



Hilda Samuel



In 1955 two little girls
ten and eleven years

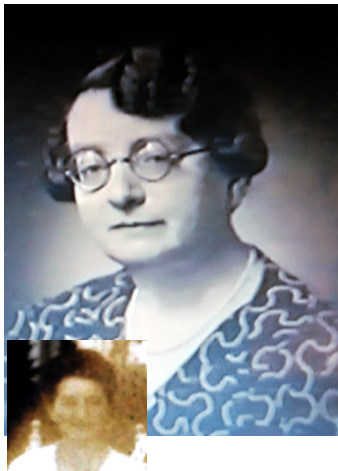
old met in their neighborhood bakery and realized

they both spoke German at home. Marion Seidemann and Ruth Samuel became fast friends, as did their families. Ruth's parents were German Jews who grew to adulthood in the Deutschland of the 1930s. This was the decade when Hitler and the Nazi party rose to power, then increasingly threatened the freedom, rights, and ultimately the very lives of its Jewish citizens. They fled to Shanghai where their children Ralph and Ruth were born. After the Second World War the Samuel family came to St. Louis. Ruth's father died in 1956. Ralph and Ruth's mother Hilda was interviewed by a Spielberg volunteer shortly before her death. Ralph, her son and Ruth are sharing her story with us.

Hilda was from a town in Northern Germany, a town called Strelitz. It was in a territory in North Germany; bounded on the north by the Baltic Sea. Hilda Samuel nee Zemack born June 27 1906 in Strelitz a small town of 5000 people in the state of Mecklenburg in Germany. Her parents (1910) were:

Pauline Ephraim

Adolf



Hilda: I was an only child.
When I was five years old I had a little brother but only for 9 days.
So he died as a baby.
I grew up as an only child. I had no Jewish girl friends
There were very few Jews in Strelitz.
There were play mates. There were 6 that I had.
And since I always was very short my parents took me for one year to a private teacher. This teacher took 2 girls for one year.
At 6 ½, I started school. My playmates and school mates were: One daughter from the mayor One daughter from the Warden.
They were my friends all through the years later.



A painting of town not unlike Strelitz, The town of Halberstadt early 1930s; the Old town - near what had been the Jewish Quarter. Halberstadt was tucked against the Harz Mountains, in the northeast of Germany two hours from Berlin,

After the first year we were ready to go to the regular school which was in the next city, which was just a few kilometers away, but we had to use the train.

That city was the center of the area. Kids from all around came every day. That was the better school. There was a lyceum 10 grades.

When we got there we could have

skipped a grade.

But the other two girls had to have religion. They stayed back. I didn't want to be alone. So I stayed back so we could go together. I had my playmates.

My grandfather came as a young boy over the border from Russia into Germany. The northeast of Germany. And there he stayed. How he made his living I don't know. He met my grandmother and they got married. He was 19 and she was 21. They had 4 children. Where they lived Jews were not allowed to own property. My grandfather wanted a house. So he moved his family to Strelitz where I was later born.

My father was the oldest and had 2 sisters. Through the years of course as his sisters grew older they got married.



L

THE BUILDING GRANDFATHER BOUGHT IN STRELITZ the store was a haberdashery.



My grandfather never thought about that he was still Russian. And then the war broke out in 1914, and all of a sudden we were Russian, my grandfather, my parents and I. My father's sisters got married to German men and the law in Germany was that you become the citizen of the state of the

husband. So they were not Russians. They were not affected. My grandparents had no problems. They were older people.. But my father had to enlist in the army. To become a citizen. And that's what he did. At 40 he went into the army. So we became citizens too. It was a shock for a while. My father had to go away. But since he was already 40 first of all he had to go through the training with the young boys. He was a very



heavy set man. Unfortunately and had to go through all these exercises.
 And that was the foundation for the 3 day illness.
 He never was sent really to the front. He was sent to where I was living. He did office work. And then for a while he was in France, but not at the front. In 1917 he was sent home one year before the war was over, but he still had to work in the factory that made boxes for ammunition. I watched him there once. In 1918 he got out he could stay home finally. I didn't have much of a father. He was never home. My grandfather's name was Simon my grandmother's name was Henriette Nee Gerson
SIMON ZIMACK

;When I started getting a Jewish education we only had a cantor in Strelitz



There were so few Jewish people in Strelitz.
 We had no minion any more
 We had a cantor until he died in 1919.

First of all there was another girl. She was already 14 and she dropped out
 The cantor made me come every shabbos afternoon to his house
 I had some history, but the old history. Nothing about modern Jewish history.
 When he died I had to go to Neustrelitz where I really went to school also.
 There we were a group of 8 or 10 children all ages.
 And another cantor came from still another city and taught all of us at the same time.

I was aware of being Jewish.

On the high holidays our store was closed. It was really closed. Sometimes people tried to come the back way to get something We wouldn't sell. I was told that one time a customer came from a nearby village to buy a dowry for his daughter. She wanted to get married.

We wouldn't sell. He had to come back another day.

In those days customers were different. They didn't go from one store to another to check on prices. If you had a customer he was your customer.

And he came to you. If you were closed he would come another day

As long as we had the cantor of course we had services. I

guess when I was very little they had services on shabbos evening I remember my grandfather going to the

synagogue. I guess at one time Strelitz must have had a large congregation. We had a very old synagogue that was big

enough for 300 people. There was no light. No electricity.

On Yom Kippur it was already cold in Strelitz. When my mother went in the morning to the temple she had a maid bring a blanket and a foot stools so she could keep warm during the day.

HILDA 1920

There was an old synagogue. When it started to get dark the shammas came with a candle at the end and lit up the candelabra that hung from the ceiling. Wherever there was someone standing each person had a candle for himself.



The candelabra was really very pretty. The synagogue was very very old.

The Germans had a munitions factory outside Strelitz which they blew up before the



Russians came, so the city was damaged. My house

doesn't exist any more.

Synagogue Strelitz built 1913

My father passed away in 1922. He was very sick.

My mother kept the store.

She was not really a business woman.

She did the best she could.



I sort of drifted a few years. I didn't know what I wanted. I was a typical teenager.

I heard of a woman who taught typing and short hand. And I went to her and took lessons.

She got me my first job. I was only there three months. She said, I think I have a job for you. He is just a beginner. He cannot pay much. Why don't you go there?

And I did and I got the job. I loved it. That was 1928. My boss was not Jewish. But he was officially Nazi. To protect himself he joined to party. He wore the uniform. Sometimes he had to go to meetings. Before he came to the office left he showed me to make sure his arm band was right. He was laughing about it. To protect himself.

Some friends of my mother were visiting. And they heard I just got the job; If this is your first job you need to stay there at least a year. Otherwise if you want to go somewhere else it will make a bad impression.

A whole year in one place?

I had to do everything that you need to do in the office. I was the only one. My boss came in in the morning and most of the time he left.

And I did my work.



After five years he had to fire me because the Nazis were after him. He couldn't help himself. That was in the fall of 1933.

