

A Survivor's Luck: Reflections on Berlin and Shanghai

Edited and Expanded Version with Embedded Artifacts and Photographs from the
Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation Holocaust Collection¹

By Kevin Ostoyich, Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation
November 14, 2025



Harry Katz with his Cubs hat [FLSFF]

[Note: Items from the Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation are marked with “FLSFF”]

Harry Katz was a lucky man. As someone who had a life-long love of numbers, he knew the odds were stacked against him from the beginning: He was born a Jew in Hitler’s Berlin on March 4, 1933. And yet he survived. As he sat in a penthouse suite of Caesars Palace in the gambler’s paradise that is Las Vegas on October 28, 2017, he thought of those who were not as lucky as he...

¹ The original version of this article was published by the American Institute of Contemporary German Studies (now American-German Institute) of Johns Hopkins University on January 22, 2018: [A Survivor's Luck: Reflections on Berlin and Shanghai – AGI \(americangerman.institute\)](#). Given that Harry Katz passed away after the publication of the original article, Kevin Ostoyich has gone through the original text and has changed wording and tenses where appropriate. He has also expanded the text based on information from items in the Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation Collection as well as additional research he has conducted. At the time of the original article, Ostoyich’s research on the history of the Shanghai Jews sponsored by a research grant of the Sino-Judaic Institute and the Wheat Ridge Ministries – O.P. Kretzmann Memorial Fund Grant of Valparaiso University. In the original article, he thanked the Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation for permission to use the August 15, 2013, interview of Harry Katz that was sponsored by the Foundation. The narrative details for the original article were primarily based on an interview of Harry Katz conducted by Ostoyich on October 28, 2017, in Las Vegas, Nevada. Unless otherwise specified in the endnotes, the source for information in this article is that interview.



A House of Cards

Harry's father, Julius Katz, was born in Posen² on October 7, 1877.³ Harry's mother, Frieda Katz (née Selmanson), was born in Berdychiv in the Russian Empire on August 2, 1898.⁴ Harry did not know how his parents met, but he thought they did so in Lübeck, Germany. Frieda was a housekeeper, and Julius had several jobs including that of a salesman for a chocolate factory. The couple had four children. In addition to Harry there was Hans (ten years older than Harry), Horst (seven years older than Harry), and Ilse (five years older than Harry). As the youngest child, Harry was tasked by his siblings to ask their father for chocolate so they could put it in the cream of wheat they often had for breakfast.

The family lived in a third-floor apartment in Berlin. The first floor of the building served as an SS headquarters and a police station was located across the street. This did not worry the family too much though, because Julius was a veteran of the First World War and had friends in both the SS and the police. In fact, he played cards with them every Friday night. With such an ace in the hole, Julius was certain nothing would happen to him and his family.

On *Kristallnacht* (November 9-10, 1938) the family's house of cards came crashing down though. Harry remembered that on the morning of November 10,

[the] rest of the kids had gone off to school, and my father had gone out to get a shave and a haircut, and I was home with my mother. We heard the sound of boots coming up the stairs. There was a knock. He was a Gestapo. And he said, "Is your husband home?" And my mother said, "No." And he said, "Well, make sure you go out and find him, don't let him come home, because if he does, we'll have to pick him up. You have one hour to take whatever belongings you can with you. We will lock the place up. And once you find another place to live, then we'll let you come back in and get the rest of your belongings." So, actually, that was probably a slight accommodation because of the friendships that my father had.

Harry was five years old at the time, and to him *Kristallnacht* meant he did not have a party for his sixth birthday (March 4, 1939): Harry explained that not having a birthday party "to me was the most meaningful thing that I missed. Actually, being so young was a blessing." Given his young age, he had not yet formed deep emotional attachments to his family. Harry said, "the fact that this happened to me when I was that young really helped because, I mean, sixteen of the aunts and uncles didn't make it."

After *Kristallnacht*, Julius started looking for a way to get the family out of Germany. He applied for an exit visa and was able to secure one in December 1938. This gave the family one year to leave the country. But where to go? Finding a destination was not easy because most countries closed their

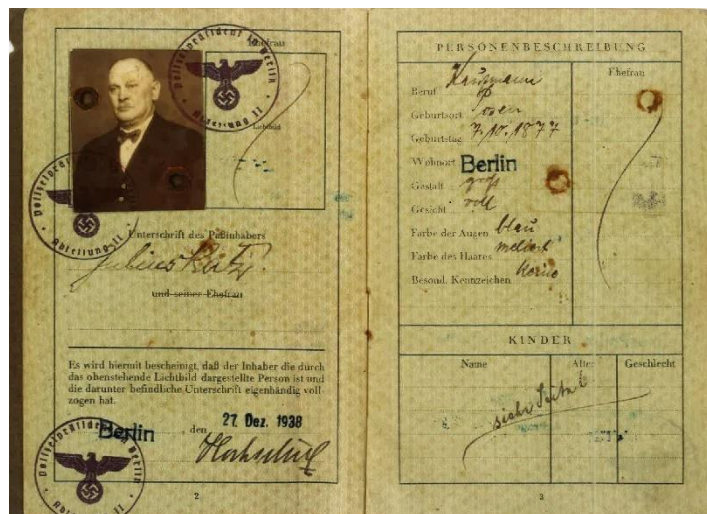
² At the time of Julius' birth, Posen was part of the German Empire. After the First World War it became part of the newly constituted Poland. It was occupied by the Germans during the Second World War, but then once again became part of Poland after the war. The Polish name for the city is Poznań.

