

The Singer of Shanghai

written by

Kari-Anne Innes, Kevin Ostoyich, Kayla Owens, Kayli Perrine, and Christian Yoder

under the direction of

Kari-Anne Innes, director, and Kevin Ostoyich, historian

CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

HARRY J. ABRAHAM,	older man, former Shanghai Jewish Refugee, founder and president of ProQuip, Inc. in Macedonia, Ohio ¹
LARA,	administrative assistant
ROSE,	college student ²
IDA ROSENTHAL ABRAHAM,	Harry's mother and seamstress ³
SA MAN ⁴	
WOMAN,	several roles ⁵
MAGISTRATE ⁶	
AGENT ⁷	
BERTHOLD ROSENTHAL,	Ida's father ⁸
MINA ROSENTHAL,	Ida's mother
INGA,	a friend of Ida's
IVY,	a young girl
ELLEN,	a young girl
YOUNG HARRY,	Harry J. Abraham as a young boy ⁹
AMERICAN GI SOLDIER ¹⁰	
TOUR GUIDE	in cemetery ¹¹

1 Originally played by Kevin Ostoyich

2 Originally played by Christian Yoder

3 Originally played by Kayli Perrine

4 Originally played by Jakob Innes

⁵ Several roles may be double cast. Lara, Woman, Inga, Ellen and Mina were originally played by Kayla Owens

⁶ Originally played by former Shanghai refugee Eric Kisch

⁷ Originally played by trustee of the Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation Danny Spungen

⁸ Originally played by former Shanghai refugee Harry J. Abraham

⁹ Originally played by Kevin Ostoyich

¹⁰ Originally played by former Shanghai refugee Bert Reiner

¹¹ Originally played by former Shanghai refugee Gary Sternberg

SCENE ONE: INT. MACEDONIA, OHIO; HARRY J. ABRAHAM'S WORK
OFFICE- DAY

HARRY sits at his desk. There is a chair opposite the desk for a guest. An antique Singer sewing machine sits prominently in the office.¹² Offstage, a knock at the door. LARA answers.

LARA

Hello! You must be Rose. I'm Lara, Mr. Abraham's assistant. He's waiting for you. Please follow me.

(LARA ushers ROSE into HARRY's office and stands by the door.)

Mr. Abraham? Rose is here for your interview.

HARRY

Hello, Rose. I hope you didn't have a hard time finding -

ROSE

No, not at all, Mr. Abraha -

HARRY

Please, call me Harry.

ROSE

Will do, Harry. I just want to say that I've been looking forward to our interview. You . . . your past . . . it intrigues me. Not many people know of the Shanghai Jewish Refugees.

HARRY

It's not only my story. It's my mother's. She's the reason I'm alive today.

ROSE

Wait - Before we go on, I'd like to set up my phone to record -

HARRY

Sure. While you get set up, should I have Lara bring us

¹² Since the first performance of the play, new information has come to light: the actual sewing machine was produced by the Wertheim factory in Frankfurt am Main.

some water?

ROSE

Yes, please.

HARRY

Lara, two waters please.

LARA

Of course. I'll be right back.

(LARA exits. ROSE sits in the chair in front of HARRY's desk and presses record on her phone.)

ROSE

Looks like we're set to go. I have a number of questions here, and at any time you feel uncomfortable, perhaps an uncomfortable question, if you wish, you don't have to answer it.

(Beat.)

First question, could you please state your name, birthday, and a brief introduction?

HARRY

My name is Harry J. Abraham. I was born on March 15, 1938. I am one of about 20,000 Jews who were able to escape from the Nazis to Shanghai, China. This was thanks to my mother. She's the one that helped our family leave Germany after Kristallnacht.

ROSE

Could you tell me more about your parents and about Kristallnacht?

HARRY

Yes, well -

(LARA enters with two glasses of water.)

LARA

Excuse me, Mr. Abraham. I have your wa-

(LARA drops a glass of water on the floor. The glass breaks.)

LARA

Oh, my goodness! I apologize. I wonder what I could've

tripped on? I'll clean it up right away. I'll bring two new glasses once I'm done.

HARRY

No problem. Accidents happen.

(LARA picks up the pieces and exits as the scene continues.)

SCENE TWO: INT. FRICKHOFEN, GERMANY; ABRAHAM'S APARTMENT-
EVENING

The sound of a window breaking.

HARRY

November 9th, 1938, Kristallnacht, the night of broken glass; in the little town that I was born in, Frickhofen, which is about 60 kilometers from Frankfurt, the Nazis threw bricks through all the windows. As I've been told, I lay beneath the window in the first house they attacked, and glass shattered all over me. My mother was there with me, and she picked me up, and luckily the glass didn't hurt me.¹³

(A baby cries. IDA enters with baby swaddled in a blanket.)

IDA

Oh, Harry! There's glass all over you! Please be okay, please be okay.

(Pause.)

Oh, thank goodness. It looks like none of it cut you.

(Four bar intro to the lullaby "Raisins and Almonds")

IDA

Shhh, it's okay. Everything is going to be okay. Shh, shhh, shh...

(IDA sings.)

¹³ The narrative details in play interview come primarily from two interviews: 1) Interview of Harry J. Abraham and Inga Berkey conducted by Kevin Ostoyich, 27 May 2017, Moreland Hills, Ohio and 2) Interview of Harry J. Abraham conducted by Kevin Ostoyich, 27 October 2018, via telephone.

"In the temple in a corner room a widowed
Daughter of Zion sits alone.
She rocks her only son to sleep with a
sweet lullaby.
Singing of raisins and almonds.
Sleep child, oh sleep *Yidel. Ailu, ailu.*"¹⁴

ROSE

To clarify, Kristallnacht was a planned attack on all
Jews by the Nazi regime?

HARRY

Yes, and in fact, Hitler ordered that storm troopers
attack in towns they didn't live in. Most Nazis had grown
up with the Jews, and he didn't want them to hesitate; he
didn't want them to have that emotional connection.¹⁵

*(The sound of SA MEN
forcing themselves into
the house, ransacking;
the sound of a bottle
knocked over, baby
cries.)*

IDA

The milk! You've knocked over the baby's milk!¹⁶

(SA MAN enters.)

SA MAN

Where's your husband? Where's the man of the house?