Our house I remember upstairs we rented out to students. Rooms. One of them took the Nazi flag out of the window. There was a box near the entrance from the Nazis where they put their notes in there. If they were having a meeting. And we couldn't do anything about it.

I wasn't afraid of the Nazis at that time. There was very bad inflation in Germany. So my mother wanted to sell the store. And if you were having a total sale you had to tell the police about it. And she did. So she told the

police she was going to have a total sale on April first 1933.

And then Hitler announced a boycott of all Jewish stores on April 1, 1933. and that was the first time I realized I had a nervous stomach. I was so afraid at that time. I really was.

When the first came of course we couldn't open. Outside stood a big guy with a sign hanging around his neck not to buy here. People walked by him and came around the back way and bought on that day.



They didn't take Hitler serious at that time. Not that serious. That was the problem. Because they didn't believe it would be like that.

A few months after I left my first job my boss came over to me and said he had a job for me in Rostock.

It was a man who had visited him a few times so I knew him. And I didn't have much choice. He said talk it over with your mother. And if you want to take it come over to me and we will call him. I needed something. I decided I better do that.

I went to him.

He made the phone call.

I went to Rostock not knowing anybody except the man I worked for.

100 km north. That was not a Jewish enterprise either.

Strelitz is 100km north of Berlin.

When I went to leave Strelitz my mother accompanied me to the station. And we knew the cantor from Rostock would come.

An old Jewish man had just died. The cantor came to bury him. So while we were waiting for the train the counter train came and a man came through with a black coat and a big black hat. And I told my mother that has to be the cantor.

I went to him and said: Excuse me. Are you the cantor from Rostock? I told him I was to go to Rostock not knowing anybody.



He said come to the synagogue on Friday night and I will introduce you to my family after we doven. So at least I had something.

I went to Rostock. And I was terribly homesick at first. One of the employees of the company I

went to work for picked me up at the railway station and took me to his mother's house, who had a

room for rent. It was a terrible room, just awful.

But my job was nice. I was very satisfied. I liked it. I even made a friend there.

We went out a

few times. Later it turned out that this guy that got me the first room turned Nazi and told the boss

he had to dismiss me. After five months.

But in the mean time I had found another room with a very nice elderly Jewish couple. They had a room empty. The room used to belong to their daughter. There was no comparison with the other room.

I found the synagogue. I went in. The service was in progress. After the service I went downstairs and the cantor introduced me to his family and invited me for a cup of coffee for the next day.

Of course I went. There was another old lady. She was the widow of a rabbi. They must have talked about me. They gave me the addresses of several families that had daughters approximately my age. And told me I should pick one of them and pay them a visit on the Sunday morning. Of course I had never done anything like that in my life. But I was desperate. So on Sunday morning I picked a family that had two daughters and paid them a visit. They were very nice people. They invited me, two sisters, and

their girl friend, another girl. They were going for a walk that afternoon and I should join them. So I did.

As we were walking one of the sisters was walking with me and said I know a husband for you.

Oh, you do? I said the man that I marry has to be tall because I'm so short.

And she said don't worry about that. The man I have in mind is tall. He is a friend of my bothers.

Of course we were joking around.

So I said: You know something. If I would make an appointment with him to meet him at a nice out doors café would you join us?

I said: Sure.

Sure enough after a couple of weeks or so I got a phone call at the house I lived with the Jewish couple.

ADOLPH SAMUEL AS A BOY



And she said I have a rendezvous with this man at this café, it was a very nice outdoor café.

Will you come?

I said I'll come

And I did go.

And they were sitting, she and the young man

And we had conversation. It was very nice. I liked the way he talked.

And after a while we went to an amusement park that was in Rostock at that time. We didn't go on any rides but



we walked and talked for quite a while

Then he and I took the other girl home. Then he took me home. Of course there were no cars. We walked.

And I came home that evening it was 2 o'clock in the morning.

We made an appointment the next day to meet at the railway station where he lived close by. And we were going to a resort at Warnemunde which is a resort something like Miami. A beautiful beach.

Warnemünde

Located just 10 km or six miles from Rostock's city center, this seaside district on the Ostsee is Rostock's jewel.

The next day I met my landlady. She said: Fraulein Zemack. Where have you been? We were worried to death.

I said I was out with Mr. Samuel.

Mr. Samuel? Oh, then you were in good hands. No worry about that.

Well I met Mr. Samuel on that Sunday and every Sunday thereafter.
Unfortunately the times were so bad that we didn't dare to get engaged or married
We met on June 2, 1934.
On Sept 28 1935 we were engaged which happened to be Rosh Hashanah
And three years later we finally got married.
By that time we knew already that we would have to leave the country.



IDENTY PASS WITH J FOR JEW.

Both of us had a job.
I was fired from that first job I had after five months.
I found another job with a Jewish company. It was like a dime store. I worked in the office.
The company was called Kadwa. I had two bosses. Mr. Loewenstein and Mrs Freida Rosenthal. I hated him like terrible but otherwise I did like my job. I hated him and I'll tell you why. I took dictation from him. One day he called me in and while I was waiting for him to start he

called in his manager from the store. He had his office next door. He was not Jewish. He had a letter in his hand. He was hoping for another girl to hire for the store, and apparently he had advertised in Germany somewhere. And this girl from a completely different area in Germany had answered, and he must have already answered once and told her that he would hire her three months of probation. And she wrote back and he had that letter in his hand that she would like to take the job, but that she came from so far away she couldn't come for three months probation. And she had all the experience and she had all the experience and she had shown in paper, but she could not accept that probation. And this letter he showed to the manager who was gentile. And he said look at this. You only can get this from a Jew. And he was Jewish.

And I was sitting there listening to him.

And later I understand on crystal night when they took all the men to concentration camps, I found out that all the men who they caught were taken to Strelitz into the prison. There was a prison and they used that as a concentration camp. And he now was there too. The others gave him their piece of mind. For they knew how he was. Supposedly he came here to America later. I never heard from him again, of course.



DAMGARTEN IN RED

In 1938 we got married.

My husband came from a much smaller town than Strelitz, from Damgarten. His family had there a grain business from many many years. They even had a little plot of cemetery in Damgarten. After the inflation they had to give it up. His father had died very early anyway, and my husband had become the manager when he was old enough.

They had to give that up. He bought a truck with a second truck and with something hanging off behind so he could transport more. And he had the various customers from the grain business, so they had him transport their grain where it was supposed to go or whatever they had to transport. And he had good business for a while.

[Germany Inflation in the Weimar Republic](#)

Germany went through its worst inflation in 1923. In 1922, the highest denomination was 50,000 Mark. By 1923, the highest denomination was 100,000,000,000,000 Mark. In December 1923 the exchange rate was 4,200,000,000,000 Marks to 1 US dollar. At one point in 1923 prices doubled every two days.



Then all of a sudden the Nazis got hold of that and went to his customers and told them to get somebody else. So he wrote the customers; and he lost the customers and he lost quite a bit of money on that truck that he had to sell.

