

**INTERVIEW WITH PETER DAMM
STEVE ADLER, INTERVIEWER**

March 14, 2007

SA: Today is the 14th of March, 2007 and I'm interviewing Peter Damm. Good morning Peter.

PD: Good morning Steve, glad to have you here.

SA: Wonderful. We're gonna do an interview today and, of course, what we want to talk about is two major areas of your life that have relevance for the Oral History Committee. One of them is your experiences in Shanghai—how you got there, what happened there and how you got away from there. And we'll talk about all those details. Then I also want to get to the other end of the story really, which is your coming to Seattle and getting into the printing business. So, let's start off and tell me a little bit about your time in Germany growing up there.

PD: Let me give you a little more of the background information because I want to tell you something about my parents and their parents.

SA: We want to know about them, too, and grandparents.

PD: Well, yeah that's what I mean. So I have here that my father was born June 23rd, 1898, in Konitz, Germany, which later became Konice, Poland. The Germans seem to lose many, many wars and each time they lose a war, their borders change a little bit. So Konitz was just on the Polish side of the border when I went to visit them, which was just about every summer. My grandfather was Mendel Max Damm, went by Max. He was born in March, March 5th, 1865. His profession was a brass foundry owner. And my grandmother was Lena, her maiden name was Cohn, her last name is Damm. I don't have a birth date on that. They had three children, a girl July 8th, 1893, born in Konitz. My father Hans Damm born on June 23, 1898 in Konitz. And my uncle, Bruno Damm, May 1st, 1901 in Konitz. I'm gonna switch here for a moment and go to my mother's side.

SA: Can I just ask you a question about the Cohns. Is that with a K or C?

PD: C.

SA: C. Thank you.

PD: My mother was Leoni Abraham, that was her maiden name. She was born July 29th, 1906 in Berlin. Her father's name was Jacob Abraham, March 12th, 1872. He was born in Duisburg. He died June 22, 1941, by natural causes, he was spared. My grandfather had a heart condition and so it finally gave out. And my grandmother was Martha, her maiden name was Friedlaender, and that's F-r-i-e-d-l-a-e-n-d-e-r, Abraham. She was

born June 25, 1872 in Berlin. She was deported to Theresienstadt and I have some interesting proof there for you. August 6th, 1942. Her place of death is Auschwitz. Her home address in Berlin was Wilmersdorf Giseler Strasse 23. Now I have some material here for you that you can have. Let me give you some material here that'll help in identifying some of the places and some of the dates. This is a map of Poland as of after the war, after the border was changed. There is Konice, which used to be, I say it once, Konitz. It is just across the border from where the old border is just next to it. Danzig is up here so this map will identify the place. This is a birth certificate of my father's and it'll show you here that his, hold it a minute. [Tape cuts out.] It identifies the midwife as being Catholic and the mother and the father, Lena Damm and Max Damm as being Jewish. Of course, all the birth certificates showed that in those days. And that's pretty much it on this thing. And here, I think, is the Polish translation. Here is the Schaft Urkunde. That's the nice part about German language is they just make their words longer. This is the citizenship of the family. You can see that the birth dates are here on the side for the children. And they're all identified as being Jewish. Here's my father's uniform in the German Army where he served during the First World War and was injured. This is a picture of my grandparents' house, business and residence in Konitz. If you take a magnifying glass you will see that his name is on that glass window, M. Damm. This is the same picture done about '37 or '38. This is done in the '60s. So the building is still there. Now here's a postcard that my father . . . we're switching time zones here but this is done from Shanghai. It was one of those double postcards that you could send to somebody in Europe. They could reply on it. Now I couldn't read this. I gave it to Ernie Stiefel. He translated this for me. Where he's, my father's asking a physician in Konitz what happened to his parents. And here is the response. His response is here from Konitz, April 29, 1940. Your parents are not here. On September 1st, and he's referring to 1939, the start of the war, when the war started most of the individuals from here fled. It was a wild flight. Everything was congested at the River Weisel, or Wisla. At that point many persons died. I do not know whether your parents were among those that met their end at that time. Several who fled from Konitz disappeared without a trace. Best regards, Dr. Marchuinski. So this gives you an idea. It is doubtful that on September 1, when the Germans crossed the border, they took time out to kill the Jews. My sneaking suspicion is that the fellow residents made sure that the Jews left in a hurry so they could take over their properties. This is a photograph taken the last time we were in Konitz in 1938 and you will see that standing left to right is Lena and Max Damm; their daughter and I don't know what her name is, was; Hans Damm, the bald one in the middle there; and far right daughter's husband and I don't have a name for that. In the front is Peter, his sister Eva and a cousin Minnie. I believe Minnie survived in Israel and we have never been able to locate her.

SA: Wonderful.

PD: Here's a set of photographs you can have. This is my sister and I on bicycles in Konitz. There's a picture of my father about that time, and it would be in 1938. There's an old picture of him at age 19. And my grand—

SA: In an Army uniform.

PD: In a German Army uniform, yeah. This is a picture of the summer of '38 we were on a hay wagon and that's his helper who is not Jewish.

SA: Wonderful, thank you. Okay, so we have kind of described your family. Can you tell me a little bit about their political, religious outlook, anything? Tell me a little bit about—

PD: I can't tell you anything about—I would. If they were living in the United States today I would gather that they were Democrats. [Laugh]

SA: Okay. But religiously what _____?

PD: They were not very religious. If they were anything, they were Reformed. And in Konitz I don't even know if they had a synagogue. It was a village. It was a very small town.

SA: Was there a significant Jewish population?