IDA

He's not here! He's away! What are you doing? Why are you
doing this?

SA MAN

Let's go. We'll be back.

*(The SA MAN exits. The
sound of a door*

¹⁴ Abraham Goldfaden, arranged by Kayli Perrine. 'Raisins
and Almonds'.

¹⁵ The SA men of the nearby village of Langendernbach were
sent to destroy the property of the Jews in Frickhofen.
Information provided by local historian of Frickhofen,
Hubert Hecker, to Kevin Ostoyich.

¹⁶ The milk story comes from conversations Kevin Ostoyich
had with both Harry J. Abraham and Hubert Hecker.

*slamming shut. The baby
cries.)*

IDA

The milk! You've spilled the milk! Shh, shhh, it's okay,
it's okay.

*(IDA sings, carrying
the baby off stage,
exits.)*

"A widowed daughter of Zion sits alone.
She rocks her only son to sleep with a
sweet lullaby.
Singing of raisins and almonds.
Sleep child, oh sleep *Yidel. Ailu, ailu.*"¹⁷

ROSE

And what about your father?

HARRY

My father was a middleman who bought and sold cows. He
was in the town that he was born in, Altenkirchen. And
that night, about 20 km from my town, all the Jewish
people, including my father, were taken to the
Marktplatz, the center of the town. My uncle, Sigfrid,
was arrested in Frickhofen. And they were both taken to
Buchenwald.

ROSE

A concentration camp, correct?

HARRY

Yes, the concentration camp.

ROSE

What was it like?

HARRY

From what I've been told, Buchenwald was "dirty and
looked terrible, 40,000 prisoners, a very big place,
absolutely empty and surrounded by wire fences and watch
towers on one side."¹⁸ During the first few weeks of its

¹⁷ Abraham Goldfaden, arranged by Kayli Perrine. 'Raisins
and Almonds'.

¹⁸ The description of Buchenwald is a quotation from a
letter written by former Shanghai Jewish refugee, Walter
Kisch. Kisch and his brother Dr. Ernst Kisch were
imprisoned in Buchenwald while Albrecht Abraham and
Sigfrid Rosenthal were. Walter Kisch Letter to Thoburn T.

opening, seven people tried to escape. They were caught by Nazi soldiers and shot. Can you believe that? Seven innocent people killed, just like that.¹⁹ They only wanted freedom. We only wanted freedom.

ROSE

But your father and uncle, were they able to escape?

HARRY

Yes, with help from my mother. You see, my grandfather, my mother's father, was in the German Navy in the First World War. My grandfather told my mother that he heard of places to go if you had the tickets to get on the ship. And the only place left open was Shanghai. So, my mother with that information, found two tickets from Frankfurt.

SCENE THREE: TRAIN STATION AND MAGISTRATE'S OFFICE- DAY.

Sound of a train. IDA enters a busy station. A WOMAN stands nearby.

IDA

Excuse me, pardon me. I'm trying to get off. I need to go to the magistrate's office. . . . Excuse me, ma'am, can you tell me where the magistrate's office is?

WOMAN

Sure, see that sign over there. Follow that sign, go up the stairs and walk for about a block then you should see the office.

IDA

Thank you, you've been a big help. Bless you.

(The WOMAN exits. IDA walks to another area of the stage, the Magistrate's office.)

MAGISTRATE

Good day, ma'am. How can I help you?

IDA

Brumbaugh, 1 August 1967. (Private Collection of Eric Kisch).

¹⁹ Nikolaus Wachsmann, *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2016), 96.

Good afternoon, sir. I would like to get passports for my husband Albrecht Abraham and my brother Sigfrid Rosenthal.

MAGISTRATE

Jewish? Are they in a concentration camp?

IDA

Buchenwald.

MAGISTRATE

I'm sorry. I can't help you.

IDA

But I was told that if I could get passports to Shanghai, they would be let go.

MAGISTRATE

Do you have assurances?

IDA

Assurances?

MAGISTRATE

From the steam company saying they'll sell you passage to Shanghai. Then, you come here to City Hall with assurances for your passports.

IDA

Please help me. I've spent countless hours. Back and forth between Frickhofen, Limburg an der Lahn, and Frankfurt.

MAGISTRATE

Then, you go back to the agent to convert your assurances to tickets.

IDA

I've been trying for weeks. My father served in the German Navy. He has friends, money, anything.

MAGISTRATE

And, then the government sends your paperwork to Buchenwald.

IDA

Thank you, you've been very helpful.

MAGISTRATE

Once they're released, you will have four weeks to get

them out of the country or back they go.²⁰

*(The sound of a train
as IDA and the
MAGISTRATE exit.)*

ROSE

And she was able to help your uncle and father get to Shanghai.

HARRY

Yes, in January of 1939, they left Buchenwald and took the train to Genoa. From Genoa, the *Conte Biancamano* took them through the Suez Canal to Shanghai.

ROSE

It was hard for her to get those tickets. After Kristallnacht, the Jews were cut off from many resources.

HARRY

Yes, and that was something my mother could never get over. She never understood how people could deprive me and her of food. She went out into the streets crying.

SCENE FOUR: EXT. STREET- DAY.

Street sounds. IDA enters with a swaddled infant. SA MAN enters opposite.

IDA

"How am I supposed to get milk for my son?"

HARRY

An SA Man stopped her.

SA MAN

"A Jew kid doesn't need to guzzle milk!"

*(Sound of a bottle
thrown on ground,
breaking. The baby
cries. SA MAN exits. A
WOMAN enters. She*

²⁰ This is a common refrain in interviews with former Shanghai Jewish refugees. In the immediate aftermath of Kristallnacht, it was still possible to secure the release of Jews from concentration camps if assurances could be made that they would immediately leave the country.

carries milk bottles.)

IDA

Shh, shhh,

(singing.)

"A widowed Daughter of Zion sits alone."²¹

HARRY

A woman helped her.

WOMAN

Ida, come here, inside the door. Shhh, be quiet. "I will help you, but you must promise never to say you were here; you will forget this whole thing, because if anybody knows that I helped someone who was Jewish, it could mean the . . . imprisonment of my family."²²

(giving IDA the milk bottles)

Here, go out the back door.

(indicating a wall in the distance)

See that wall? I'll leave a bottle of milk on that wall in the back of the yard each morning before dawn.