³ For Julius' birthdate: Scan of Julius Katz's German Passport, Berlin, December 27, 1938, Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Collection.

⁴ For Frieda's maiden name and birthdate: Scan of Frieda Katz's German Passport, Berlin, December 27, 1938, Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Collection. The passport provides the spelling of Frieda's birthplace as Berditschew. Presently, Berdychiv is in Ukraine.



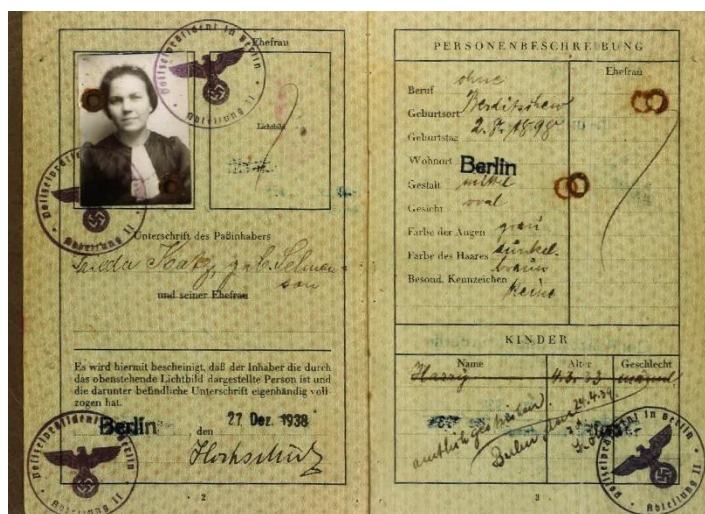
borders to the Jews. As historian David S. Wyman has chronicled in detail, the United States erected paper walls to prevent the immigration of Jews.⁵



Left: Inside of Julius Katz's "J" Passport. Issued December 27, 1938.

[Note: Crop of Scan possessed by the FLSFF. Harry donated the original "J" Passport to the USHMM.]

Right: Inside of Frieda Katz's "J" Passport. Issued December 27, 1938.
[Note: Crop of Scan possessed by the FLSFF. Harry donated the original "J" Passport to the USHMM.]



⁵ See David S. Wyman, *Paper Walls: America and the Refugee Crisis, 1938-1941* (University of Massachusetts Press: Amherst, 1968) and David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941-1945* (Pantheon Books: New York, 1984). Although the United States did have quotas for immigrants from Germany, the obstacles placed in the way of Jews were so effective, that the low, yearly quotas were not filled. A particularly illustrative document of the tactic is an internal memo within the State Department written by the assistant secretary of state, Breckinridge Long. In it he wrote, "We can delay and effectively stop for a temporary period of indefinite length the number of immigrants into the United States. We could do this by simply advising our consuls to put every obstacle in the way and to require additional evidence and to resort to various administrative advices which would postpone and postpone and postpone the granting of the visas." Later in the same memo, Long wrote, "We can temporarily prevent the number of immigrants from certain localities such as Cuba, Mexico and other places of origin of German intending immigrants by simply raising administrative obstacles." Memorandum from US State Department on delaying immigration, 26 June 1940 reprinted in Steve Hochstadt, ed. *Sources of the Holocaust* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2004), 106-107. Original Source is archived in Library of Congress, Breckinridge Long to Adolf A. Berle, Jr., and James C. Dunn, June 26, 1940, Breckinridge Long Papers, Box 211, Visa Division, General, 1940.



Eventually, Julius found out that Jews could escape to Shanghai. Harry did not know why, but the family split up: Hans was to go to Palestine; Horst was to go on a *Kindertransport* to England; and the rest of the family was to go to Shanghai. In April 1939, Julius, Frieda, Ilse, and Harry took an overnight train to Genoa, Italy. From there Frieda took one boat and Julius, Ilse, and Harry boarded another, the *Conte Biancamano*, to Shanghai. Harry did not know why these were the particular arrangements, but guessed this was simply the best Julius could manage for the family. Harry remembered the trip to Shanghai lasting four weeks, his getting seasick on the journey, and his father assigning Ilse to look after him.⁶ Meanwhile, Hans started out on his journey to Palestine by first going to Cologne. In Cologne, he was apprehended by the Gestapo and sent back to Berlin. Subsequently, the family received some correspondence from Hans “in the early 40s, and then it stopped.”⁷ Years later, the family learned that Hans had been murdered in Auschwitz.⁸ The second son, Horst, decided rather than taking the *Kindertransport* to England, where the family had cousins, he “wanted to be with the rest of the family. And at the tender age of thirteen he somehow managed to get his documentations changed and followed the same route by train to Genoa, Italy, and followed us to Shanghai.”

⁶ On the trip duration, seasickness, and Ilse having to look after Harry: Richard Peritz interview of Harry Katz on August 15, 2013.

⁷ Richard Peritz interview of Harry Katz on August 15, 2013.