PD: The 1938-1939 count was 110 Jewish persons.

SA: Don't know.

PD: Can't tell you. You can have this file folder. And put it back in there so you have it kind of in the sequence.

SA: Okay. Let me then ask, you grew up in Berlin?

PD: Yes.

SA: That's where your life begins.

PD: Right.

SA: What was it like living in Berlin? What do you remember?

PD: Well, I have something, material here. Can we put that in at the time?

SA: Sure.

PD: Okay. Let me get to my mother's side of the family which I gave you some information before. Here's her birth certificate, or well this was issued in 1971.

SA: This is Leoni Abraham?

PD: Leoni Abraham, yeah. Here's a birth certificate, now this is a Heirats-Urkunde this is a marriage certificate of my father to my mother in 1927.

SA: Yeah, actually marriage announcement isn't it. Yes.

PD: Okay, you can call it anything you want.

SA: Interestingly in the birth certificate Yacov Abraham is shown as Mosaisch. Mosaic.

PD: There's a reason for that. In 1971 they weren't _____ allowed to do that anymore. Only old certificates have Mosaish.

SA: Yeah, they don't say Yiddish. They say Mosaisch.

PD: Mosash. So I looked up, I have a Langenscheidt's dictionary that's this thick. It's German-English and English-German, two books. I looked up Mosaisch and it, Moses is the translation.

SA: Yeah, it's based on Moses, right.

PD: Yeah. Here's a letterhead of my grandfather in Berlin. Jacob Abraham. He was a merchant. I can't tell you what he did but, I think, it was import and export. This was late in his life, so. Here's a Red Cross letter that finally came back from my grandmother and she says she's going for a trip to Theresienstadt. And that was the last time—

SA: And that is dated, does it have a date, yes. The 26th of July, 1942, when it was written. And about a month later, August 11, 1942, it was apparently stamped and then released.

PD: Right. I'm sure it was censored.

SA: Undoubtedly. Although it doesn't show any, there's nothing's blacked out.

PD: There was nothing there to be blacked out.

SA: No. At the time, I think, they were allowed a 25 word message.

PD: I guess.

SA: And, let's go on. _____.

PD: I have a number of these—

SA: Really interesting.

PD: I have a number of these correspondences and I did not include them because they're not very indicative of anything important. I should backtrack here for a minute. Fred Taucher went to Berlin about three is it now, what's the date on this, it's 2000. Six years ago. And he did some research for me. I wanted to find out if my parents, grandparents had any insurance, for the obvious reasons. He was able to after the third place that he was sent to. He was sent to this place and he found a woman, the office manager, who comes out of the back office and tells him that she went to the University of Washington. So he had a relatively good friend there for a little while. Anyway, she sent this document to me—a declaration of her belongings (Fermögenserklärung). It is my grandmother from Berlin, Martha, registering to give up all her properties before she went to Theresienstadt. So I have multiple copies, all signed Heil Hitler, and the accounting for how much money each item was worth. But the interesting part is I haven't found any jewelry in here and, I think, that was all taken ahead of time.

SA: Yes, it was.

PD: So it was not listed.

SA: I've seen this kind of a form for one of my uncles, who also filled out such a form before he was sent to Theresienstadt. So it was a standard procedure. It was a requirement that they would turn all of their possessions over to, I think, it was to the government in Berlin.

PD: Right. Here's a calendar on the back pages of Martha's going to the concentration camp. Eventually she's shows that she went to Auschwitz and Jacob, her husband, who had died in Berlin. And this is my side of the family that went to Shanghai. They recorded there, too.

SA: Interesting.

PD: So you can add—

SA: And that also.

PD: All of this.

SA: Okay. And we'll put that in this folder. Thank you.

PD: Okay, now, you asked me about Peter. So I have here a birth certificate that was issued in 1975. I was born on the 21st of April 1931. This is a kennkarte because I was underage. I didn't have a photograph in it. But you can have that.

SA: Okay. And a kennkarte for the record is an identification card.

PD: Yeah. Yeah. When we left I was just short of 8-years-old. I've always been short, but at that time I was just under 8.

SA: This is 1939.

PD: '39 is when we left. Okay. I'll talk about that.

SA: Okay. I want to ask you when 1939 comes and you are going to be leaving, how much did you know about what was going to be happening, o do you know anything about your parents' plans?

PD: Very little. I could tell you this, that for probably at least a half a year, so all of 1938, let's see, all of 1938 my parents would meet in the evening with a Berlitz teacher, who'd brought them up to snuff on English. They learned English in high school, so my father was fairly well versed in it. H picked up most of the English that he needed to emigrate.

SA: My question is this.

PD: What did I know?

SA: Maybe you know the answer and maybe you don't. Do you know what made your parents decide to head in the Shanghai direction?

PD: Yes, I can tell you that.

SA: That's what I want to have you talk about.

PD: Okay. The reason they went to Shanghai, because everywhere else is closed. Now England was willing to take my father, but not his children, because he was a physician. He turned that down. So we never made it to England. The only other place to go was to Shanghai. I'm sure he didn't know very much about Shanghai. But since it was the only place to go, that's what he decided to do. South America was closed. Australia, you know, off limits. The United States was closed. Can't tell you anywhere else that he might have thought of going to. This is a directory of Jewish refugees and has a very old picture of mine. I don't think I was at that age, but that's a . . .

SA: But that's a?

PD: A photo that was issued?

SA: Photo, in Shanghai.

PD: Yeah, in Shanghai, yeah. Here's my United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration Certificate of Identity and that's dated, can you see the date down there?

SA: It's issued in 1946.