That was already after I met him. So now he just found a job with a Jewish company who made accessories for shoes. His bosses name was also Samuel. No relation at all. And his boss got away from Germany

the easy way; went over the border with no passport or whatever. Apparently he had money lots of money outside already.



We were married in 1938. Three months later was Kristallnacht. And we had heard about that this young man in Paris was killed, the man from the consulate was killed supposedly by a Jew and now they gave Mr. Goebbels the reason to go and have that Crystal Night.

We only knew about this murder, but we didn't know about anything else. So on the Morning of the 10th of November 1938 both of us went to work like usual. He walked. I had to take the street car.

As I was riding along I saw already some windows smashed from small Jewish stores. That was the first thing I saw.



As I came to my store where I worked of course the windows were smashed. And I went upstairs to the office and there were two other girls already there. They were not Jewish. But they didn't work. They were just sitting there. Their faces were white. And they told me the men were downstairs waiting to be picked up. And I heard they tried to take all the men to concentration camps. So I figured I better see my husband again. After three months exactly three months.

After I was upstairs for a short while they let us know we should go home. So I walked home. I didn't take the street car. I was afraid to show my face. Back ways.

And shortly before I reached home I met one of the janitors from the stores. And he came running to me and said: Oh Mrs. Samuel, I have message for you from your husband. He got away. And he is on his way. And he will call you as soon as he can and let you know where he is and what he is planning to do.

I tell you something fell off my chest.

And we only had a room with my mother in law. And I went in to my mother in law. We didn't even try to get an apartment. I don't know if we would have gotten one.

I told my mother in law what happened. How we were waiting for the phone call.

And it came. My husband had gone to Waramunde where the trains go very often. And this was in winter so it was not in season; but there was a spot very near the station; and there he was with two other men who had gone with him. It was a cantor and someone else. But they went home afterwards. They didn't go with my husband. But my husband wanted me to take a suitcase for him and meet him there in Waramunde. And get some cash.

So my mother in law packed a suit case for him, and I went to my lady boss who didn't live far from me to get some cash. And she told me that all the apartments of the Jewish families had been invaded

that night and the furniture smashed except for two. One was my mother in law's. and another one from my boss. All the others were invaded. And she wanted to take me to my other boss because his was damaged.

I said thank you. I don't want to see it.

We figured out that we were exempted because our name and the name from my husband's boss were the same. And the people who did the invading must have had a list. But they didn't know there were two Samuels and there was also two Rosenthals. One was my boss. And there was a young couple. They had just married maybe 6 months before. There's was invaded. And they cut open the feather beds and poured jam into it. It was just awful.

So I got the cash. And I went to meet my husband in Waramunde. And he told me what he planned. He planned to go to Hamburg where his mother had two old lady cousins who he thought would put him up for a little while. And I should follow him.

Now he told me what happened at his place when the Nazis came. He got to work as usual and was just about to sit down to start to work when another young man came in. He was a friend of my husbands who happened to come there.

He said: Oh Adolf get on your coat and hat and leave. The Nazis are coming up to get you. Just leave.

My husband did that. He didn't really look Jewish so he put on his hat and coat and as he went down the stairs the Nazis came up. So when he came out onto the sidewalk a big desk came smashing out through the window right a few feet ahead of him. He was not hurt but he realized how serious it was. So then he made his plan that he would go to Hamburg for a while.

When the train came we both went in I got off in Rostock and he went on to Hamburg but he told me to come after him on the next train so we would be together. So I did that. I went home and I packed most of the things. And a few hours later there was another train that happened to be the same train we used three months earlier for our honeymoon. So I followed him a few hours later.

In Hamburg at the big station the train was underground, and I had to look around first and see where he might be.

I saw him upstairs with a Nazi in full uniform. So I thought there we go again.



Of course I walked up the stairs. He saw me coming. He came towards me. Apparently excused himself from that Nazi. So we left took a cab. He stayed at these two old

ladies by the way. That must have been a house which belonged to a Jewish organization. There were only Jews in that building. And downstairs was a family that offered me a room that happened to be empty that belonged to their daughter who was not there so I could stay there overnight.

So we took a cab. And the cab driver offered to take us down town to see the smashed windows.

We thanked him. We didn't really care.

So we went to that place. I stayed downstairs and he went upstairs. But after the first night, the room was right next to the hallway, early in the morning at 6 o'clock I heard very heavy footsteps going down the hall. I thought here they come. But it was the milk man delivering fresh milk to the people. And after I got up the people offered me breakfast. Well I could drink coffee. I couldn't eat. I couldn't eat anything.

They had heard already that we were married only three months so they thought I was pregnant.

But of course I wasn't.

And after a few days the old ladies upstairs got scared. They were afraid because they gave shelter to my husband they might get punished

So we were supposed to find another place.

I got some addresses. I don't know how.

I called people but to no avail. Some of the members from that house were already taken. It wasn't safe.

Several times I was on the street I saw the trucks filled with Jewish men driving away to the concentration camps.

Then, I don't know where this family came from; I unfortunately never got their name. They were gentile. They might even have been Communists. I don't know. They offered us a room. We went there. We stayed there several nights.

Then one night I took my husband out to get a little fresh air. And there was a phone on the street. So I phoned my uncle in Berlin. I didn't know if he was at home. But he was elderly already. And there was he and his wife and another aunt. They lived together. So I called and he answered the phone.



And I said Oh, Uncle Alvin. Can we come to you? I am in Hamburg with my little boy.

And he understood. I thought the phone was tapped. I don't know what I thought.

I said can we come to you?

And he said: Of course. Come with the next train. There's one coming. Tonight.

We went back to the room, packed our things, and left. And I never knew the name of these people.

This was not the main station of Hamburg. It was a substation. But it was on the way to Berlin so it was fine.

When we got there on the platform we wouldn't stay together. We didn't want to show two Jewish faces together. There were Nazis in uniform everywhere.

When the train came my husband went on one wagon and I took another one.

It crawled with Nazis in uniform.

After we were riding for a while I went along that walkway where you can walk along the whole train, I walked along to see if I still could find my husband. After two or three cars there was one window where the curtain was closed but between the end of the window and the curtain there was a gap. I could see his hands on his knees. And I recognized his hands. So I was satisfied he was still there and I went back to my place.

But it was full with Nazis.

In Berlin we both got out, of course

But I let him go ahead.

I followed him from a distance; and he hired a cab and I got in with him and we went to my relatives.

Now we were in Berlin.

And we got in touch with my mother in law. She told us that they had been searching for my husband for days. They searched the house from the top to bottom. They threatened her to tell them where we were. She didn't know. I didn't tell her where we were.

Finally not far ahead of Christmas she said you can come home now. It's safe now. Together.