IDA

Thank you, thank you.

(IDA and the WOMAN exit.)

HARRY

That really affected her. I was only a baby.²³

²¹ Abraham Goldfaden, arranged by Kayli Perrine. Raisins and Almonds

²² This quote comes from an interview of former Shanghai Jewish refugee, Eric Kisch. Kisch was describing what an Italian man said to Kisch's mother, Grete Kisch, when he helped her as she fled to Shanghai. The playwrights decided to use this to supply dialogue of the woman helping Harry's mother. Interview of Eric Kisch conducted by Kevin Ostoyich, 9 September 2017, Shaker Heights, Ohio.

²³ Kevin Ostoyich, 'Mothers: Remembering Three Women on the 80th Anniversary of Kristallnacht', American Institute for Contemporary German Studies of The Johns Hopkins University (Published online 9 November 2018: <https://www.aicgs.org/2018/11/mothers-remembering-three-women-on-the-80th-anniversary-of-kristallnacht/>).

ROSE

What was your mother like before Kristallnacht?

HARRY

Well, I didn't know her, you know, beforehand, but in talking with my uncle and others, they said she was a whole different person. She was fairly easygoing in fact.²⁴

ROSE

Do you believe that Kristallnacht changed her?

HARRY

I do. That night changed everybody. Nobody trusted anyone anymore and my mother especially became hard, tough, and difficult. You know, after she got the tickets for her brother and my father, she got four more for me, herself, and her parents. But they didn't want to go.²⁵

SCENE FIVE: EXT. TRAIN STATION/INT. TRAVEL AGENT- DAY.

Sound of a train. IDA and AGENT enter opposite sides of the stage. IDA crosses toward AGENT.

IDA

Excuse me, pardon me, I'm trying to get off. I need to go to the travel office.

AGENT

Good morning, ma'am, how may I assist you today?

IDA

I need tickets to Shanghai. I only had the funds earlier to get two for my husband and brother. Now I need to get tickets for the rest of my family. I was hoping to be able to get four. One for each of my parents, one for my son, and one for myself.

AGENT

The price has gone up.

IDA

But you gave me assurances!

AGENT

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

There are others waiting that can pay much more than this.

IDA

You gave me assurances at the lower price. Please, I don't have a lot of money.

AGENT

Did you still want the tickets?

IDA

Albrecht and Sigfrid are in Shanghai already. They're waiting for us. My father was in the German Navy. He has friends, money, anything.

AGENT

Remember once you get these you have four weeks to get out of the country.

IDA

Yes sir. I remember all too well.

*Sound of a train. AGENT exits.
BERTHOLD and MINA enter,
meeting IDA.*

SCENE FIVE: INT.- DAY.

IDA

Mom and Dad, here are your tickets. I have mine and Harry's in my coat pocket.

BERTHOLD

Schatzi...we...we aren't going.²⁶

IDA

Not going?? What do you mean not going?

MINA

Ida we aren't going. We want to stay here.

IDA

You have to come with us. I don't want to think about what could happen to you if you stay here.

(BERTHOLD, MINA, and

²⁶ 'Schatzi' is a German word of endearment akin to 'Sweetie'.

IDA exit.)

ROSE

They didn't want to go? Even though they knew what was happening to the Jews?

HARRY

Well, you have to understand, my grandfather had served in the German Navy and Frickhofen was their home.

ROSE

So, they thought they would be okay.

HARRY

Yes. But even they weren't safe from the Nazis.

ROSE

What happened to them?

HARRY

My grandfather was forced into hard labor and because of that, suffered very much from malnutrition and exhaustion. He died from a ruptured appendix.

ROSE

And your grandmother?

HARRY

She lived for about two years in a house with other Jewish women. But eventually they were shipped off to Auschwitz, and there, all of them, including my grandmother, were killed.²⁷

ROSE

Your mother did her best to keep you all together. It seems like she was a great role model for you.

²⁷ Information about Harry's grandparents comes from the interviews with him. Additional information about Harry's grandmother hiding in Frickhofen comes from conversations Kevin Ostoyich had with local Frickhofen historian, Hubert Hecker. Since the original performance of the play, new information has come to light: according to The Central Database of Shoah Victim's Names at Yad Vashem, Mina (née Heilbronn) Rosenthal was deported to Sobibor extermination camp on 11 June 1942 and murdered. <https://yvng.yadvashem.org/nameDetails.html?language=en&itemId=11618237&ind=1> (last accessed 14 December 2022). Note: There are alternate spellings of Mina's maiden name in various records: 'Heilbronn' and 'Heilbrunn'.

HARRY

Oh, of course; not only for me, but for others as well.

ROSE

What do you mean?

HARRY

My mother was a great seamstress. She learned how to sew when she was very young from her mother and grandmother. See that machine over there? That was her sewing machine.

ROSE

This... is her original sewing machine?

HARRY

Yes, it is. After Kristallnacht, when she was gathering the materials for us to leave for Shanghai, she made it a priority to bring the Singer along with us. Jews in Shanghai didn't have much. We were forced to give up most of our possessions, even our clothes. Sewing. She loved to sew.²⁸ She taught young people in Shanghai to sew.²⁹ Here's a good one for you, when people no longer had clothes, women made blouses out of—

ROSE

My mother and women in Shanghai shared similar talents! She could recreate an old blouse into something new and different.

HARRY

But these women could make dresses out of parachute material . . .

ROSE

Wow, your mother was an amazing woman. She went through so much, but still found it necessary to help others.

HARRY

It was important to her. Though Kristallnacht really had an impact on who she was, this was the one thing that

²⁸ Kevin Ostoyich, 'Mothers: Remembering Three Women on the 80th Anniversary of Kristallnacht', American Institute for Contemporary German Studies of The Johns Hopkins University (Published online 9 November 2018: <https://www.aicgs.org/2018/11/mothers-remembering-three-women-on-the-80th-anniversary-of-kristallnacht/>).

²⁹ Ibid.

kept her mind at ease. She just loved to sew.³⁰

Sound of a sewing machine.

SCENE SIX: INT. IDA'S APARTMENT IN THE HEIM³¹- DAY.

IDA and INGA³² are working on a dress that INGA wears as a model.

IDA

Can you hand me the pincushion please?