PD: Okay, this is after the war.

SA: Yeah. And this organization UNRRA or, as you give the name, but what was their function?

PD: They helped feed the people. We had somewhere between 20 and 22,000 European refugees in Shanghai.

SA: Okay. Before we get into Shanghai itself, tell me if you remember anything about the trip from Germany.

PD: I can go back a little farther than that. May I?

SA: Okay.

PD: Okay. The first school that I went to in Germany, I can't tell you what the name of it was but I stayed in it for a little while but there was so much anti-Semitism shown towards me I remember that they wouldn't permit me to go to the bathroom. And so you know what the end result of that is. So my parents pulled me out of there and they sent me to the Josef Lehmann School, Joachimstatestrasse. 1938 and 1939.

SA: And Joseph Layman School is a—

PD: Jewish school.

SA: A Jewish school, a private school.

PD: Yes. I went there in '38 and I left early in 1939 before we left for Shanghai. And Shanghai, am I rushing you here if I go to schools?

SA: Fine. You want to stay in Berlin or you want to?

PD: No, I'm gonna switch to—

SA: I want you to—

PD: Stay in Berlin?

SA: No, no, I want you to describe something of which you remember of the trip. How did you get?

PD: I'm sorry?

SA: From Berlin. Tell us something about that.

PD: My father was ransomed because there were about 20,000 or 26,000 professionals that were arrested and taken to concentration camps, you are aware of that?

SA: Um hum.

PD: If you were ransomed you could get out and leave and you had a certain number of days that you could get out of Germany. The immediate cause of the vandalism, murder and destruction of Jewish property, better known as Crystal Night, was the result of the assassination of the third secretary of the German Embassy in Paris by Herschel Grynszpan. The official penalty inflicted on the Jews for their collective guilt was to be a fine of one billion Reichsmark for the entire Jewish community. Before being permitted to leave Germany, you were required to submit a certificate that his portion was paid. Additionally Jews had to pay for the damages to their property and in addition Jewish businesses were to be "Aryanized".

SA: Yes, you're talking now about November 1938?

PD: Well, that's when he was—

SA: The Kristallnacht.

PD: Yeah, Kristallnacht. I remember the black boots. I remember the city burning. But I can't tell you much else. How my mother ever was able to do the things she did, and my father, at their age. If you look back at the ages, there, it's just absolutely amazing. Astounding. Well, anyway, she paid the ransom. I can't tell you how much. I have no idea. And both parents are deceased so I can't ask the questions. We left as quickly as we could get out of there and we took the train to Italy. We ended up in Trieste. We

were there about four weeks because we were waiting for a ship to come in. Trieste had a landing for, I forgot the name of the line now, but it was the "ConteVerde," was the name of the ship. Which made several more trips to Shanghai after—

SA: Do you remember the spelling of that?

PD: I, I have it recorded here someplace.

SA: Okay, we'll come back to it later.

PD: Yeah, I'll get that for you. And they made several more trips to Shanghai and you know where the Bund is in, or you've heard where the Bund is in Shanghai, the financial district on the waterfront, on the river, very famous. They scuttled the ship there. They laid it down on its side and it stayed there. When I left Shanghai in 1947 it was still there. It was sabotaged.

SA: The ship that you traveled on?

PD: Yeah. Eventually, after two, three more trips. The crew opened up all the port holes on one side and what else to flood it. And they scattered the ship.

SA: And the trip from Trieste, where was the _____?

PD: Oh, okay. From Trieste we went to, and I've got that too. Turn that off for a minute. We passed the Brenner Pass April 15th, 1939 and arrived in Trieste April 15th. It's not very far. We left Trieste May 10th. We stopped at Colombo. We went through the Suez Canal. Across the Indian—

SA: _____ now _____.

PD: Right. That's right. Colombo, it's not the, the American detective Colombo. [Laugh]. May 24th and Singapore, we were not permitted to land by the British because we were Germans and so therefore they were afraid of us. We went to Hong Kong June 1st and Shanghai June 6th. So we spent about 3½ weeks on this ship. It was a passenger boat so we were not in the kind of conditions that we came over to the United States in, which was a troop transport. And we actually—

SA: Okay. So you're in Shanghai now it's June—

PD: Yeah, it's June 6th, a good time of the year.

SA: Can you describe a little bit about what kind of living quarters you had?

PD: Oh, yeah.

SA: Who provided them for you?

PD: I'll give you that and I'll give you more.

SA: Okay. [Tape cuts out] And so we're talking now about Shanghai. Can you talk a little bit about where you lived? How did you get the place? How did you pay for it and what was going on there?

PD: What would help would be if I knew how my father, if he was able to remove some of the finances out of the country because you weren't allowed to remove any money. So I can't comment on that. I can tell you that we arrived in Shanghai on June 6 and when you walked down the gangplank this is the first impression you get of Shanghai is the smell. The stench. A stench from the river and the stench from the outdoor cooking that goes on all over the city, at least in that section of town. The temperatures in the summertime hit 110°. The humidity is 100. So the walls are just running, the water is just running off the inside walls. The winters get down to 30, 32. Very cold.

Now let's talk about living, where we moved to. We went to the French concession and, I thought I have a map of, yes I do have a map of Shanghai that's taken from a book. I give credit to the book which is right next to you. The French concession was the dignified place to live. My father got an apartment there and opened up a little office for a practice. We weren't there very long, maybe a half a year. Maximum a year. He got a job in a school for Chinese children as a school doctor, as a school physician and it's a missionary school run by American and English missionaries. He stayed there until Pearl Harbor, or close to Pearl Harbor.