⁸ Richard Peritz interview of Harry Katz on August 15, 2013. Hans Katz was born on February 12, 1923. He was deported from Berlin on January 12, 1943 to Auschwitz. He was killed in Auschwitz on April 11, 1943. <https://yvng.yadvashem.org/nameDetails.html?language=de&itemId=11537612&ind=1> (Accessed August 21, 2023). The source Yad Vashem uses for the information on Hans Katz is *Liste von Deportierten aus Berlin, Gedenkbuch Berlins der jüdischen Opfer des Nationalsozialismus*, Freie Universität Berlin, Zentralinstitut für sozialwissenschaftliche Forschung, Edition Hentrich, Berlin 1995 (Memorial Book of the Jewish victims of National Socialism in Berlin, Free University of Berlin). (See <https://yvng.yadvashem.org/nameDetails.html?language=de&itemId=4109810&ind=2> Accessed August 21, 2023.) Hans Katz was on Transport 26. According to the Yad Vashem website, “It departed from the city’s Putlitzstrasse Station in the Moabit district on January 12, 1943 and arrived at Auschwitz the following day.” The Yad Vashem website provides the following information about what happened to those on Transport 26 after it arrived in Auschwitz: “Historian Danuta Czech notes in the Auschwitz Chronicles that a transport organized by the RSHA arrived in Auschwitz on January 13 [...]. It consisted of 1,000 Jewish men, women and children originating from various cities in Germany. Upon arrival outside the Auschwitz camp complex, the deportees were subject to a selection process carried out by the SS. 127 men were given Nos. 86567-866962 [Note: The 2 at the end of 866962 is most likely a typo. It should probably be 86696 or perhaps 86694, given that there were 127 men] and sent to the camp. The remaining 898 deportees [...] were sent directly to the gas chambers at Birkenau (Auschwitz II) and murdered. The other deportees were sent to forced labour under harsh conditions which they rarely survived.” <https://deportation.yadvashem.org/index.html?language=en&itemId=5092734> (Accessed August 22, 2023). Note: The deportation date and date of murder for Harry Katz is corroborated by information provided by the Memorial Book: Victims of the Persecution of Jews under the National Socialist Tyranny in Germany 1933 – 1945 at the website for Das Bundesarchiv: <https://www.bundesarchiv.de/gedenkbuch/en1087475> (Accessed August 22, 2023).





"J" Passport of Harry's brother, Horst Katz, issued December 27, 1938

[Note: These are crops of scans possessed by the FLSFF. Harry donated the original "J" Passport to the USHMM.]

Note: The passport has markings to the effect that he was on the Brenner Railway (Brenner Bahn and Ferrovia del Brennero) on May 30, 1939, and that he was in an exit port of call "Uscita" and "Scalo Marritimo" on May 31, 1939.

A Will to Survive

Shortly after arriving in Shanghai, both Horst and Ilse contracted polio. Horst's case was particularly acute, and he had to stay in hospital for two years in Shanghai. As a result of the disease, Horst had a severe curvature of the spine. Harry explained, "To give you an idea of how advanced the medical technology was, they literally hung him out the window in a harness to try to straighten him out." Ilse's case was milder. She had to wear a metal corset to strengthen her body. Always the lucky one, Harry did not contract the disease.

By the time the family left Germany at the relatively late date of April 1939, the Nazis had imposed severe restrictions on what Jews could take with them out of the country. As a result, the family was quite destitute. Harry remembered arriving in Shanghai: "It seemed like there were people all over, and I know there was a truck waiting to pick us up to take us to the first place we lived, which was in Alcock Camp."⁹ Harry noted that many Jews who had fled to Shanghai earlier had been able to take more of their valuables with them and thus were able to live in the more fashionable neighborhoods of Shanghai (such as the French Concession). Harry's family did not have much of anything and had to live in the poorest section of the city, Hongkew, the whole time. The living arrangements in the Alcock Camp were far from ideal: "We were in a large room with thirty other families, and we used bedsheets and

⁹ Richard Peritz interview of Harry Katz on August 15, 2013.



tablecloth to kind of divide the spaces and get whatever privacy we could.”¹⁰ After Alcock Camp they moved into a one-room apartment in Wayside Camp, where they stayed the longest during their years in Shanghai:

We had two bunk beds, so my mother and my father were on the bottom and my sister and I were on top, and then there was a little alcove, like a balcony, that my brother, who—after he got out of the hospital from polio—[...] had[.] But that one room served as a bedroom, living room, dining room, whatever.¹¹

Julius was sixty-one years old when the family arrived in Shanghai and found it difficult to adjust and find work. The only job that Harry remembered his father having in Shanghai was as a supplier of local news to a newspaper; however, he did not do so as a full-fledged reporter. Briefly, Julius and Frieda tried to run a coffee stand with a partner but could not continue because the demands of looking after two polio-stricken children were too great. Frieda was able to secure some income intermittently by working as a housekeeper and nanny in various homes. But for the most part, the family lived “hand to mouth.” They were able to acquire basic staples through food stamps. They also went to the relief kitchen, where they received such fare as red beans, rice, and corn-on-the-cob. For Harry, corn-on-the-cob and sweet potatoes were always his favorites and remained so throughout his life.¹²

The camps not only provided food but social sustenance as well. Wayside Camp had a canteen, half of which was “a coffee shop or café, and the other half was used as a synagogue and also for performances. So, that’s how we interacted [...] with one another.”¹³ Theater revues were held in the canteen. Usually, the adults would have a revue on Saturday evening, and the young people would have theirs the next morning. On one occasion Harry served as the emcee for the young people’s revue:

I went to attend the revue Saturday night and listened to some of the jokes. And when people laughed, I tried to remember that joke. I didn’t know why they were laughing. But then, the next morning, I would tell those jokes to the young revue, and the adults in the audience would laugh, and the young kids didn’t know what I was talking about, but from that time on [...] and today, I still like to tell jokes because I enjoy to hear people laugh.¹⁴

The children who lived in Hongkew attended the Shanghai Jewish Youth Association school. The land and building for this school had been donated by the wealthy Sephardic Jew Sir Horace Kadoorie. The curriculum was rigorous, and in order to graduate from the high school one had to pass the Cambridge University entrance exam. Harry excelled in mathematics. He and Ilse shared a room, and at night they would give each other chain problems of multiplication, division, addition, and subtraction of whole numbers:

¹⁰ Richard Peritz interview of Harry Katz on August 15, 2013.