INGA

What are we gonna do about this area in the back, it's looking a little scarce?

IDA

I know. Right now, I just need to pin the bodice closed so I can remember to sew it up, we can't have the young woman giving a peep show at the Shanghai Jewish Youth Association.³³

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Shanghai had various barracks-style buildings called *Heime* (pl. homes)/*Heim* (s. house) where the poorest refugees tended to live with very little furnishings. Often many refugees from different families would live in the same room with only blankets hung up to provide a semblance of privacy.

³² The name INGA is in honor of former Shanghai Jewish refugee Inga Berkey.

³³ The Shanghai Jewish Youth Association School (also known as the 'Kadoorie School' after the Sephardic Jewish benefactor, Horace Kadoorie) was the main school for the refugee children in Shanghai. It served much more than a school, however. It also was the location of vocational training, cultural events, and religious services. It even served at times as makeshift housing. For more information about the Shanghai Jewish Youth Association school, see Steve Hochstadt, 'The Kadoorie School: Educating Refugee Children in Shanghai', in Kevin Ostoyich and Yun Xia, eds. *The History of the Shanghai Jews: New Pathways of Research* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 99-131. Harry J. Abraham attended a different school in Shanghai known as the Freysinger School. Nevertheless, the Abraham family most likely would have attended events at the Shanghai Jewish Youth Association School.

INGA

I'm amazed anyone is still having dances these days!

IDA

I couldn't agree with you more! Dances are a time for celebration! What is there to celebrate here?

INGA

I mean think about it, wouldn't you want to celebrate something even if it's not how you want it to be, instead of celebrating nothing at all?

IDA

At least some people will have good memories when they leave Shanghai. Now help me figure out what we're gonna do to the rest of the dress.

INGA

Hmm let's see, well the dress is coming together quite nicely Ida, but what if we reconstructed the bodice and took some material from there and added it to the gown?

IDA

No, no, we can't do that; then she would have less coverage at the bodice and, trust me, that would not work for a modest Jewish family like hers.

(Chuckling. Pause. IDA and INGA quietly think to themselves. IDA snaps her fingers.)

I know what to do! Come help me get it from the kitchen.

(IDA and INGA cross off stage and re-enter with a large white parachute.)

Albrecht brought this home yesterday and I felt the need to keep it for something useful, and I was right!

INGA

What on Earth is this? And, it has a huge mud stain on it!!

(laughing)

IDA

If you'd use your imagination this dirty old parachute will complete the two layers of draping on her gown that

we need!³⁴

INGA

You still haven't answered my question about the giant mud stain at the center of it.

IDA

Oh, that's nothing a good old wash can't get out, have some faith in my abilities

(chuckling).

She won't even be able to tell what material this is because it will be hidden under the first layer we already have! Just wait and see! You may not know this about me, but I was taught by the best.

INGA

(chuckling)

And who exactly was that?

IDA

My grandmother. You see that sewing machine we've been using this whole time to make the dress?

INGA

Yes.

IDA

Well, she taught me everything I know, and I couldn't just leave it when we were fleeing to Shanghai; I would feel as if I were leaving a part of me behind. It keeps me connected to my grandmother. And now I want to use this same piece of machinery to bring this dress together.

(Sound of a cell phone ringing. IDA and INGA exit.)

ROSE

Oh, excuse me, I have to take this Yes, well I am actually in the middle of the interview as we speak okay I'll check my email when I hang up.

³⁴ The parachute story is based on former Shanghai Jewish refugee, Inga Berkey's description of how her aunt made clothes in Shanghai out of a parachute that Inga's uncle found discarded in Shanghai. Interview of Harry J. Abraham and Inga Berkey conducted by Kevin Ostoyich, 27 May 2017, Moreland Hills, Ohio.

HARRY

(chuckles)

ROSE

What's so funny, Harry?

*(Sound of three
notifications on cell
phone.)*

ROSE

Oh that? Yeah, I get a lot of notifications throughout the day, but that's the only way I know when I get a new message, so I can immediately check it.

HARRY

This generation and their technology I tell you; you wouldn't last a week back in my day. Picture it, you're a young child in a very unfamiliar place, you can't go back home because it's being torn down from top to bottom, you couldn't bring your toys, just the bare necessities if that....so what do you do to have fun? You make something out of absolutely nothing. The year is 1943, the date is February 18th. You're playing outside when you see a flyer posted on a telephone pole about a new proclamation issued by the Japanese. All stateless refugees that entered Shanghai after 1937, in other words, the Jews, have to move into a Designated Area, in Hongkew, with all of the other Jewish people and poorest of the Chinese. All this time Shanghai is occupied by Japan, allies to Germany. Life in Shanghai was good at first, it wasn't the French Concession, where people had a lot of space, made a fairly good living, and didn't face a lot of oppression, but we made the best of it.³⁵

SCENE SEVEN: EXT. PLAYGROUND- DAY.³⁶

³⁵ Eric Kisch, Webex meeting with Valparaiso University students, 7 April 2020.

³⁶ Although Harry had friends in Shanghai, he had a hard time remembering them during his interviews with Kevin

*ELLEN³⁷ and IVY³⁸ enter
playing.*

ELLEN

How do you like your new house?

IVY

I don't know. It isn't much, but it's a place to live, you know, even though it has a lot of people living in such a small space.

ELLEN

I miss where we lived before the Japanese said we had to live here. It isn't like the fancy house I used to live in on the other side of the bridge.

IVY

Do you think the Japanese knew it was mean?

ELLEN

I don't think they did. The Germans made them do it.

IVY

Do you have a lot of people living in your house like I do?

ELLEN

Yes, but everyone is in my family, so I guess that helps

Ostoyich. The playwrights decided to provide a scene of children discussing conditions in Shanghai and playing games. The scene is a historical composite based on interviews of multiple individuals, including 1) Inga Berkey, Interview of Harry J. Abraham and Inga Berkey conducted by Kevin Ostoyich, 27 May 2017, Moreland Hills, Ohio and Interview of Inga Berkey conducted by Kevin Ostoyich, 7 October 2017, Cleveland, Ohio; 2) Helga Silberberg, Interview of Helga Silberberg, conducted by Kevin Ostoyich, 18 September 2019, San Francisco, California; 3) Bert Reiner, Interview of Bert Reiner conducted by Kevin Ostoyich, 27 October 2017, Las Vegas, Nevada; 4) Gary Sternberg, Interview of Gary Sternberg conducted by Kevin Ostoyich, 28 October 2017, Henderson, Nevada; and 5) Ivy Green, Interview of Ivy Green conducted by Kevin Ostoyich, 29 June 2019, Sydney, Australia.