SA: A question about this. So he had a job.

PD: Well, he got this job at this school.

SA: Is that what allowed your family to exist in these quarters?

PD: At this time, yes. I can't tell you what transpired after he lost that job because just prior to Pearl Harbor these people were all interned on the other side, which is now called Putong, which was just farm country in those days.

SA: Can you spell that?

PD: I'll spell it to you it, the way I'm accustomed. P-u-t-o-n-g. Today's is spelled with a D instead of a T. And it's all developed now, high rises on it. So we lived there and we had a maid, an amah. So we were certainly not in the poorest segment of the population. And it was relatively pleasant. I didn't know any English.

SA: Father, mother and their three—

PD: My sister and I. Just the four of us.

SA: Four of you, okay. What kind of room did you have?

PD: We had an apartment with several rooms.

SA: Separate bedrooms?

PD: Separate bedrooms. We lived in style. My sister and I didn't speak any English. We learned from Berlitz, we said we learned how to say "hello" and "goodbye". We then hired a teacher to teach us and I learned English from pictures. So it's kind of a hard way to do it, but at that age you're pretty flexible. You can do that. So we spoke German. And we started to pickup the English. When we get closer to Pearl Harbor, we were forced to move—the Japanese forced us to move to Hong Qiao, which is a section that is removed from the French concession. It is a poor section of the city. The city at that time altogether had about four million people. I don't know what it is now but it's like 12 or 16 million. The Japanese garrison was stationed there. The Chinese lived there. And the Europeans moved there, the refugees moved there. At that stage we ended up in one room in a house. Let me explain that house to you. There are two-story houses on both sides of the main street. We had an opening like a big garage door that you walked through, like a tunnel, and you walked to the middle of the block and there was a residence there, it's a very nice building—two stories and, of course, no basements in Shanghai. It's all groundwater. And every family got one room. Now you had to pay for this. This was not a freebie. And you had electricity. You had no heat, no refrigeration. There was one cook stove downstairs in the lower level in the back.

SA: That stove is a communal?

PD: A communal stove, yeah. Under the Japanese, power was restricted. So if we had electricity, now we're getting closer to Pearl Harbor, we had electricity for about two days. With a light bulb. There was nothing else on electricity. And a radio. Hot in the summer. Cold in the winter. No refrigeration, no cook stove. We burnt charcoal. We were lucky we had what seemed to be a balcony which was inside a glass roofed area facing the front of the house. We had one room. I would guess that that room was 30 feet wide and 25, 20 foot, 20 feet deep. And my father put a curtain the length of that room. He used one side for his, their sleeping, my mother and father sleeping area, and his office area so he had patients. My sister and I were on the other side and, of course, we went to school so we weren't there all the time.

SA: Is this building that you're describing, or is this set aside for Jewish refugees? Or are you in the general population?

PD: We're in a condensed area that's [tape cuts out] Richie Jacobs, who had lived in Shanghai [end of Tape 1, Side A]

[Start Tape 1, Side B]

PD: ...Richie Jacobs, who had lived in Shanghai, she was born there, her parents came from Persia. Her forefathers came across the Silk Road, across the top of India. These _____ you understand [laugh] and the Sephardic community helped the European community financially and whatever way they could. So it wasn't just isolated Jews. Turn that off. [Tape cuts out.]

Okay, let's talk about cooking and food. I said my mother would cook on a little bucket outside on this balcony with charcoal. You couldn't drink any water. It had to be boiled. You could not eat any raw vegetables or foods of any kind. One of the main

reasons for that was that most of the people, most of the houses didn't have any toilets in them. Our house had three or four toilets in it. It's a very large house. So that was shared by all the tenants in this house. The Chinese, the residents, used honey buckets. Those are wooden buckets, they would go on that and in the morning you'd have a guy come along in the street with a black cart and big wheels, and he would yell out and they would bring their buckets out onto the sidewalk and he would spill the buckets into his container. Now when he was full he would walk about probably two miles out in the countryside, which is no longer countryside, and there were vegetable fields there. And he would have a long or somebody would have a long ladle on a long pole and they would dip into this and they would spread it out over the vegetables. That's called night soil. So therefore diseases were abundant. And you didn't have an opportunity to eat anything that wasn't cooked. So my mother did the cooking out there. She did the hand washing. We had no hot water in the building. If you wanted hot water, you had to go across the street. There was a store there that sold hot water. So you can tell the whole neighborhood didn't have any running hot water, nor did they have toilets. So that's the way we went about, yeah go ahead.

SA: You said your father was still essentially running a practice. People were coming for medical attention. Did he have any medicines available?

PD: There were some pharmacies there that he was able to get his medicines. Why he brought a microscope. I know he analyzed slides under the microscope of stool samples or blood counts. He did this by hand. I mean by eyesight—the hard way. One of the reasons that he was practicing is because the Jewish population there, most of them, just all of them are western European Jews, spoke German. So he had no problem communicating but they all would catch some kind of a disease. I have in my possession little pieces of paper folded over where he kept track of the people that he consulted with and what he charged them. They didn't always pay, but he carried that on the books. Most of the people paid. Now you had to be inoculated for typhoid fever, cholera, typhus, typhus fever—that's a little different—yellow fever, and the plague. Those are common diseases over there. Now some of the refugees that survived moved to Seattle and I knew them when they came here and they had typhoid. He was able to pull them through. So he had a number of those people that he had as patients. There wasn't a flock of people coming through. He also was licensed to practice in the Shanghai General Hospital and I have a photograph of that somewhere in here.

SA: So did he do that in English?

PD: He did that in English.