¹¹ Richard Peritz interview of Harry Katz on August 15, 2013.

¹² Richard Peritz interview of Harry Katz on August 15, 2013.

¹³ Richard Peritz interview of Harry Katz on August 15, 2013.

¹⁴ Richard Peritz interview of Harry Katz on August 15, 2013.



One would give the problem and the other one would answer, and then they would give the problem, and the other one would answer. And you kept doing this until you didn't get an answer any more, and then you knew that person was asleep, and then you went to sleep. [...] It meant that early in our childhood we really became very familiar with numbers, and I've been a numbers person ever since. And I can still add numbers faster than most people can do it on a calculator.

He jokingly added, "If they had never invented the calculator, I might be famous now!" When Harry was eleven or twelve, he started to train to become a rabbi at the Mir Yeshiva. While doing this he did not attend regular school, and his family had to keep a kosher house. This lasted for about a year and a half.¹⁵ Harry did not enjoy the Mir Yeshiva experience and later reflected that the experience actually distanced him from the faith to a considerable extent.

On a more positive note, Harry remembered he and other children riding scooters, which were forerunners to skateboards. These could be rented for an hour or so. Children also participated in many sports, including soccer and track and field. Harry loved all sports, and as a left-footer, he was always in demand on the soccer field as a leftfielder. Harry joined the Boy Scouts and later, after the end of the war, he briefly participated in the Betar. His friends and playmates were predominantly other Jewish refugee children who went to the same school or lived in the same camp. They generally did not interact with Chinese children. They also did not have much interaction with the Japanese. For him the biggest engagement with the Japanese was that the occupying forces mandated that Japanese become part of their curriculum. He said, "teachers had to teach it, and students reluctantly had to take the course." He and the other Jewish refugee children tended to have more interaction with the children of the White Russians who lived in the area. He did not remember any stateless Russian Jews having attended his school.

Although the attack on Pearl Harbor of December 1941 and the Proclamation of the Designated Area in 1943 had considerable consequences for westerners living in Shanghai, they did not have as much of an effect on Harry's family, given his family already was poor and living in the part of Hongkew where the Japanese set up the Designated Area. The Proclamation meant that other Jewish refugees—many of whom had been in much better material circumstances—now had to move into the area. Distinctions still remained, though, for many of those who moved in after the Proclamation were able to afford apartments within the Designated Area. Harry remembered these new neighbors providing help to the poorer children such as himself. When the "richer" children started to attend the Shanghai Jewish Youth Association, Harry developed a system whereby the "richer" kids brought extra sandwiches for the poorer children. According to Harry, the response to his idea was "remarkable." Harry and Ilse tended to stretch whatever lunch money they had by purchasing hot sweet potatoes from Chinese street vendors. The sweet potatoes served two purposes: They kept their hands warm during the walk to school, and then filled their bellies when eaten upon arrival.

Harry and Ilse liked to go to see American films at the cinema. They were always trying to scrounge up enough money to go, but only managed to do so once every two or three months. They mostly saw

¹⁵ Richard Peritz interview of Harry Katz on August 15, 2013.



musicals and romantic comedies. The movies of Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. and Errol Flynn were Harry's favorites. Ilse also like to leaf through the pages of *Look Magazine* and *Life Magazine* and fill scrapbooks with pictures of the latest movie stars.

Children such as Harry and Ilse did not really look too far ahead because their future was so uncertain. Harry remembered that, as he was growing up, he wanted to become either a psychiatrist, chemist, or a lawyer. The latter probably was grounded in his love of Perry Mason books. His main outlets for books were the C-rations and K-rations (military rations) from the United States. In addition to food, coffee, and cigarettes, these packages often included books. Whereas his mother, being a smoker, took the cigarettes, Harry often got the books.

Children tended to adjust well to Shanghai life. The adults were less successful. Julius particularly struggled in Shanghai. In addition to his difficulties finding work, he eventually was diagnosed with prostate cancer. Harry never developed a very close relationship with his father, and, unfortunately, did not have many positive memories of him. Nevertheless, one thing Julius accomplished left an indelible mark on Harry:

I was due to become Bar Mitzvahed in March of 1946. [...] At the time, my father was near death, and he said he wanted to live long enough to see his son become Bar Mitzvahed. And so he was at the service that Saturday morning and that evening he went into a coma, and the next day he died. And it impressed me that the only thing I could attribute to this was just the human will that he lived long enough to accomplish what he wanted to see, and that was it. And quite frankly it was one of the few positive memories that I have of my father, because he was fifty-five when I was born, so we didn't have the normal father-son-playing-ball relationship [...]. The only other positive thing that I remember is he would take me to the *Bierstube* [pub] in Germany, and I'm sure what I had was Coke while everybody else was having beer, but the Coke looked just liked the beer that the adults were drinking so it made me feel like an adult. And, at that time already, I was good with numbers, and he would show me off a little bit. So, that and the Bar Mitzvah thing were two of the few positive memories I have of my father. He was a rather stern individual.