But while we were in Berlin I went several times to visit my mother in Strelitz which was just half way between Berlin and Rostock. She told me what happened in Strelitz where there were no Jews. So they took the women on the tenth. Including my mother. In the morning a policeman came and told her Mrs. Zemack you need to come with me. You have to give me all the cash you have. And your jewelry. And you have to come with me. And he took her to the prison which was right now a concentration camp. And in Strelitz there were more women Jews than men. There were two friends of my mother who were spinsters who lived together who also had a house. But they had just sold the house. And they had the cash at home. And they had to give that away in the morning.

My mother was now in what they considered a concentration camp in Strelitz. In the afternoon the women were issued blankets.

A little while later I guess a warden changed his mind and he sent the women home.

The next morning a policeman came again and said my mother should come over to the police station and get her things back. We happened to live almost across the street from the police station. And my mother went and she got all her money back. All her jewelry. Everything.

And she was about to leave, and they called after her: Oh Mrs. Zemack. You don't have to worry about your friends. They committed suicide overnight. These two women since they had to give away all the money from the house; they didn't expect to get anything back; they

had nothing to live on. So they thought. And both of them hanged themselves.



My poor mother had to arrange for the funeral. That's what she told me. There's some side story to the prison. Because

the warden was the father of my girlfriend. And during my school years I went to that prison so often. It was built on the side of what several hundred years ago had been a castle. And that burned down. And after that they built up a prison and a huge yard with a big wall around and a moat around and a drawbridge. And I went visiting there. I had to go across. And knock at that big door. Of course the police all knew me. And I went onto the big yard. And the warden had a nice little house on the side. And there I visited so often, and now it was a concentration camp. But the people there had more freedom. But they were not mishandled. And I found out from all around that area including Rostock came to that site.

I stayed in Berlin at my relatives. Erwin Heyman and His wife and his unmarried sister Meta Ephraim. The three of them lived in that apartment.

Adolf Aron Samuel. Hitler decreed that all men had to accept a Jewish name. because most of them had just one name. He didn't have to. I became Hilda Sara. All Jewish women had to have a second name of Sarah. Hitler had a list of names that he thought were Jewish and they could choose from those names. My birth certificate that I had here is Hilda Sara. Because my original birth certificate stayed with my mother.



Shortly before Christmas we went home to Rostock. After this guy was murdered in France there was a big Jewish tax which we had to pay. And it was so much that rich people had to sell their property to be able to pay the tax. In our case we had to sell the house, which we probably would have done anyway. While the sale was still in progress they allowed me to take the money, my part, to pay my tickets to Shanghai. And my mother stayed, of course, until the sale was done. After the sale was finished she moved also to Berlin. She moved in with her sisters.

While we were in Berlin my husband went to any place he could think of, any consulate probably but there was nothing available. All the countries in South America asked for a lot of money, and here you had to have relatives who would give you an affidavit. We didn't have anybody. There was one cousin of my mother's I wrote to but she had two boys she had to bring in. I knew her personally. But she couldn't help me. So Shanghai turned out to be the only place. We didn't think much of it. When we left home we had thought about it, but it didn't have much appeal. But, as it happened, a few days after I got home I met another young woman on the street. Jewish. And she said: Oh Mrs. Samuel I want to talk with you. Can you use two tickets for Shanghai? We bought four. Two for me and my husband and two for my parents. But they don't want to go. I believe it also was too much money for them. Now if they are handed to you of course you took them. The only thing we did was exchange them for first class. That was good because I get sea sick pretty fast. The trip to Shanghai was not too bad in that respect.

So we left for Shanghai on the 23rd of February 1939 and got to Shanghai on the 20th of March. Before we left we had to get permissions for everything. We could not take any valuables except for a wedding band and a gold watch. Besides that \$4 apiece. We left the country with \$8 between us. I had to make a list of how many sheets, how many pillow cases, how many dish cloths. How many towels; you name it. I had to make a list of that. And that was allowed. And when we were ready to pack they came; two packers and a police man. The policeman had the list and the packers packed. And they counted. And I had a little diamond engagement ring. I would have so much liked to take it. I had a shirt on with a little pocket. And I thought maybe some moment I could just drop it in. But I was never alone. And my husband had from his childhood these stuffed animals; and he loved those little guys; and I put them on the floor with the other stuff. That was not on the list of course,

Some people used them to put something into the stuffing. I didn't. I did not have anything in there. And I thought if they take them, fine. If they don't take them ok. So they were finished packing they took them and put them all in. I could have had something in them but I didn't. Of course we applied for our passports. My husband was constantly on the railway getting permission for all sorts of things.

After we came home to Rostock we were ok. At that time Hitler really wanted us (the Jews) to leave. We went to the office to get our passports. When we came there we told the clerk: Samuel He said Samuel. There was something wrong. And he left. And I was so scared. But he came back within a few minutes and said: No that was the other Samuel. This is OK. Everything is fine. My husband's boss was Samuel. And he had gotten away. He probably had money outside the country. So we left with \$8 between us.

I went from Rostoff a day ahead to be with my mother for one day in Strelitz and I left my husband to be with his mother another day. In Strelitz in our house were still these people living who lived there all my life. We lived in the house in the back. So I went to these people to say goodbye. They cried with me and on the wall was Hitler's picture. And much later I got in touch with one of their daughters and she was the one with whom I corresponded. People were not all Nazis. They had a son who was my age. He never joined the party. Somehow he managed to stay away from it. But he died young.

We went by Berlin by train to Geneva. Before we could go on the ship we had to spend one night. We had to spend one dollar. Then we could go onto the ship the night before it left.

The next morning my husband went down to the purser to see there might be some mail.

In my mind I tried to find other people with my maiden name. All



Dancing aboard the ship

My husband went down to that office. He didn't find letters for us. There was a letter to Mr. Leo Zemack. Of course we immediately went to these people. They were older than we were. They had a grown daughter who had just got married. And they were as surprised as we were. We became friends eventually. And Mr. Zemack thinks it's possible that he and my father might have been cousins. There is no way to check that.

through my life I have always tried to find people with my maiden name. never found anyone. When I was in Berlin I looked in the telephone book. Or wherever I was. I never found anyone. Now we were on the ship.





The ship went along the Italian coast. We saw Vesuvius in the background smoking and of course the Mediterranean and the Suez canal. The first stop was at night in the south

Large group of people in Manila

The first stop was at night in the south. It was so hot. WE couldn't get off the ship because it would cost money.

Singapore was as far south as we got. That's two degrees above the equator. Colombo comes first; (Colombo was a large seaport on the western side of Ceylon) Singapore; Manila; Hong Kong, Shanghai.





In Shanghai was a committee from America. Jewish organization had an office in Shanghai for us. Eventually we were 18,000 people in Shanghai.

We got picked up at the harbor with a truck. Like a cattle truck. And we were taken to the embankment camp. That was a catchall at first. It was a big

building with large rooms. Men and women were separated. There we stayed until we found a room. It was not easy because the area where we would have to stay to be close to the office of this committee was Hongkew. That was like a suburb. But a poor one. There were many Chinese people too.