SA: Because he didn't speak Chinese, I guess.

PD: Well, he had made up a little dictionary of things translated into Chinese.

SA: He could operate a little bit in Chinese.

PD: Right. But then the other side of his practice consisted of Indians, from India, Sikhs. The reason Sikhs were there, because in our neighborhood, and I've seen this in the movie, is

the largest prison that they have, this huge place, and of course the Indian Sikhs were the guards. They were also dairy farmers. Now we had very little dairy food available to us. But every once in a while they'd bring over a quart of milk, especially after my father died. They were just the finest people. You know he had a patient that was humungous. He was drinking wine to abundance. He became so sick that my father talked him into going to the Indian temple and to pledge to stop drinking. And he succeeded. You know that man was so grateful we had tea coming out of our kazoo. Tea would walk in in five pound bags. You know that's [laugh].

SA: Amazing.

PD: Anyway, yeah, it's amazing. So anyway I had my bar mitzvah in 1940—

SA: 4?

PD: 4. Yeah, 1944. I had to think for a minute. My father got gall stones and he was terribly sick. And he couldn't come. It was kind of a nightmare because my teacher, Mr. Amsterdam, and Mr. Amsterdam is long gone, taught me the wrong haphtarah. Because I think it was Rosh Chodesh and I should have had a different—so five days before my bar mitzvah I had to learn a new haphtarah. I am not a very good student of Hebrew, or any language. [Laugh] Anyway we survived that, my father was sick. My father was sick from then on he had jaundice and they were afraid to operate on him until the jaundice left him. He finally was in so much pain he submitted to surgery and three days later he died. So in August of '44 he had passed away. That's when every morning a Sikh would bring over a quart of milk.

SA: Yeah, that was the question I was gonna ask. Once your father was no longer there, now you have your mother and _____.

PD: I'll tell you what happened.

SA: How do you manage?

PD: My father had a full practice in Berlin. One of his specialties if you look at that carefully and read the Latin on his, on his degree, you'll see he also studied Breuns-Strahlen which is x-rays.

SA: X-ray.

PD: Internal medicine and x-rays and chests. So he had his own x-ray equipment so he left a complete practice, a brand new car, a 1938 car, in Berlin. Now over here his nurse was my mother. She went to work for him in Berlin and so as soon as he died, she went to the hospital, the Jewish Hospital, which was kind of a suffering hospital. She went there to work as a nurse. My sister who was 15½ went to work there as a nurse's aide. So she quit school. I still kept on going to school, didn't learn much.

SA: So that's how the family managed to—

PD: Survive.

SA: To survive. Your mother's a nurse, your sister is—

PD: Nurse's aide.

SA: Nurse's aide. Alright. Okay.

PD: Tough circumstances.

SA: We've tried to kind of describe the conditions in Shanghai and I wonder if there's anything else you want to say about that?

PD: Okay. Let's talk about the money. This is Chinese currency in 1939 there's a 1¢ piece here and there's another one here that's 5¢ and for 5¢ you could probably buy a loaf of bread. This is a \$200 bill. Let's turn that over. This is after the war because Chang Kai Shek is on here, the very honest crook. \$200 bill and that's a \$10,000 bill. Now, \$10,000 would buy a loaf of bread in 1947. That's inflation for you.

SA: Yeah, the bill is actually in Yuan.

PD: Yes, we called em—

SA: You called em dollars.

PD: Dollars yeah.

SA: _____ they're Yuan.

PD: What does it say here?

SA: 200 Yuan.

PD: Yeah, that's right. It's Yuan, but who cares? It wasn't worth anything [laugh].

SA: But it wasn't worth anything [laugh].

PD: Okay. Here's a certificate of registration that my father had to have in order to practice there. Here's an ID card that he had to have and you can see that's been heavily used.

SA: Yes.

PD: Here is his certificate of death of August 1944. And here's the bill for the funeral, 7,000.

SA: The death certificate is issued by the Jewish community.

PD: Yes.

SA: Interesting. Yes.

PD: Clearly Japanese didn't want to be involved in it.

SA: Yeah, right. Right.

PD: Oh, I want to give you this too. This is where we stayed in Trieste, this is the bill for the housing. Before we go on, I want to give you some pictures [tape cuts out].

SA: Okay. So you'll talk about the schools you went to.

PD: Yep. I want to talk about the schools. Hold on a minute will you? [Tape cuts out.] In Shanghai I went to the Jewish Youth Association School, which is the Kaduri School to 1946. This one down here. After the war, I went to the Shanghai Jewish School end of 1946 to early 1947, which is this building right here. This is Sephardi. They sponsored it. This is Kaduri, you've heard of the Kaduris? No.

SA: No.

PD: Okay. The Kaduri brothers were quite wealthy and they owned good parts of Shanghai.

SA: Are they Iranian?

PD: I think Kaddorie is either Iranian or English. And you know the Sassoons, Rav Sassoon owned most of Shanghai downtown and Hongkong and Macao.

SA: And Sassoons were Iranians.