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✓Fleischhauer, Emil	18. 4.82	8. 8.45	encephalitis acuta
✓Friedlaender, Kurt	14.12.77	15. 8.45	avitaminosis
✓Fackenheim, Elise	20. 8.94	4. 9.45	carcinoma of ovary
✓Frankl, Marie ne. Vogel	6. 3.96	17. 9.45	mental disease
✓Fried, Anna	31. 5.21	14. 9.45	carcinoma intestina, ileus
✓Flusser, Jaroslav	8. 7.01	26.10.45	suicide
✓Fuchs, Emma Natalie	11. 3.75	30.10.45	sprue
✓Finkenstein, Erich	11.12.01	22.12.45	encephalitis acuta
✓Freund, Albert	24. 4.69	10.12.45	myodegen. cordis
✓Dr. Flater, Dagobert	15. 6.86	6. 1.46	arteriosclerosis
✓Gottfried, Salomon	18.10.71	1. 9.45	neoplasma intestini
✓Goetz, Arnold	5. 9.74	16.10.45	malignant struma
✓Gross, Gertrud	3. 3.10	2.11.45	carcinoma pancreatis
✓Gottlieb, Zacharias	15. 4.77	22.11.45	carcinoma vesicae bacheri
✓Guhner, Emy	24. 3.75	21.12.45	encephalitis acuta
✓Glueckmann, Elise	25. 1.96	4. 1.46	
✓Grosslicht, Esther Emma	15.12.69	23. 3.46	apoplexia cerebri 125
✓Gruen, Desiderius	2. 2.94	9. 2.46	arteriosclerosis
✓Gruener, Heinrich (Hera)	14.11.73	10. 3.46	osteosarcom., insuff. cordis
✓Harpuder, Hans	26.11.01	24. 2.45	carcinoma ventriculi
✓Henzl, Anton	23. 9.86	17. 9.45	organic brain lesion
✓Hornik, Max	17. 5.89	21.10.45	organic brain lesion
✓Hawer, Gertrud	28. 6.78	19.11.45	avitaminosis
✓Dr. Hess, Otto	11.11.74	28. 3.46	apoplexia cerebri
✓Hesse, Fritz	27.10.82	15. 3.46	apoplexia cerebri
✓Israelski, Adolf	14. 3.90	5.12.45	coronary thrombosis
✓Jacobsberg, Regina nee Leib	14.10.90	4. 9.45	ileus
✓Joseph, Bernhard	10. 1.76	2. 3.46	carcinoma ventriculi
✓Kalitski, Pauline nee Goldschmied	19. 8.82	14. 9.45	typhoid fever
✓Kardos, Elisabeth	2. 3.97	22. 9.45	
✓Klausner, Leopold	12. 1.01	23. 9.45	
✓Krohn, Max	21. 6.84	5. 9.45	neoplasma intestini
✓Kantorowsky, Martha	14. 7.76	18.11.45	intestinal cancer
✓Kayser, Manfred	4. 5.78	17.12.45	angina pectoris
✓Dr. Kunitzky, Heinz	25. 5.89	30.12.45	tuberculosis pulmonum
✓Krauer, Klara	28. 6.90	15.12.45	cancer of the ovary
✓Kutarski, Max	4.10.78	3. 2.46	neo pulmon. insuff. cordis
✓Katz, Julius	7.10.77	10. 3.46	prostate enlargement

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-3-

Julius Katz's date of death listed as March 10, 1946 on the list of Jewish refugees who died in Shanghai, compiled by the H.I.A.S. in Shanghai.

Arolsen Archives, <https://collections.arolsen-archives.org/en/document/78827415>
(Accessed November 13, 2025).

On August 15, 1945, word spread quickly that the war was over. There was dancing in the streets, and everybody was happy. This triggered an immediate exodus from Shanghai. Most people wanted to go to the United States. Other popular destinations included Australia, Canada, and Israel. Soon American sailors arrived in Shanghai, and one day Harry and a friend went out to an American ship on a Chinese sampan boat:

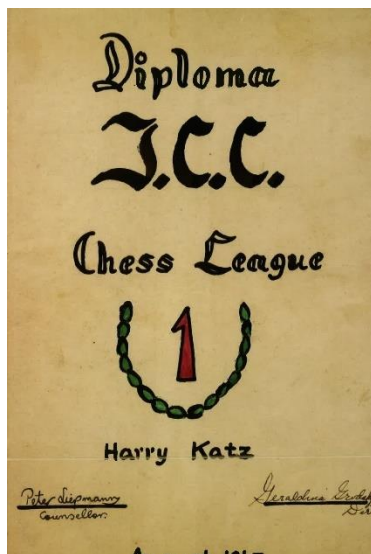
The sailors welcomed us on board, and, God, they fed us, what I remember mostly was ice cream. I [...] ate [so] much ice cream [that] I almost got sick to my stomach. They entertained us, treated us really nice, actually kept us overnight. [We] slept in one of the bunks. Of course, our parents had no idea where we were. [*He laughs.*] So, the next day [...] on one of the United States boats, they took us back to shore. And then we went home, and I think our parents had a tough time deciding whether they should give us a spanking or just welcome us back because we were okay. So, that was our interaction.

At the time, the United States was thought of as “the land of milk and honey.”



Given that Julius had been born in Posen, the family fell under the Polish quota for U.S. immigration. This quota was extremely small. When Julius died in 1946, the family then were categorized under Frieda's place of birth, Berdychiv. The American immigration system was even more restrictive with respect to the Soviet Union than Poland, so the family's prospects of going the United States did not look good. In either 1946 or 1947, the family was finally able to move from a camp into a small apartment, where they resided until they eventually left Shanghai.¹⁶ The address of the apartment was 481 Wayside Road.¹⁷ At this time the family had some income because Frieda continued to work in houses, Ilse worked as a hairdresser, and Horst worked in a pharmacy.