³⁷ The name ELLEN is in honor of former Shanghai Jewish refugee Ellen Wolf.

³⁸ The name IVY is in honor of former Shanghai Jewish refugee Ivy Green.

a little bit. Do you like where you live?

IVY

It's hard having to share sinks and toilets, and the little bugs in our beds and rice are annoying.

(pause)

How are you liking it?

ELLEN

It's getting better . . . when we first moved here, I heard a lot of people complaining that the designated area was just a bombed out, burnt out place.

IVY

Is your family having a hard time living here? There are a lot of families living in my house and the rooms are divided by curtains.

ELLEN

Yeah it's not the cleanest place to live; there are a lot of people living in my house. Three floors aren't as big as you think. The first floor is a giant bedroom and a small bedroom in the corner that is mine. The next floor is where my aunt, uncle, uncle's cousin, and grandpa sleep. The next floor is for my uncle, aunt and my cousin, and the outhouse is a little room above that.³⁹

IVY

We don't have an outhouse. We have to use honey buckets.⁴⁰ The smell is horrible because so many people are using them.

ELLEN

Ewww, honey buckets. Why do they call them that? The smell of them is so gross and nasty. I feel bad for the people who empty them every day. What a crappy job.

(girls laugh)

Do you get tired of eating beans? There are so many beans in my house that other people ask me, "What color did you have last night knowing it was one color of beans:

³⁹ Interview of Inga Berkey conducted by Kevin Ostoyich, 7 October 2017, Cleveland, Ohio.

⁴⁰ Given the lack of indoor plumbing, most refugees had to use buckets for relieving themselves. The waste from the 'honey buckets' was collected on the street by Chinese labourers and often used as fertiliser. Honey buckets are described in multiple interviews with former Shanghai Jewish refugees.

purple, brown, black, white, or yellow."⁴¹

IVY

Were you able to bring any toys or anything with you? I couldn't bring my teddy bear with me, and I miss him a lot.

ELLEN

I don't have any kind of toys. Not a doll, not a teddy bear. I've never learned how to ride a bicycle even.⁴²

IVY

What do you play with then?

ELLEN

Sometimes I play this game with marbles that I learned from my friends, and my family also plays Shanghai Millionaire sometimes.⁴³

IVY

That sounds fun. I wish I knew how to play. Do you think we could play? I don't want to be sad anymore.

ELLEN

Sure! I could teach you. My marbles aren't the prettiest, but they're still fun and special to me.

*(ELLEN drops marbles
from a small bag on the
ground.)*

IVY

Can I play with this one? I like the color.

ELLEN

I like that one, too. It's my favorite. Put your marble on the ground like this and flick it to try to hit another marble.

IVY

⁴¹ The description of eating beans of different colors on different days comes from interview of Bert Reiner conducted by Kevin Ostoyich, 27 October 2017, Las Vegas, Nevada.

⁴² Interview of Inga Berkey conducted by Kevin Ostoyich, 7 October 2017, Cleveland, Ohio.

⁴³ Interview of Helga Silberberg, conducted by Kevin Ostoyich, 18 September 2019, San Francisco, California. 'Shanghai Millionaire' was a variant of Monopoly.

Don't we need more people to play?

ELLEN

No, we can play with the two of us. Sometimes people play with four or five shooting the marbles, but we don't need that many. Hey, have you heard of packs? I've seen some of the boys play that.⁴⁴

IVY

Is that the game with the cigarette packs that you fold and throw at each other?

ELLEN

They seem to have fun playing it, but they never let me play. I guess some of the packs are collectible, but I don't see what is collectible about a folded cigarette pack.

*(ELLEN and IVY laugh
and keep playing.)*

HARRY

Don't get me wrong, it's not like we enjoyed every second of our time there nor were we always happy but what were we to do? Sit around and sulk? That wasn't an option, so we didn't have a choice but to use our imagination.

(pause)

Everything that you hold near and dear is on your phone, right?

ROSE

For the most part yeah, I keep all my passwords on my note's app, all my family photos—

HARRY

Right! See if your phone were to stop working right now, you'd have a heart attack, wouldn't you?

ROSE

I'll give you that one Harry. I will say that my phone has definitely become part of my daily life, but I didn't always have this small rectangular piece of metal and glass to keep me entertained.

HARRY

Please enlighten me!

⁴⁴ Description of 'packs' comes from multiple interviews conducted of Gary Sternberg by Kevin Ostoyich in Henderson, Nevada.

ROSE

Let me see, some of my favorites were Simon says, kick ball, oh definitely dodgeball. Dodgeball could get real violent. I've gotten hit in the face a few times by accident. That was not fun to say the least.

HARRY

I don't know many people getting hit in the face "on accident" even if it's just a game. On a serious note, there weren't many activities in school outside of racing and soccer. When school was over, we went home.

ROSE

Are there any other moments you can remember when you were in school?

HARRY

Oh definitely! I'll never forget this.

ROSE

Alright what happened?

SCENE EIGHT: INT. IDA'S HEIM- DAY.

HARRY

It was later, after the war was over. Everyone was distracted, thinking about getting out of Shanghai. The teacher would walk up and down the aisle and warn you when you would take a test. I couldn't concentrate. I'll never forget he had a ruler behind his back, and he gave me a whack across my knuckles, I can feel it now! And I hid my hands behind my back when I got home, and my mother was wondering what I was doing, so I showed her and it was all red, and of course you don't lie to your mother, especially my mother, she was tough.

(Sound of sewing machine. IDA enters looking for YOUNG HARRY.⁴⁵ YOUNG HARRY enters.)

IDA

Harry, is that you?

⁴⁵ Important Note: The play was originally performed as a Radio Theatre Broadcast. Kevin Ostoyich played both HARRY and YOUNG HARRY. For live performances of this play, it is suggested that a child actor play the role of the YOUNG HARRY.

YOUNG HARRY

Yes, ma'am.