PD: They were Iranians, yeah. So I went to those two schools there. I learned an accumulation of languages. I kept up the German. Learned French. In fact, the French teacher I had was my mother's French teacher in high school who moved to Seattle after the war and is buried at Herzl. She and her sister. I learned English, of course. I learned Hebrew. And I learned either Chinese or Japanese. During the war it was Japanese. After the war it was Chinese. We learned the wrong dialect so I knew I wasn't going to be able to use, I could cuss in Chinese real good. Okay. Pictures here—the rubble, from the 1936-37 war between the Chinese and the Japanese. This portion of the city was just in the pile of rubble. I don't know if I ever told you what the national pastime is in China. It's spitting. Spitting and blowing your nose and laugh if you want to, but the disease that spread by spitting is immense. When they felt like having to relieve themselves, they would pull down their pants and squat on the bricks in the ruins and they'd do whatever they had to do. This was an ongoing thing. They called this Little Vienna. Some of the Jews were able to start a little business or they had some kind of entertainment—anything to distract you from the real portions of their lives. Okay. Now a lot of people didn't live like we did, they lived in camps. We had three camps in Shanghai in this region. I don't have the numbers or the figures of how many people lived in camps but they were community, they had to live in a large room. And they ate together. They had a community kitchen and they were being fed. There, was no income for these people and they would be fed by—

SA: By the Jewish community.

PD: By the Jewish community.

SA: Yeah. Does that mean the Sephardic community?

PD: It was Sephardic _____, _____, after the war _____. So we had all of that. These are the synagogues. This is the synagogue and this is the inside of that synagogue. There the Yeshiva which my brother-in-law came over with lived in Shanghai. This is their Rabbi. I think you have enough description down here—

SA: Yes, wonderful.

PD: To take care of that. Okay.

SA: So you obviously didn't stay in Shanghai. You left?

PD: Oh, in 1947.

SA: In 1947.

PD: In January 1947.

SA: What led to your departure?

PD: Getting out [laugh].

SA: No, no, no. How did your mother make that decision and what did she . . . ?

PD: Well, we knew the Communists were coming because the National Chinese and the Communists had a partnership during the war against the Japanese which was hardly held together long enough after the war. Once the Japanese were defeated, we knew the Communists were gonna come to Shanghai because that was the good find. So we were anxious to get out. Now my mother had a sister that made it to New York in 1942. A sister and her husband, never had any children. And she sponsored us. Took us two years before our number came up.

I wanted to go back here to this map and the pictures I gave you, photographs, charts and map are from Japanese, Nazis and Jews, the Jewish Refugee Community of Shanghai 1938, '45 by David Kransler, Yeshiva University Press in 1976. So I needed to give credit to that. I had a little chart here for you that would describe some of the benefits where, can you shut that off? [Tape cuts out].

An aunt in New York sponsored us and in order to do that she had to furnish an income tax return. Here's a witness that this is the truthful thing. Here's a letter from a certified public accountant who says that this is true. Here's a note from the Central Savings Bank that says you have the monies in the bank.

SA: So you had to set aside the amount of money to guarantee—

PD: The welfare of the family when they came over. Right.

SA: The amount she set aside was a lot of money in those days, 7—

PD: Yeah, \$7,100.

SA: Over \$7,000.

PD: Right.

SA: Yeah. Interesting. Really interesting. Okay, so you coming to the States.

PD: Coming to the States.

SA: And where did you go?

PD: Ended up going to San Francisco. From Shanghai to San Francisco, 14 days, on the General Gordon, the troop transport. I slept on the lower bunk. There are four above me. Are you familiar with those bunks?

SA: No.

PD: Okay. The translation of Pacific is calm, but it was not calm. I didn't feel well but I didn't get sick like most of the other people did.

SA: San Francisco's mainly the destination of the ship.

PD: That's correct.

SA: Where are you going?

PD: Okay, we're going to New York.

SA: New York.

PD: So we stayed at the Powell Hotel in San Francisco for two weeks before arrangements were made for us to get the train ticket and we went by train to New York. In New York, my sister was not married at the time. She met my brother-in-law in Shanghai. They dated. In New York they decided to, he was going to look for a job. He went to apply for work as a rabbi, a teacher, and he had an offering in New York State, coal country, escapes me right now, which he didn't get—which was just fine. He got a job, application to come to Seattle and be the first headmaster of the Seattle Hebrew Academy which was then called the Talmud Torah. So he came here and since my mother didn't have anything to do over there and she was never close to her sister, they were never close to one another, and so we decided to hop on the train now go back to Seattle. It's a roundtrip. [Laugh] We arrived in Seattle, I think, in May sometime. My brother-in-law and my sister got married at Bikur Holim. So I ended up going to Bikur Holim. I said kaddish for my father for the full year. Since I was going to the Talmud Torah in Shanghai and studying, after school, I then went to say kaddish for him for a year and then when we left we stayed with going to Bikur Holim. When my brother-in-law came to Seattle, he, of course, went to Bikur Holim.

SA: This was 1940?

PD: 7.

SA: '47, '48.

PD: '47. '47. In Shanghai you couldn't keep a kosher home, or we couldn't. We didn't have the facilities and we didn't have the money. So we didn't get to be kosher until we came to the United States. In Germany we were Reform. I remember going to the synagogue on Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur with my dad. I'm sure my mother went too. I sat next to him and the women didn't sit next to the husbands. They sat up in the balcony. The Reform movement was more Orthodox than it is here [laugh]. In any event, got to Seattle. Oh, I spent three months in New York City. I went to the High School of Commerce that the Gershwins went to but I didn't write any music. That was an eye opener because the kids over there were not like the kids who were over here. And we moved to Seattle. I went to Garfield High School for a year and a half. You were asking me how did I meet my wife? I met her through going to shul at Bikur Holim and after school I had some friends and we would walk down to play tennis at Leschi in the summertime, everyday, whenever we could. My wife then lived on the corner of 32nd and Jefferson. She saw me walking by everyday. And so we got to talking and she said she'd like to play tennis so, took her along, we played tennis. That's how we met.

SA: When'd you get married?