As the Katz family waited to leave Shanghai, Harry remained active in a variety of extracurricular activities, including chess and sports.

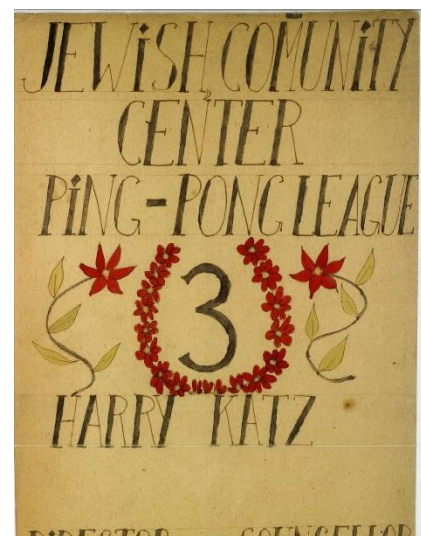


Left: Harry's First Place Award for the J.C.C. Chess League. Dated August 1947. [Crop of FLSFF scan. Harry donated original to USHMM.]

Right: Harry's 11th Place certificate in Shot-put from the Jewish Recreation Club issued in Shanghai on September 19, 1948. [Crop of FLSFF scan. Harry donated original to USHMM.]



Bottom Right: Harry's 3rd Place certificate in the Ping Pong League [FLSFF scan. Harry donated original to USHMM.]



¹⁶ Richard Peritz interview of Harry Katz on August 15, 2013.

¹⁷ The address is listed on Harry Katz's and Frieda Katz's inoculation certificates as well as Harry's Affidavit issued by the U.S. Consulate in Shanghai on April 13, 1949, Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation Collection.



By 1948, most refugees had left Shanghai, and there were no longer enough children or teachers for school. Thus, Harry took a full-time job at a fur salon (a business that alters, repairs, cleans, and maintains fur garments.)¹⁸

Harry's Certificate of Identity issued by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration on May 3, 1947. [FLSFF]

Champions

When Horst turned twenty-one years old in 1947, he automatically became a stateless German and, thus, no longer tied to the quota associated with Frieda's place of birth. Given the United States' immigration policy was favorable to Germans, Horst was able to leave for America immediately and settled in Chicago. In the United States, Horst changed his name to Horace.¹⁹ Meanwhile, Frieda, Ilse, and Harry were stuck. They were not able to leave Shanghai until President Harry S. Truman issued an executive order authorizing boats to pick up refugees who wanted to come to the United States regardless of quota before the communists took over China. Harry thinks that at this late date in 1949 there were only a few hundred refugees left in Shanghai.²⁰

¹⁸ On the full-time work after there was no more school: Robert Peritz interview of Harry Katz on August 15, 2013.

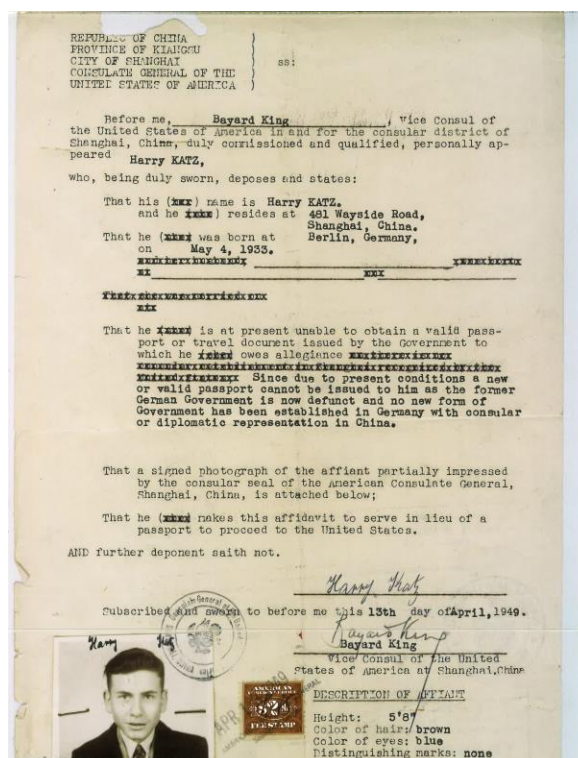
¹⁹ In post-interview correspondence, Harry noted that Horst changed his name to Horace after arriving in the United States.

²⁰ On there being only a few hundred refugees: Robert Peritz interview of Harry Katz on August 15, 2013.