IDA

Well come in here and let me see you, what are you hiding for? How was school?

YOUNG HARRY

It was okay . . . Well . . . umm we had a test in History class today . . .

IDA

Just okay? How'd you do?

YOUNG HARRY

I think I did pretty good, but . . .

IDA

But wha-? What are you rubbing your hand like that for?

YOUNG HARRY

Well . . . the teacher hit me on the hand real hard in class and it still hurts.

IDA

What happened this time?

YOUNG HARRY

Well, he hadn't passed all the tests out yet, so I thought it was okay to keep talking until he was finished but then he came over and told me to hold out my hand and he popped me with a ruler.

IDA

Let me see your hand.

YOUNG HARRY

See it's still red.

*(IDA slaps YOUNG
HARRY.)*

IDA

Maybe he didn't hit you hard enough.

ROSE

Whoa! Your mother did not play, she meant business.

HARRY

Education was very important to my mother.

IDA

What are you going to do when we go to America? Do you want to be behind all of the other children?

YOUNG HARRY

We're moving to America?!

IDA

When the quotas come through. Your father has a cousin that will sponsor us.

YOUNG HARRY

The quotas! That could take years!

IDA

Then you will have plenty of time to work on those marks in school.

(pause)

What do you want to be when you are grown up in America?

YOUNG HARRY

I don't know. A businessman, like Poppa, or an engineer.

IDA

You want to be like your father? Selling tin cans to the Chinese to make rain spouts?

YOUNG HARRY

Sure! Look at all these bags of money Pa's made. We're Shanghai millionaires!⁴⁶

IDA

(laughing)

Yes, but with inflation, it's not worth the money it's printed on. Kindling for the stove!

YOUNG HARRY

What will you do in America?

IDA

Well, I'll sew, of course, on my Singer sewing machine.

⁴⁶ The playwrights wished to underscore the popularity of the game Shanghai Millionaire among refugee children here. A Shanghai Millionaire board game made by two refugee children from a US Army cardboard 'K' rations box is in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection, Accession Number: 2009.106.1.

(Sound of sewing machine. IDA goes to machine and sews.)

YOUNG HARRY

What are you sewing now?

IDA

A jacket, for you, out of my old ski pants. I won't need them in Shanghai. Here try it on.

(IDA holds up a shirt made to look like a G.I. Soldier, and a hat. HARRY takes the shirt and hat.)

YOUNG HARRY

Wow! American badges, and a soldier's hat! Where did you get these!

(pause)

Wait, mom! You put the buttons on the wrong side! You think I'm a girl!⁴⁷

IDA

(laughing)

You look like a man, sweetheart!

YOUNG HARRY

I look like a G.I.!

IDA

You look like a G.I., my friend!⁴⁸

HARRY

I'm going to go show the kids!

(YOUNG HARRY exits. IDA continues to sew. As

⁴⁷ The story of the buttons being on the wrong side is one of the most vivid memories has of his mother's sewing in Shanghai.

⁴⁸ This refers to an original song from the Shanghai refugee community titled 'You Look Like a G.I., My Friend'. Willy Rosen. New text by Kurt Lewin. English translation of Lewin text by Kevin Ostoyich. Arranged by Kayli Perrine. Lewin text located in United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection, Harpuder Family Papers, Accession Number: 2010.240.1.

IDA sings "You Look Like A G.I., My Friend," there is the sound of a sewing machine.)

IDA

(singing)

"After a long time indeed, we were finally freed.
Over night we'd discern that fortune had returned.
Work brought by military corps gave golden dollars, more and more.
Running after cash and prizes no one recognizes:
You look just like a G.I. my friend,
But you get nothing on that account, my friend."⁴⁹

SCENE NINE: EXT. PLAYGROUND- DAY.⁵⁰

ELLEN and IVY continue playing marbles. A *G.I. SOLDIER* enters.

G.I. SOLDIER

What are you kids playing?

ELLEN

Hey, you're the soldier that gave us candy in my English class!!!

G.I. SOLDIER

Yes, I am! And what is your name??

ELLEN

My name is Ellen, sir!

G.I. SOLDIER

Well, it is nice to meet you, young lady, what do you girls have there?

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ In addition to the Harry J. Abraham interviews, this scene draws inspiration from the interview of Bert Reiner conducted by Kevin Ostoyich, 27 October 2017, Las Vegas, Nevada.

IVY

It's a game called marbles.

G.I. SOLDIER

Hmm, I see, and have you ever played baseball?⁵¹

IVY

Nope!

G.I. SOLDIER

You've never played baseball before, not even your own version?

ELLEN

(laughing)

No sir, I've seen a few soldiers playing around here, and I enjoyed watching them play. It looks like so much fun. When one soldier would hit the ball, I could hear it echo and watch it soar through the sky and land in the trees!!

G.I. SOLDIER

Well Ellen, today is your lucky day. I'm going to show you how to play my country's favorite pastime!

IVY

But we don't have any balls or bats?!

G.I. SOLDIER

Don't you worry about that, my boys and I have plenty! You'll be pros in no time!

ELLEN

Now I bet the boys will let me play!

IVY

Look over there! Who's that?

ELLEN

It looks like Harry.

IVY

What's he wearing? That jacket makes him look like a G.I.

⁵¹ Harry believes that it was later through baseball that he became integrated into American society. See Kevin Ostoyich, 'From Kristallnacht and Back: Searching for Meaning in the History of the Shanghai Jews', American Institute for Contemporary German Studies of The Johns Hopkins University. (Published online 2 August 2017: <https://www.aicgs.org/2017/08/from-kristallnacht-and-back/>).

ELLEN

Hey, Harry! Over here! We're playing baseball!

*(IVY and ELLEN run off.
Music up for chorus of
"You Look Like a G.I.
My Friend." IDA sings
and sews.)*

IDA

"You buy everything second hand, that's true,
and you leave the fighting for others to do.
You look just like a G.I. my friend,
Yet you were never in the thick of it my friend.
Only Jews in Hongkew know the score,
a profess'nal emigrant and nothing more.
You look just like a G.I. my friend, a
G.I. my immigrant friend."⁵²

(IDA exits.)

HARRY

"My mother was tough, hard-nosed, and sometimes difficult. But that difficulty was what created the ability to accomplish what she accomplished."⁵³ Did I tell you about a trip we took back to Germany to check on the graves of my family members and see if they were being attended to?