PD: We got married in 1952 after her graduation from high school. And that's it. I graduated mid-term '48-'49, in the winter, January, which was a very cold winter here. I wanted to go to school. I wanted to study architecture so I went to University of Washington for a quarter. At that time I ran out of money. I lived with my mother and my sister and her husband. Then my mother moved to California to San Francisco because her husband had arrived, also from Shanghai, and she remarried. She went down to San Francisco and I said to myself, "Gee, I don't feel like moving down to California. I'm gonna stay here." Well, I couldn't stay with my sister, I was sleeping on a sun porch and that didn't work out too well. So I moved out and I rented a room from one of the Jewish couples here. And, I had to get a job because I didn't have any more money to go back to school and to live. So I looked for a job. I interviewed with a couple of architects, Priteca was one of them—the one that built Bikur Holim. Marcus B. Priteca. Nice guy. He didn't have an opening. He was an old man at that time. And I interviewed with a guy named Damm in the Smith Tower. I forgot his first name now, but his son became an architect and he didn't like the ribbing he was taking with his name so he changed his name to D-a-u-m, instead of staying with D-a-m-m. We're not related. They're Christians.

Anyway I couldn't find a job. I finally found a job—I went to The Bon Marché and they said, "Yeah, we can hire you. You can come in 87½¢, 87-1/3¢ an hour and you can be a paper cutter." I had no idea what a paper cutter was. Absolutely none. Anyway, my weight when I came to the United States was 97 pounds. By the time I got to The Bon Marché I weighed 115. The paper cutter was a 26-inch challenge paper cutter with a hand lever that you had to pull down. Some of the sheets were too big for my weight so I

would hang on to the shaft and cut the paper. How did I get into printing? I worked in a subbasement of The Bon Marché, not the basement, the subbasement. They had a print shop there—that's where the paper cutter fit in. The pressman who they had wanted to avoid, oh I got to get another step in here, avoid getting drafted and he joined the Navy. He gave me two weeks notice and they said I'll teach you how to do this. Well, he didn't know too much but I learned what I could and the rest of it I learned on the job, the hard way. Became the pressman for The Bon Marché and I stayed there for nine years. In the process of the nine years, I could also see that I had some real limitations. Anyway [tape cuts out]. So I ended up borrowing \$500 from the Ladies Free Home Society, Jewish Ladies Free Home Loan Society and bought a used piece of equipment, a small press. We had moved out of my father-in-law's house on Jefferson and 32nd, and we moved to an apartment on 24th Avenue and Cherry Street. I put the press in his basement and I would work there in the evenings and sometimes I'd work till 1 or 2:00 in the morning. We eventually bought a house, I put the press in the garage. I still worked for The Bon. They never knew I was doing anything on the outside. Didn't take a piece of paper, didn't take an ounce of ink. Everything was done before work, after work or during lunchtime. And everything was paid. So that's how I got started. On the—

SA: Can you tell me when did you begin your independent printing activity here?

PD: 1960.

SA: 1960, alright.

PD: In 1960, I opened up Damm Fine Printing, which my brother-in-law devised that name. Leo Siegel in Portland came up with the name. And moved into the Smith Tower. I started in 200 square feet, which is less than a garage, on the 4th floor. Eventually I moved over to the corner of Yesler and 1st, and 2nd Avenue and I added one room after another, I had three rooms. I think I had like 1200 square feet in that building. I stayed there for nine years. Then I bought a printer from a former printer who died and his wife sold me a couple of big presses. I didn't have to move them if I would move into her place there on Prefontaine Place, which is one block long. Are you familiar with Prefontaine?

SA: The name is familiar, where is it exactly?

PD: Well, if you come from 4th Avenue before you get to Yesler, there's a one block that angles off to the left.

SA: I know where it is, yeah.

PD: Okay. Now Father Prefontaine has a fountain named for him over there in front of the park there by the County Courthouse. Anyway this is Prefontaine Place. We stayed there for about well, 10 years.

SA: At that point who is your clientele? Who are you trying to serve?

PD: Pretty much anyone.

SA: Anybody who wants it.

PD: Yeah, yeah. Businesses. Mostly businesses.

SA: Okay, that's my question.

PD: Very little social stuff. The only time we did social work or bar mitzvahs would be when customers had a need for that. And you wanted to serve them.

SA: So it was business printing, commercial.

PD: Yeah. In fact, I'll give you one item. When I was in the Smith Tower I was there for about a year, my life insurance agent was Levine, Mr. Levine. He was a nice gentleman. He came to me one day and he said my boss, the manager of New York Life in the Central Building would like to see you. I said, "Okay fine." So I made an appointment went over to see him, and he said the basis was I should come and work for him and sell life insurance. I said, "Well look, it's like this. I just opened up here. I've got to find out if this'll work or not. I can't just walk away from it. So give me a chance and fine." About two, three months later I get a letter from Madison Avenue New York Life, that's their main office. They want to know how much I would charge them to print the blue New York Life logo? A thousand of those on a specific paper. I said sure I'll quote them but this sounds ridiculous. So, eventually I got the job. I did it. Sent it to them. What they did with that is they sent out a letter to all the New York Life offices with a sample clipped to it and they said if you would like, then they asked me how much I would charge them for imprinting it in black ink. So I did that in various quantities—100, 200, 300. And I still thought this is ridiculous. So what turned out was eventually they sent this information to all the offices. I ended up with 450 New York Life agencies in Washington, in U.S., Canada, Puerto Rico and Hawaii, Alaska and Hawaii.

SA: Wonderful.

PD: So this is—

SA: And what year is this?

PD: It was about 1961. I started in '60 so it must have been '61 or '62.