Destruction of HongKew in 1939
Chinese refugees left HongKew

That had been the area where the war was fought between Japan and China. This area was very badly damaged. And the committee tried to repair as many houses as possible.



So that we could find rooms. It was not easy to find a room. We were 10 days in that camp before we found a room in the attic. The room was in the attic but it was a large room. It was ok. But at least it was a room where we could close the door behind us. The problem was we had to pay rent. And we had not the

money. Not the cash. We had something in the trunk which we had brought to sell. But we couldn't get the trunk out before we had a room. So people we had met on the boat lent us the money for the first rent so we could get our trunks and start selling something and pay of course back.

We went back to the embankment building twice a day for our meals. We were really completely relying on that. We walked everywhere. I heard the day after we moved out that one of the meals was not that good. The people were running to the toilet. It was a rampage to the toilets. We missed that.

We got there in March. In May 1939 somebody brought scarlet fever from the ship. I was one who caught it. More than 100 people caught it.



So again the committee arranged. They used a big empty school building as a make shift hospital. There were big rooms. We were maybe 6 to 8 people in each room. And for 2 to 3 months there were my neighbors there. They also caught it. Mother and daughter. Of course it was nice because we could talk with each other. We passed through days with really high fevers. After that we really didn't feel very sick. It wasn't bad. A few people felt more sick but we didn't feel sick at all. I think I had to stay there 6 weeks.

The problem was my husband was alone and he is not a person to be alone. Of course he tried to find something to make money. But he tried the wrong things. He wanted to have a little store. Like a little



grocery store. But not where all the refugees lived.

Because we didn't have any money he figured that they didn't have money either. He rented a little tiny room for a store in the English section. Shanghai consisted at that time of a big Chinese area where you wouldn't go in because you wouldn't find your way. It was all Chinese. Then there was a British sector. And American. And French. So he was in the English sector and rented this little tiny place as a store and on top of it just as tiny was a room with two windows to one side, no cross ventilation. No screens. At night we had to have the windows open.

In summer. The bugs could come in and out at their pleasure. And did. He did this now while I was in the hospital. Of course he no idea how to stock the store. He didn't know what people wanted. Everything was wrong. Right from the beginning. And there I had to go after I got out of the hospital. Lost my first strength. And that really was not a place to recuperate. Overnight I got stung. One morning I woke up with a swollen eye. One time my lip was swollen. I just felt terrible.



He realized it was wrong. And he tried to sell it. And luckily he found somebody. That's where we lost our first money.

By the way we made money by selling. He sold his violin eventually. And his typewriter. And I had some diamonds smuggled which I sold. But of course we never got the price what the things were

worth. While we were trying to sell that store one day I was upstairs washing dishes and I had taken off my gold watch which I had brought with me and I put it behind me. And a Chinese came up to look around. He wanted to buy the store. He left again. And after I looked around for my watch it was gone. That wasn't a nice experience. But we did sell. There was a loss. But the first loss is always the best.

In the mean time the Zemacks had located a room for us in the same building where the were. We moved there to Hongkew where all the others were there too. There was one family that did have a grocery

store and they did good business. Even so people bought by the ounce. Not by the pound or half pound. For instance after my daughter was born I bought each day half an ounce of butter. And melted it on a frying pan. I had a little plate. And put in some flour and made a paste. It was what she ate. This was July 39.



In August 1940 first my husband had to be in bed for a few days with a bad cold and then I had it. For days I must have had high fever. I had the feeling I was melting away. Finally we got a doctor and he recognized I was carrying stomach typhoid. And he gave me a shot which cured me eventually. I had lost so much weight that when I got out of bed and went to his office I weighed 77 lbs.

After I got out of bed I couldn't get my strength back. And I complained to the doctor.

And he said the best way for you would be to have a baby.

And I thought he was crazy under the circumstances. But unbeknownst to him and me I was already pregnant. And that's how Ralph was born 9 months later. He was born October 2nd 1941. And you couldn't have any happier parents



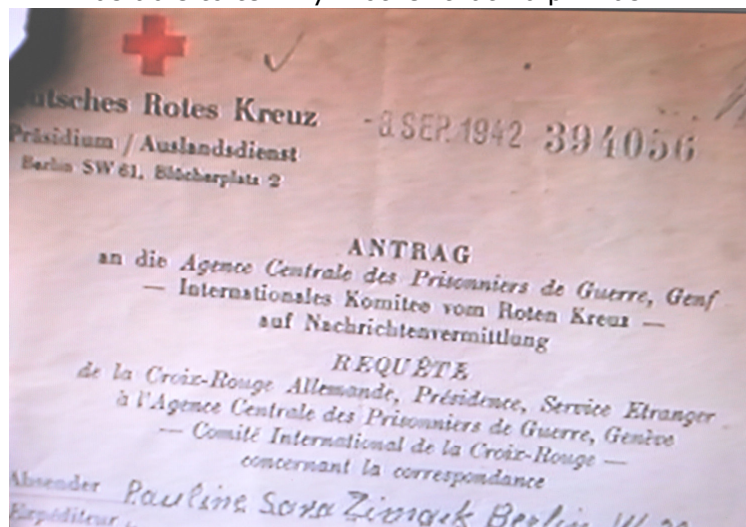
than we were. We just didn't expect to have children in Shanghai.

And as it happened in another 2 years or so I became pregnant again. And my daughter was born. And that was in the hardest time, at that time. We didn't have much to eat. We often went to that committee. She was born March 27, 1944. Her name was Ruth Gita.

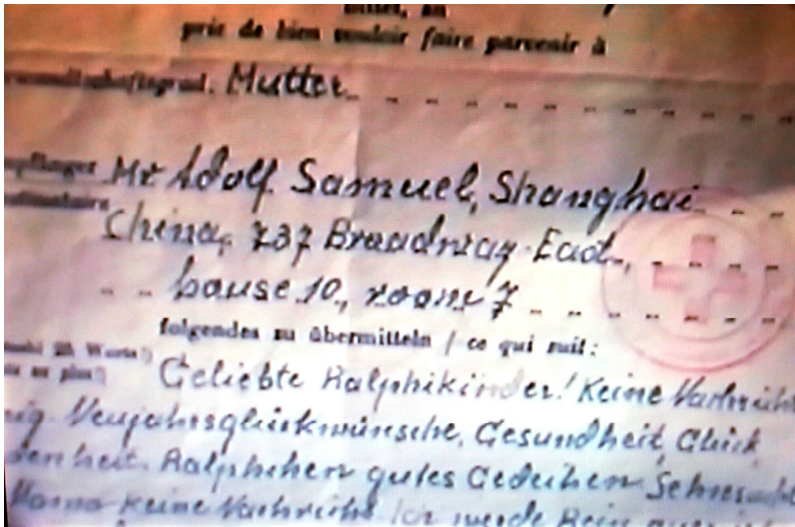
As it happened a few days after Ralph was born Hitler took our citizenship away so we became stateless. And the children were never German. They were stateless. And after they came here they were stateless until we became citizens all four of us.