ROSE

No, tell me.

SCENE TEN: EXT. FRICKHOFEN JEWISH CEMETERY, FRICKHOFEN—

⁵² 'You Look Life a G.I., My Friend'. Willy Rosen. New text by Kurt Lewin. English translation of Lewin text by Kevin Ostoyich. Arranged by Kayli Perrine. Lewin text located in United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection, Harpuder Family Papers, Accession Number: 2010.240.1.

⁵³ Kevin Ostoyich, 'Mothers: Remembering Three Women on the 80th Anniversary of Kristallnacht', American Institute for Contemporary German Studies of The Johns Hopkins University (Published online 9 November 2018: <https://www.aicgs.org/2018/11/mothers-remembering-three-women-on-the-80th-anniversary-of-kristallnacht/>).

DAY.⁵⁴

Sound of rustling of leaves in the wind. IDA and TOUR GUIDE enter opposite.

IDA

Excuse me sir, I'm looking for the graves of my parents Berthold and Mina. Would you be able to help me?

TOUR GUIDE

Sure. What did you say your parent's names were?

IDA

Berthold and Mina Rosenthal.

TOUR GUIDE

They should be over here along that wall; follow me this way. They're buried over there in the Jewish cemetery. The graves aren't the easiest to find, some of the tombstones are missing.⁵⁵

IDA

Ahh, here they are.

TOUR GUIDE

I'll let you have a moment with your parents. Come back to the entrance when you're ready to go.

IDA

Thank you.

(Pause. Takes a deep breath)

Mother and Father, I miss you both dearly. I wish you could see everything we've been through. There is so much

⁵⁴ The scene is loosely based on the return of Ida Abraham and Harry J. Abraham to Frickhofen in the 1970s. The Frickhofen cemetery actually contains the graves of Ida's grandparents: Siegmund Heilbrunn and Rebeka Heilbrunn. Rebeka Heilbrunn is the grandmother who gave Ida her sewing machine. There are alternate spellings of surname in records: 'Heilbronn' and 'Heilbrunn'. The current tombstone uses the 'Heilbrunn' spelling.

⁵⁵ The original tombstones were destroyed by the Nazis. New tombstones were placed in the cemetery after the war. Pieces of the old tombstones are still found by hikers and joggers and are placed in the cemetery. Information provided by local Frickhofen historian, Hubert Hecker to Kevin Ostoyich.

I wish I could tell you. I wish you would have come with us to Shanghai. I wish I would have known when you told me you weren't coming that you were signing your own death sentences. I would have thanked you more for everything you did for our family. That moment weighs heavily on my mind and will for the rest of my life.

(Pause.)

I wish you could see how tough I've become through all of this. Everything you and grandmother taught me has served me well. I can't thank you enough. I did everything for my family. All I hope for is that a hard work ethic and determined mindset will get them anywhere. I can see so much of myself in Harry.

(Sound of rustling leaves in the wind. IDA exits.)

ROSE

What else can you tell me? I have a lot of questions, but sometimes I forget to ask the most important ones.

HARRY

During the trip I had an encounter with some of my father's friends.

ROSE

How did that go?

(WOMAN and others (not the actress playing IDA enter).)

HARRY

"I'll tell you a story. I sat in the room in Altenkirchen in the room with [people] that grew up with my father. And they were sittin' on the couch . . . They were sittin' on the couch. And I was asked before I came by the, and I have the paper,

(cough),

the German newspaper, I'll send you a copy if you're interested. And I was handed the questionnaire . . . you know they wanted to ask a certain question, they said . . . 'If you feel uncomfortable talking about anything, let us know.' I said, 'No, but can I ask you questions? If you feel uncomfortable in terms of me asking questions, then you tell me.' 'No, you can ask whatever you want.' I said, 'Fine.' So they brought these people in . . . they grew up with my father, and as I started to ask questions, they started to cry, they were crying,

they said"⁵⁶

WOMAN

"We didn't know anything about this"

HARRY

"Because you know what I asked then? I said, 'How could you let my father go to Buchenwald? How? You were there. What did you do about it? . . . This one said. . . 'He was my best friend. I knew him as a Jew, but he was my best friend.' 'Then how could you let him go?' And these were people, in the town, that knew my father, that were allowing this to happen. A simple question."

(Silence.)

"They had no answer for me."⁵⁷

WOMAN

"We didn't understand."

HARRY

"But they started to cry. . . I mean, they lived together, they grew up together, they played together, went to school together, you know, it's what they said before that.

(Pause.)

That stopped after I started asking my questions . . .⁵⁸

*(WOMAN and others
exit.)*

And that's even the point today. . . ignoring reality, in some ways. . . ."

(Pause.)

"Because if that would have been recognized and reacted to at that time we wouldn't be talking maybe about Shanghai Jews, or the Holocaust or anything."

(Pause.)

"There has to be something that you can see through that people are just overlooking because it keeps continuing to come up, it just keeps coming up . . . I think even

⁵⁶ Direct quotation of Harry J. Abraham from Interview of Harry J. Abraham and Inga Berkey conducted by Kevin Ostoyich, 27 May 2017, Moreland Hills, Ohio.

⁵⁷ Direct quotation of Harry J. Abraham from Interview of Harry J. Abraham and Inga Berkey conducted by Kevin Ostoyich, 27 May 2017, Moreland Hills, Ohio.

⁵⁸ Direct quotation of Harry J. Abraham from Interview of Harry J. Abraham and Inga Berkey conducted by Kevin Ostoyich, 27 May 2017, Moreland Hills, Ohio.

now that things are happening in the world and people are ignoring it. They're just standing by and not really doing anything about it you know. I'm seeing repeated now on the world stage just a few years after all this happened."⁵⁹ But wait, I would like to ask you a question.

ROSE

Of course. Go ahead, Harry.