Inoculation certificates of Frieda Katz and Harry Katz. Various dates in April 1949. [FLSFF]

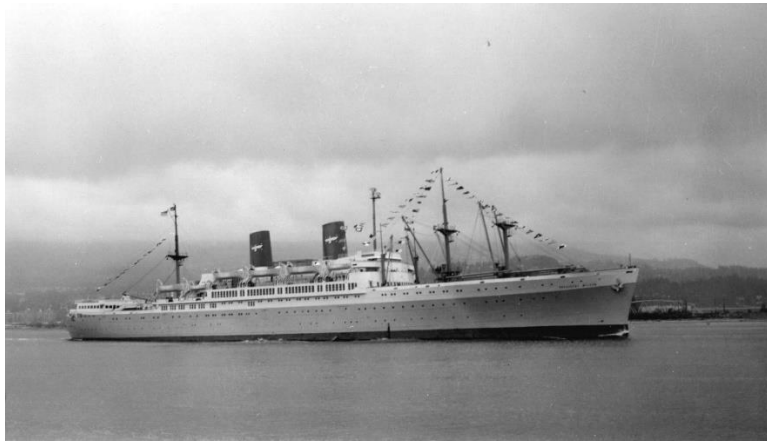


Harry's Affidavit issued by the U.S. Consulate in Shanghai on April 13, 1949. [FLSFF]



Frieda, Ilse, and Harry did not have any money but were able to get out on an emergency basis on the *S.S. President Wilson*, which was one of the last ships to leave.²¹ Frieda and Ilse slept in a gymnasium, and Harry slept in a hallway. Nevertheless, they were allowed to eat first class:

After living on fish heads and rice and C-rations and K-rations for as many years as we did, to start eating fresh fruits and vegetables cooked in butter, my goodness! [The] two weeks on that boat [were] just wonderful. My mother gained twenty pounds in those two weeks. Fortunately, I was young enough, sixteen, and active enough that despite enjoying all this good food, I was able to work it off. But that two weeks' trip from Shanghai to come to the United States...that was wonderful!



U.S.S. *President Wilson* (Source:

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/3a/Passenger_ship_S.S. President Wilson.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/3a/Passenger_ship_S.S._President_Wilson.jpg)

(Accessed August 22, 2023)

During the trip, there was a competition consisting of five or six different sports (badminton, deck tennis, shuffleboard, etc.). When the points were tallied, Harry was declared the winner and awarded a trophy. He explained though that when he got to the United States, he lost the trophy. Eventually, however, “somehow it showed up again, and once it did, I put it on one of the shelves to display it. I mean really, it’s a simple little thing, but it brings back wonderful memories.”

²¹ On their leaving on an “emergency basis”: Robert Peritz interview of Harry Katz on August 15, 2013.





Harry Katz with the trophy he won on the U.S.S. *President Wilson* [FLSFF]

Harry had saved up five U.S. dollars for the trip. They first stopped in Yokohama, Japan, where he bought a Swiss army knife for two dollars. They then docked in Honolulu. Harry remembers thinking that Hawaii was so beautiful that he decided if he was ever rich enough to retire, this is where he wanted to be. They landed in San Francisco on May 14, 1949, and stayed there for a couple of days.²² It was in the spring, and cherries were just starting to be in season.²³ Harry loved cherries and bought a pound of cherries for thirteen cents. He then walked up and down San Francisco's Market Street eating his cherries. He went to his first movie in the United States: *The Champion* starring Kirk Douglas. Harry and his family were champions in their own right:

We got out of Germany very late and just made it. And so, then we got to Shanghai, and ten years later we got out of Shanghai just barely, just made it. And to now come to a place like the United States where you felt safe and secure. That meant a lot. All of a sudden this fear about having to leave again, was no longer there. So, that felt good.

The family moved to Chicago and stayed in the Jackson Hotel. Their room had a small television, and Harry watched his first baseball game. The Chicago Cubs were playing. It was love at first sight, and Harry became a charter member of the Chicago Cub Die Hard Fan Club right away. Although he could not afford to go to many games, he loved listening to the Cubs on the radio. He said proudly during his October 28, 2017 interview, "I will die a Cub fan!"

²² On the landing date in San Francisco: Harry Katz's Declaration of Intention document, dated November 7, 1951 in the Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation Collection.

²³ Harry's Declaration of Intention certificate lists May 14, 1949, as the date of his lawful entry for permanent residence in the United States on the *SS President Wilson*. United States of America Declaration of Intention of Harry Katz, Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation Collection.





Harry's Die-Hard Cut Fan Club membership card.
The card states that Harry was a Charter Member since 1949. [FLSFF]

Becoming a Cubs fan was easy; not so easy was the adjustment to the American school system. The first challenge was to figure out how Harry's credits from Shanghai would transfer to his new school. Eventually, it was decided that he be placed in the junior class because he was sixteen years old. The next challenge was to master English. This meant taking special courses in the summer. He was given the assignment of reciting "A Message to Garcia." Not having a clue who "Garcia" was, he gave it a try. The teacher immediately stopped him saying, "Mr. Katz, we are here to learn how to pronounce the English language correctly, not to have a cute accent." At the time, he burned with anger and embarrassment. Thinking back to this incident, Harry stated that this "abbreviated" "A Message to Garcia" was one of the best things to have happened to him, because from that point on, he resolved to speak English fluently and without accent.

His accent did have its advantages though in non-scholastic pursuits: The girls liked it. Harry enjoyed the popularity of being the exotic guy from Shanghai at Hyde Park High. Eventually, when the novelty effect wore off, Harry compensated by drawing on the craft he had developed back in the Sunday morning revues: He told jokes. Accents may open doors, but laughter wins hearts.

Harry graduated from high school in 1951 and proceeded to take a job with an advertising company.²⁴ After a few months, Harry and a close friend decided to enlist in the army and signed up to become paratroopers. Harry took this leap in hopes of staying with his friend despite never having been on a plane before, let alone jumping out of one! Despite their well-laid plans, Harry and his friend were separated. The next thing Harry knew, he was travelling back to Asia, this time to fight in Korea.