We had no idea what was happening in Germany. We had correspondence. In 1942 I was able to tell my mother that Ralph was

born. I think that's my last letter to her. There's a letter from her where she answers and she got that letter. But her letter is already a Red Cross letter with 25 words.



And how happy she was. But before that she had told me in another letter that



my mother in law had been taken away. I'm not sure when she was taken but she was taken a week before that to Theresienstadt. After that I haven't heard from my mother any more.

Theresienstadt concentration camp was

established by the [Gestapo](#) in the fortress and garrison city of [Terezín](#) ([German](#) name Theresienstadt), located in what is now the [Czech Republic](#). During [WWII](#), the [Gestapo](#) used [Theresienstadt](#) as a [ghetto](#), concentrating Jews from Czechoslovakia, as well as many from Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, and Denmark. More than 150,000 Jews were sent there, and although it was not an extermination camp about 33,000 died in the ghetto itself, mostly because of the appalling conditions arising out of extreme population density. About 88,000 inhabitants were deported to [Auschwitz](#) and other extermination camps

When we came here we heard what was going on and we didn't believe it. Then there came a list of some survivors and we didn't find anybody. We found one name and it wasn't really a relative. It was an aunt of my cousin who had survived but that was all. We didn't find my aunts and my uncles, my mother or my mother in law. For my husband I don't know if there was anybody who survived. He had quite a few cousins but I don't know if they are around or not. But my family the only people who survived were two male cousins who went to Israel as teenagers. One of them died in the mean time. The other is there. He is 10 years younger than I am. And we keep a correspondence. Unfortunately he doesn't speak English and I don't understand Hebrew so we correspond in German.



Shanghai was a disaster. You couldn't have a job, a real job. My husband didn't have much luck. At one time he heard about some Viennese ladies who designed and made blouses for ladies. Very pretty. They had salesmen who sold them in the city. So my husband went there and they gave him some blouses to try and sell. Now we had one address of a German Jewish couple that were not immigrants. They lived in Shanghai. Most of the foreign people who lived in Shanghai were exporters. We had their address from my sister in law. We had contacted them after we came to Shanghai. They invited us once to dinner. So when my husband got those blouses to sell he went, of course to her. She bought a blouse and gave him the address of friends and he sold. One day somebody mentioned why don't you go to the British school. The teachers are sure to buy. And I even went with him on that day. And they bought. And the next day he went back to his source to get more blouses. And they told him: sorry. We have to take it away from you. We got complaints from stores. You are too much of a competition. We were out.

I don't know how long it took till my husband heard about a Viennese butcher who made excellent German type sausages. So we went there. And we had a little suitcase. And he filled that up with sausages. But of course we had now all the addresses where he sold the blouses before. He went there to try to sell sausage. And they bought. Sausage is something you eat, and they need it again so they ordered for the next week. So he built up a business. He put every day a different route. And people loved the sausage. Then after Pearl Harbor the British and French were taken into concentration camps. Now we sold to Russian people who were friends of these people. They bought sausage to take it to the camp to their friends. So this was still O.K.

A wave of 18,000 Jews from [Germany](#), [Austria](#), and [Poland](#) immigrated to [Shanghai](#) at the end of 1930s and the early of 1940s. Shanghai at the time was an open city and did not have restrictions on immigration. In 1943, the occupying Japanese army required these 18,000 Jews, formally known as "stateless refugees," to relocate to a 3/4 square mile area of Shanghai's Hongkew district where many lived in group homes called "Heime" or "Little Vienna".

Then I heard Hitler tried to get the Japanese people to build a



gas chamber for us. But the Japanese refused. To them it didn't matter if you were Jewish or whatever. To them we were white. That's all. But to do something they made the Ghetto. Which meant the same area where we lived but a little more concentrated. We were living outside now. But we had to move in.

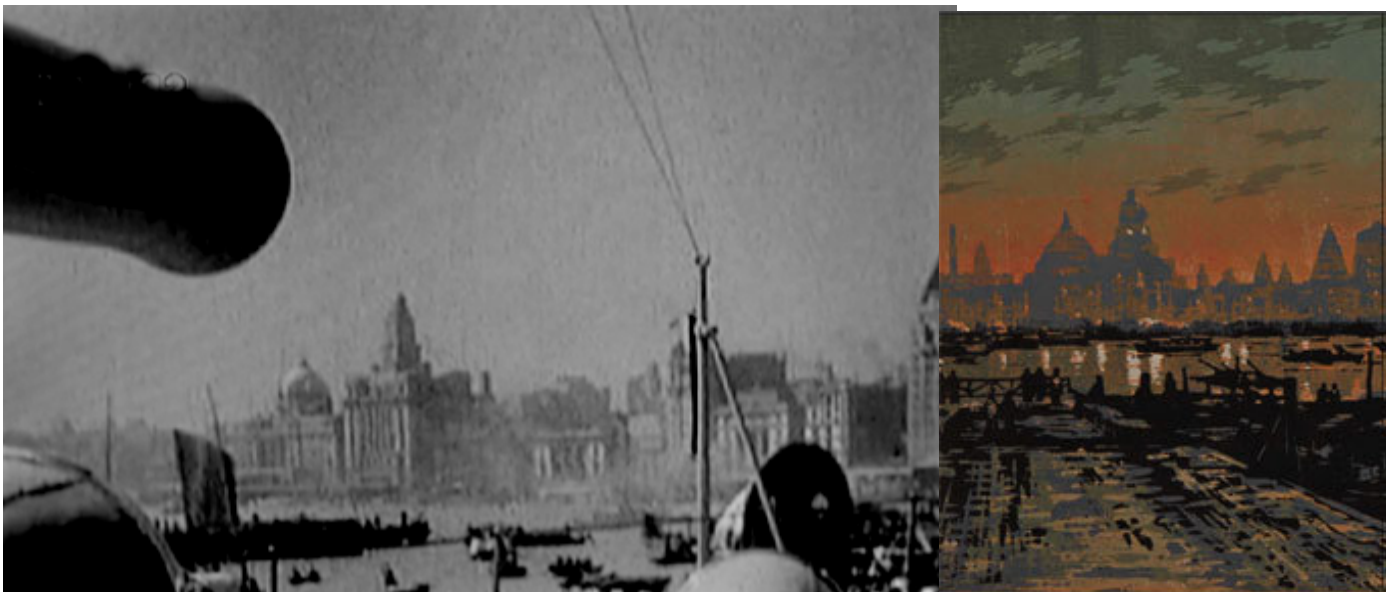
The committee still restored more of those damaged houses.

