chinese. It was a question that they didn't have the standards that Europeans had and vice versa.

SH: Whose rules were they or who owned the apartments?

MB: Oh. It was an English concession. Who knows who had the apartment? It's a, I have no idea. Might have been one man, it could have been a company. But, and that was the same thing for the parks. Okay, the parks did not allow Chinese in there and the reason

[12] Ohel Rachel, the major Sephardic synagogue, was on Seymour Road.

why is they didn't want vagrants, they didn't want people spitting, they didn't want people littering. So, and, you know, they felt if the Chinese were there all these things would happen. So this is why, you know, no Chinese and dogs. Okay, that of course, you know, might have been for the hoi polloi. But, you know, obviously the upper-crust Chinese and the middle-class Chinese didn't like that, which is comprehensible. So that's part of the friction. And this was also true, in the, okay, foreign YMCA, of which I was a member, that they would not allow Chinese, and, because the Chinese had, okay, there were diseases, trachoma and various, you know, who else, exotic diseases. And they felt that they did not practice the same hygiene that Europeans did. And, of course, there were lots of tropical diseases. So one way to work this was that just being very exclusive. No Chinese.

SH: Did you have any jobs while you were in Shanghai?

MB: Not, nothing except going to school. Yes, I did. All right. I taught school. I was asked to teach in a secondary boy's school. I guess it was the equivalent of the 10th or 11th grade. Someone recommended me in the English department.

SH: This is while you were in St. John's?

MB: Yeah, this is while I was St. John's. And it was three times a week in the afternoons. And my grades just plummeted. So I decided, you know, that wasn't worth it and dropped it. It was fun while it lasted, but there were other things I preferred to do.

SH: You better get going.

MB: Yeah, I better get going.

END OF INTERVIEW