SA: Yeah, so this is major step up.

PD: This is a major step up. It's kind of a fun thing, they would pay for the UPS service and we had UPS ever since. It was funny because it just worked, I kept it for years. I think I kept it till about 1990, not all of them because by that time they had computers and they could do their own on their, on their copiers. They didn't have the need. But it was a fun thing while it worked.

SA: Did you have a philosophy for your business, I mean something that, I mean you said already that when you started you did this thing totally on your own, not a scrap of paper.

But when you're in business now, you're no longer at The Bon Marché at some point. What would you have described as your—

PD: Well, you have to get some help. Eventually my kids worked in the company. All these boys were all trained to run a press, whether they wanted to pursue it or not, it didn't make any difference. But they did it, so they could fall back if they had to. But yeah, you have to give people a service and proper treatment and the quality. It has to be what they want to have. You have to know what you're doing. [End of Tape 1, Side B].

[Start Tape 2, Side A]

SA: Tape number 2. We're talking about your business, Damm Fine Printing, and talking about your philosophy. So you grew the business, you moved, I met you when you were in your what is it 6th Avenue?

PD: Yeah, 6th Avenue, One Union Square. So what transpired is that I kept Damm Fine Printing on Prefontaine Place. I opened up a place called Damm Quick Printing and we did that in the Seattle Tower. It was a sky bridge next to the Financial Center. There was good reason for doing this, but it's a lengthy story I don't need to go into. Stayed there for let's see 1972 to 1982. In 1982, I opened up One Step Copy Center, a little more sophisticated in One Union Square. Again, I had a very nice relationship with my landlord and good behavior our part and always paying our bills had paid off. We stayed there until I sold the business in 1999. No, I'm sorry 2003. Eventually what I did is I had Damm Fine Printing was on Prefontaine Place but they doubled my rent when that building was sold and I found a building up on Jackson Street, 1240 South Jackson, which I bought, and we moved up there. Ran the business up there from 1979 to 1999, 20 years. Sold that building to my neighbor who had a Vietnamese Restaurant and I moved whatever we had of Damm Fine Printing we moved down to One Union Square so we combined both of the companies and called it One Step Copy Center. That was kind of the trailing end of Damm Fine Printing. That was pretty much the calendar of events for the company.

SA: A quick question about your printing business. It starts in '61, a little business. Did you encounter any problems in the community because you're Jewish?

PD: Because my name is not Jewish I am privileged to hear a lot of conversations that are not terribly Jewish friendly. Had one person who made a remark, a slang term in his conversation, and I was in the Smith Tower and here's the thing: "That is not a very nice remark and I happen to be Jewish. Now if you're serious about that you can leave, if you want to do business with a Jew you can stay." So we did business. He did not leave. But I had some Jews, too, that had terrible behavior I had kicked out, so [laugh].

SA: Okay. _____ [laugh]. But you did achieve a wonderful business reputation.

PD: Yes, I did that.

SA: Let me ask a question. If you were to do it over again would you do anything differently? It doesn't have to be—

PD: The technology has changed so rapidly.

SA: I understand.

PD: So, yeah I—

SA: But you adapted to the technology.

PD: I would adapt to the technology.

SA: I'm thinking more in terms, you know—

PD: [Laugh] What you're saying is if you knew what you know now would you have done this? [Laugh] The typical answer would be no, I'm not crazy. [Laugh] But it has provided a living for a family and has given me an opportunity to grow. Now as far as military service is concerned, you asked me about that?

SA: Well, I haven't asked you because I wanted to focus on the two ends, the Shanghai and the printing because we haven't, had no one so far as I know, who has discussed anything about that particular business in Seattle. So there was a gap in our knowledge. We've had a lot of people talk of military, maybe we could, ____ have the time to do it.

PD: Mine is different.

SA: Is there anything that you can think of now that we should have covered on Shanghai that we didn't do?

PD: Probably the only thing I would add to that is that in addition to the climate that I talked about and the smell and the stench is the death. Death is, when you walk out, if you're living in a camp you don't get out in the street. When you walked out of my little place and you walked into the street there would be generally dead bodies next to the door. They would lie there until the guy comes along with the little cart and they pick them up and haul them away. Children, infant girls were wrapped up in blankets, put out to die. That's a common sight. The wealthy women would have their feet tied and their shoe size would be about this big. That would be an indication of wealth. You don't have that anymore. They're gone. The one thing I miss is the disease. [Tape cuts out.] A true case of leprosy where the limbs rot off lying in the street and were still alive. You don't forget that and you don't see that in the movie. And the good times, I'm sorry to say, I don't think I ever had any good times. Eventually I joined the Boy Scouts that later part. I joined the B-e-t-a-r, you know what that is?

SA: No.

PD: Okay. You know what Irgun is in Israel?

SA: Yeah.

PD: Okay, this is a radical group. They felt that the sides of the Jordan should be part of Israel.

SA: How do you spell this?

PD: Betar. B-e-t-a-r. The Betar movement is a very right wing of political thinking. If Israel had gone that way, it wouldn't have that split now [laugh].

SA: So. Shanghai. We talked about the printing business. I really want to thank you for letting, filling in a huge gap in our knowledge—

PD: Really?

SA: Our recorded knowledge. Thank you also for all these copies, tremendous amount of work. We really appreciate it.

PD: You want to hear about military?

SA: No, we can't, I haven't got time for it and, as I say, we have it covered in other tapes. But I thank you for this wonderful interview.

PD: Okay. I have a couple a things I will give you that are too lengthy—

END OF INTERVIEW