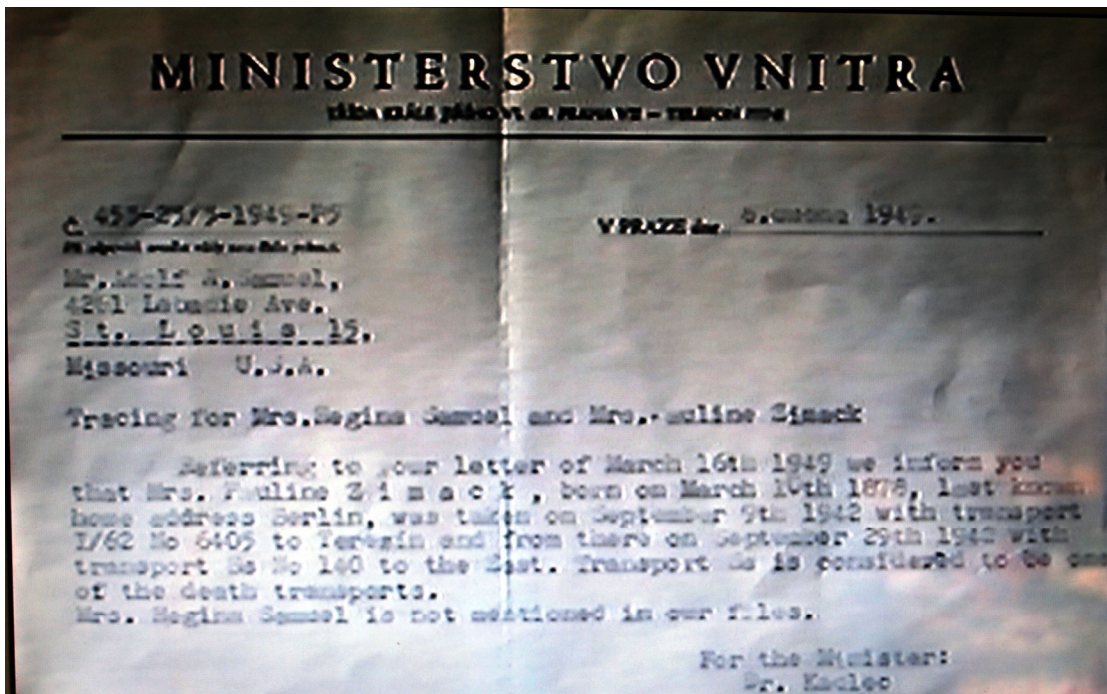
And Ralph was only one in the meantime. And one day they came and showed us the room we were going to move to. That was fine with us except once you were in there you couldn't get out anymore. And after that it was nothing. And I started to sell whatever I could do without. As I said before my husband sold his violin. There came a man. And my husband took the violin out, and he never had it out before. And he started playing. And Ralph had never seen that before and didn't know that there is something which could make noise. He started crying. He wanted to play it.

In 1945 in July the Americans flew over Shanghai. High up. One time I saw a plane that looked like the head of a straight pin. They flew across to bomb Japanese installations that were beyond Shanghai. One day they made a mistake and one or two bombs fell on our area. That day over a hundred Chinese and over 20 immigrants died. One of them I knew. And after that we took the children every morning after we were taking breakfast and went down the street maybe one or two blocks. There was a little playground and kids could play. But across the street was a big Chinese prison which was considered bomb proof. So in case there was an attack again by the Americans we could go across the street into the prison.

Every time the alarm sounded which wasn't often we went across the street into the prison and waited it out. But it never happened again after this one time.

Then the Americans said they would invade with ships into Shanghai. And the Japanese really dug little foxholes along the street. How they would hide in them I don't know. That was late July early August. Just when they were supposed to come there was a big typhoon in the ocean and the ships couldn't come into the harbor. And then the bomb fell in Japan. That saved our lives. Because we lived close to the harbor. I'm sure we wouldn't have made it. The first (atomic) bomb wasn't enough. They had to have a second bomb.





After the war ended we found out what had happened in Europe.
"Transport is considered to be one of the death transports"

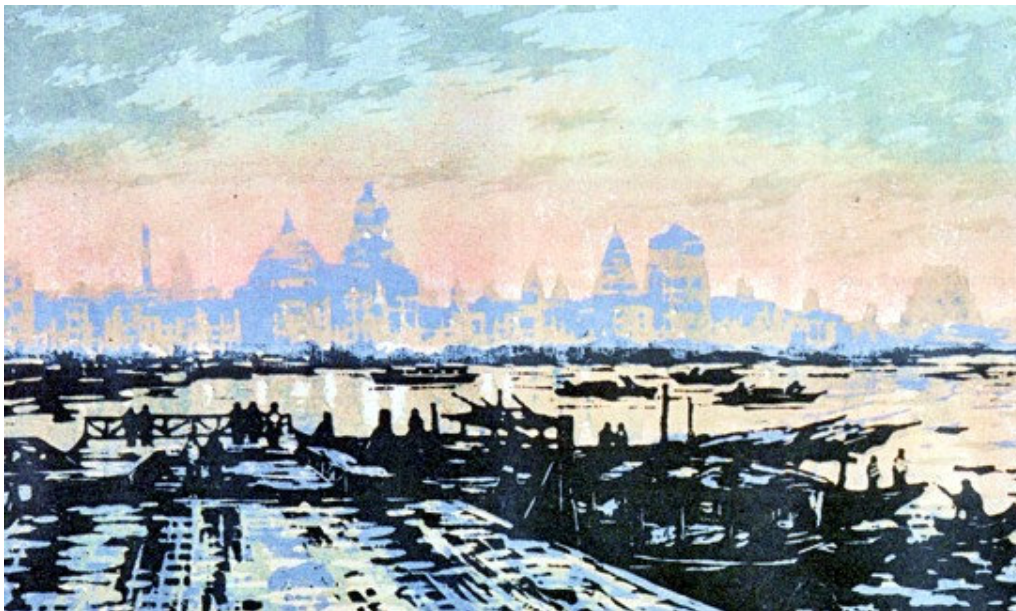
We couldn't stay in Shanghai. We were 18,000 people. Many of them had their papers to come here to the states or some to Canada or Israel. We didn't have any plans. We would have loved to come here. But at that point we still were not able to and we were told to choose between Canada, Israel, Australia, or back to Germany. But that was out, of course. All of that took time because there were so many people.

But in the mean time my sister in law from Mexico wrote "Oh you come here. And don't you worry about anything." We couldn't at the time so we didn't lose anything.

Then we got another letter from a sister in law in England who said "please. Don't listen to Ginny in Mexico. She has no way of getting you there. That costs very much money that she doesn't have." So that was that.

A friend of ours once told my husband: I just come back from the American counsel that I registered. I got a number. I wish you would do the same.

My husband said: I might take the number away from somebody because we have no chance to go to the States.



He said get a number. It doesn't cost you anything. It doesn't hurt.

So we did.

And soon after we got the number the law here was changed that organizations could vouch for you. Not just relatives. That's how we came here in 1947.

After that law came through of course we went to the consulate and we had the number so it took till August when we got the visa. We had examinations. We had x rays. And medications.

The last two months in Shanghai the American army was there. And they needed drivers. My husband was a driver. He got a job as a driver. And those were just a few months left. And those were the only months we had a real salary.