HARRY

(defensively)

Why do you care? I mean, why do you care about our history? "In this case of the Shanghai Jews, what it possibly could leave, um as a memory for the future? . . . This happened so long ago. It's small, 20 thousand Jews, and it's so far away, and it's really insignificant on the world stage, it didn't really create anything, you know in terms of making history, as far as development and so on, so why would someone even begin to think about it?"⁶⁰

ROSE

I understand where you're coming from, Harry, and I can understand why you're confused about my interest. But the thing is . . . your history, the history of the Shanghai Jews is not insignificant. Twenty thousand people escaping death is not insignificant. It's just like you explained with Kristallnacht. Something like that should never, ever happen again. I want to learn about your story and tell it, Harry, so that I can help you in making sure nothing like Kristallnacht ever happens again.

SCENE ELEVEN: EXT. STREET IN FRICKHOFEN. DAY.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Direct quotation of Harry J. Abraham from Interview of Harry J. Abraham and Inga Berkey conducted by Kevin Ostoyich, 27 May 2017, Moreland Hills, Ohio.

⁶⁰ Direct quotation of Harry J. Abraham from Interview of Harry J. Abraham and Inga Berkey conducted by Kevin Ostoyich, 27 May 2017, Moreland Hills, Ohio.

⁶¹ The scene was inspired by conversations between local Frickhofen historian, Hubert Hecker and Kevin Ostoyich as well as the recollections of Harry J. Abraham of the reunion he and his mother had with the woman who provided milk in the immediate aftermath of Kristallnacht.

Sound of rustling leaves.
GUIDE and IDA enter together.
HARRY joins them.

GUIDE

Which house was yours again?

*(Sound of breaking
glass.)*

IDA

It's that one. See the upstairs? We used to rent the second floor.

GUIDE

This was one of the first houses raided in Kristallnacht, wasn't it?

IDA

Yes... see the window on the right? On the night of Kristallnacht, my precious Harry, who was only an infant at the time, was sleeping under that window when a rock was thrown through it shattering glass all over my sleeping baby. Do you know what my biggest concern was in that moment out of everything that happened, even bigger than my Albrecht being sent to Buchenwald?

GUIDE

What's that?

IDA

Why couldn't I get milk for my son? Why did the Nazis refuse us food?

(WOMAN enters.)

WOMAN

Ida? Ida Abraham. Is that you?

IDA

I'm Ida, who are you?

WOMAN

I put the milk on the wall, over there in the back of the yard.

IDA

It's you? It's really you? This is my son. This is Harry. Harry, this is the woman that saved your life.

HARRY

They embraced.

(The women embrace.)

You have to remember that, even in a story like this, there were some good people.

IDA

Why was my family imprisoned?

WOMAN

I'm so sorry, Ida... Harry.

IDA

Why did everyone shut us Jews out? Why was Shanghai the only place for us to go?

WOMAN

I'm so sorry.

(WOMAN exits.)

HARRY & IDA

"Why, why, why?"

(IDA exits.)

HARRY

(Pauses)

I'll be right back. I need to get some more water.

ROSE

We can take as long as you need.

(HARRY exits.)

ROSE

I hope I didn't upset him.

(LARA knocks and enters.)

LARA

Rose? It's Lara.

ROSE

Hello again! Please, come have a seat next to me.

LARA

I could overhear you from the other room. I wanted to say that, even though Mr. Abraham can get worked up talking about his past, just know that this really means a lot to him. Knowing that people care about Kristallnacht, about Shanghai, about his mother . . . people aren't normally interested in this kind of stuff.

ROSE

Of course. I mean, these interviews are the least I could do. I think that if people hear these stories, especially from refugees themselves, they will start to see how the Holocaust and the Nazis affected these peoples' lives.

LARA

I agree.

(Pauses)

I know your interview is coming to a close, but I wanted to make sure you got a good look at Ida's sewing machine before you left. I overheard Harry mention it to you earlier.

ROSE

Yes, he did. It's remarkable he has it with him still.

LARA

I know, right? I also think it's amazing how intact this thing is. It's a bit dingy and matted from years of wear and tear, but with a good polish I'm sure this thing could look brand new!

ROSE

I think its unpolished state says something about the machine and about Harry and Ida's lives. With everything they experienced, they made it through, together.

(HARRY re-enters.)

HARRY

Beautiful, isn't she?

LARA

I figured I'd show it to Rose while you grabbed some more water. How are you feeling, Mr. Abraham?

HARRY

I'm fine . . . a little tired, but fine. Thank you, Lara.

(LARA exits.)

ROSE

Wow. This machine holds so many amazing stories.

HARRY

I keep this in my office in memory of my mother and the perseverance she showed. It inspires me every day.

ROSE

I'm happy you could share some of those stories with me.

HARRY

Oh, there are plenty more! There is one thing you should keep in mind. Shanghai was just a part of my life. Just a part. I just want to remind you and everyone else studying this history that it is important to go past Shanghai. A refugee's story doesn't end there. Those of us who survived have lived out the rest of our lives as normally as we can. But occasionally, something happens and it reminds us of those times. It's important that we look out for one another now more than ever.

ROSE

Would you be willing to tell me more about your life? I mean . . . after Shanghai?

HARRY

Yes, of course. We could meet again.

ROSE

Yes . . . When would you be free?

HARRY

How about the same time next week?

ROSE

Yes . . . that works!

HARRY

Yes . . . and then I can tell you about my mother's adventures in the United States behind the wheel.

ROSE

Behind the wheel?

HARRY

Oh...she loved cars. Oh, I can tell you about her beautiful red Cutlass!⁶² And about her working at Sears Roebuck—in charge of the slip-covers. Oh, and I need to tell you about the time I criticized her driving at an

⁶² Oldsmobile Cutlass automobile.

intersection, and she just got right out of the car leaving me there in the middle of an intersection!

ROSE & HARRY

(laughter)

ROSE

Wow! Shanghai isn't the end of the story. . .

HARRY

It is just the beginning!

(Sound of cell phone ringing.)

ROSE

Well, Harry, I would love to do a second interview. Thank you so much for your time and sharing your history.

HARRY

No, thank you. Lara, could you please see Rose out?

(LARA enters.)

LARA

Sure thing, Mr. Abraham. It was nice meeting you, Rose.

ROSE

You too, Lara. I will be coming back next week to learn more . . . Apparently, Mrs. Abraham was quite the driver.

LARA

Oh yes, you have learned the history of the Singer of Shanghai, but just you wait for the Cutlass of Cleveland!

(LARA and ROSE laugh and exit. HARRY and the Singer of Shanghai are left on stage).

THE END