Evening glow on the Huangpu River 1955 Shen Roujian

August 1945. Before that we

young Ralph and

Ruth

were hungry. The first time it was like Hanukah. Now we got food, we got food galore. We got sugar and coffee. Anything. You could name it. It was in these packages. We got it regularly. We got so much food we couldn't barely eat it. It was just wonderful. But we



gained too fast. Not me as much as my husband. It wasn't good for him because it tasted good. We got so hungry. That was 1945. Now it didn't matter so much that we didn't have the money because we got the food. But we still had to wait until 1947 when the law here was changed. After we got the visas we took the next ship that happened to be October 28th.

We got November to San Francisco. On that trip I was so sick I wanted to die. The kids were fine. My husband was fine. We stopped one day in Honolulu. That was like in heaven. That was beautiful. Then



we went another three days to San Francisco. And when we came into the bay it was over night. I didn't even go to bed. I was so excited. And it was so beautiful. The golden gate ahead. We had to stop in the bay overnight before we could come ashore. And San Francisco. I don't know if you have ever seen it at night. The streets of San Francisco come

down the hills and the look like strings of pearls. After you come from the dump and you come to this city. It was out of the world. There we were taken care of by the Jewish Family service.

We got a very nice room in San Francisco right above where the cable car was turning.



This was November and there was already Christmas decorations. We hadn't seen anything clean in so long. It was just beautiful.

San Francisco 1946

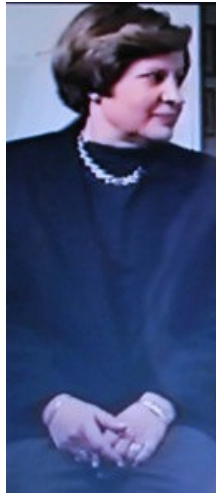
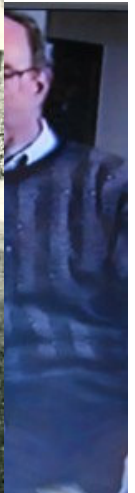
Several cities didn't want to take us because they didn't have housing. But St. Louis agreed to take

us. We moved to St. Louis.

It took two months for them to place us somewhere because housing was here so scarce. It was still early after the war and the soldiers had come home and wanted to get married and needed rooms. And with us with two small children we couldn't just take a room. Many of our friends took a room with kitchen privileges. People wouldn't take us with 2 children like that. I tried to find one but that was not possible. So we were put up in an apartment hotel which was much too expensive. But they paid for that. They kept after me to find an apartment.

I didn't know where to look. I didn't have transportation. I couldn't. Ralph I put to school right away. Around the corner from the hotel was a school. The first day I went to pick him up after school and I thought he might be crying. After all it was strange. Instead a boy came out beaming all over.

Mother. That's beautiful. They were all so nice to me. And the pencils and paper are free. So I didn't have that worry. But I couldn't find



an apartment.

It took us 6 months. And the poor family service paid this hotel \$100 a week. It was terrible. Then one day the case worker called me. He found an apartment. Not the best neighborhood, but so what. It wasn't bad either. It was a one bedroom flat. My keys were compounded because he happened to know the man who moved out of this apartment. And he told him when you move out you give me the key and I move my people in. The agency who was in charge didn't even know about it. Then they gave me a list of the furniture. We were allowed to buy second hand, of course. And I had no complaints. They even told what streets to go to look for. Where those stores were.

A few days later somebody knocked on my door. It was a tall good looking man. And he said: How did you get in here?

I was so scared. I still had that fear in me and I'm not sure if I could explain but I told him the case worker got this for us.

And he got in touch. And it was alright.

After over a hundred dollars a week, this was 23 dollars a month. I couldn't believe our fortune. There we lived for five years. Ralph went to school immediately. My daughter was only 4 years old and I couldn't go to work. The baby sitter would have cost more than I could make. I didn't like that idea anyway.

My husband found work in and out. He was more out than in. The last one in is the first one out, always. And that went on for two years. Then Ruth came to school and I started looking for work. And a woman I knew, I met, she had also been in Shanghai. She said why don't you go to my place. They always need some body.

So I did. I got there. The receptionist took my application. And she said: I'm sorry. Today we don't need somebody. I'll keep this on file. But why don't you come back in two weeks. It always is changing. Keeping on file means the wastebasket.



But I did go back. I don't know if I went anywhere else in the mean time. But I did go back and this time she said: please sit down for a minute. I'll talk with somebody. And a few minutes later a young man came in from outside and she pushed my application form over to him. He looked

at it. I didn't know him. He didn't know me either.

He said: she's an office girl. I didn't apply for anything specific. I just applied for work. I would have done anything. My application showed what I did in Germany. I hadn't worked her yet. So he saw. It turned out he was from Germany too. I didn't know. So now he's calling somebody from the office to talk with me. And he happened to be the nephew of the owner. When we talked he said, you know I think I could use you. When can you start?

I said, right away. But I need a permanent job.

He said you can make this job as permanent as you like.

So I started on a Monday. That must have been on a Friday. They started me on the lowest. But I didn't care. It was 75 cents an hour anyway. After I was there for a two weeks when the boss of the

office came back from a vacation. After a few days he called me to his desk. He says, You know, I don't mind telling you we are very satisfied with your work. But If I had been here when you applied I wouldn't have hired you.

I could feel the blood drain out of my face again.

I said why?

He said I'll tell you why. We had this couple from Austria and they knew everything better. We did this this way. And we used to do this that way. So I swore I'd never take an immigrant again.

But he wasn't there and that was my luck.

So now he talked so nice to me I said I also have a husband at home and he also needs work.

Well. Let him come and talk with me. If we can use him we will hire him if he wants to start at the bottom for 75 cents.

So my husband started at that place for 75 cents. And from that day we were on our own. We never needed anybody anymore.

One evening I got a phone call and a gentleman introduced himself and said I was wondering if you would like to come to work for us.

I said I have a job.

He said I know but maybe you would like to change.

I say the only reason I would change is if I could make more money.

He said why don't you come and see our boss and talk with him.

Where I worked they were very tight on salaries and they would not give me a raise. I tried several times and they always refused.

I did go to this place and I talked to the boss who was the opposite of the other boss. He offered me much more than I was getting.

I accepted him but I was nice enough to give the other ones notice. One shouldn't just leave. When I gave notice they wanted to give me the same. But I wasn't that stupid. Because there it was the end and here it was the beginning. And my boss was just wonderful.

Samuel family 1956

My husband stayed there and I changed. And I worked for this company 24 years. I retired in 1976.

My husband passed away in 1956.



Paul and Ruth
Ralph

Shelly Hilda

Ella and Jake grandchildren
HILDA Kim Nisenshal

Cindy Samuel Andrew Nisenshal



Marion Seidemann (Fredman) and Friend Ljuba Davis at Shanghai Synagogue 2005



ius
and
rete

Seidemann and Hilda Samuel



6th grade camp. Marion second from left front row Ruth right standing