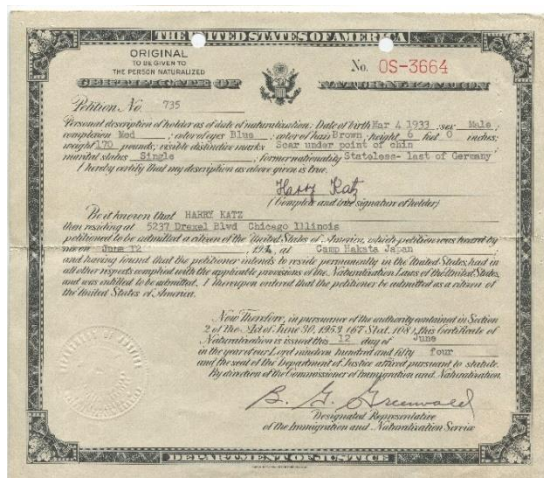
Before going to Korea, on November 7, 1951, Harry had officially declared his intention of becoming an American citizen.

²⁴ On graduation date: Robert Peritz interview of Harry Katz on August 15, 2013.

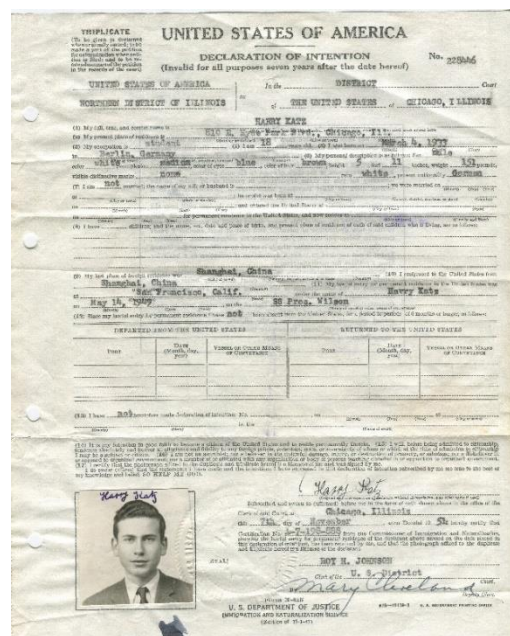


He noted,

In order to become a citizen of the United States, you had one of two requirements: you either needed five years of permanent residency or you needed two years of active duty. Well, I came here in '49 so in '54 I would have had my five years of permanent residency. I joined the Army in '52 so in '54, I had my two years of active duty. So, I happened to be in Japan at the time, so I actually became a citizen of the United States in Camp Hakata, Japan,²⁵ [...] which was somewhat unusual. I am proud of my service.



Above Right: Harry's Declaration of Intention of becoming an American citizen. Dated November 7, 1951. [FLSFF]



Left: Harry's Certificate of Naturalization issued on June 12, 1954, at Camp Hakata Japan. [FLSFF]

Harry explained that he “went into the Army as [an] eighteen-year-old punk kid and came out a twenty-one-year-old man.”



Right: Harry (right) playing table tennis in military uniform. [FLSFF]

²⁵ The Certificate of Naturalization was issued on June 12, 1954. Certification of Naturalization for Harry Katz, Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation Collection.



After returning from Korea, he attended the University of Illinois Chicago for a year under the GI Bill, but ultimately this proved too costly. His chemistry professor gave him a letter of introduction to Sherwin Williams, where he took a position as a paint chemist in 1956.²⁶ He worked to develop paint for aluminum sheet used in aluminum siding. While working at Sherwin Williams, he met his wife, Audrey. In 1959 he accepted an offer from another company, and he and Audrey moved from Chicago to South Bend, Indiana, where they stayed until 1970.

While in South Bend, Harry and a friend, Ralph Hagemeyer, started Big Brothers of Saint Joseph County in 1968.²⁷ Harry's favorite memory from his time with Big Brothers was playing in a softball league with his thirteen-year-old "little brother" named Anthony. In one game Harry had a particularly woeful pitching performance, walking something like nine batters in a row. Afterward, he was feeling quite down in the dumps when Anthony came up to him and tried to cheer him, saying, "You know, they never hit ya!" Harry remembered how effective this comment was in cheering him up, for it made him laugh. This episode with Anthony encapsulates well Harry's experience with Big Brothers and his volunteer work in general: "I've always found whenever I volunteered that I always got so much more out of it than [...] what I gave."



From South Bend, Harry and Audrey moved to Kansas City, Missouri, where Harry worked for a friend running a plastics business. The arrangement eventually started to strain the friendship, and Harry thought it best to move on. First, he took a job with an aluminum siding business, but, after this experience too started to sour, he and a partner bought a distribution company in Maryland. He helped run the business for seventeen years, each of which being profitable. Due to this success, in 1999, Harry and Audrey were able to retire to Pebble Beach, California, of which he quipped, "When I die, it's a shame if I don't go to heaven, because I feel like I'm so well prepared for it just by living there."

Left: Harry Katz as president of the Big Brothers of St. Josephs County. Article in *South Bend Tribune*, July 15, 1970. [FLSFF]

Facing the Odds

Harry was fortunate to have had his mother in his life for many years after they left Shanghai. He noted that his mother was always remarkably adaptive throughout her life. After Julius died in 1946, Frieda "had a boyfriend that none of the kids liked." This relationship was brief and never serious. After the family went to the United States, she became a milliner (a person who makes or sells hats for women). She took care of Horace, whose health was still very compromised. His lungs had not formed properly

²⁶ On 1956: Robert Peritz interview of Harry Katz on August 15, 2013.

²⁷ Louis Mumford, "La Bosky Directs County's Big Brothers," *The South Bend Tribune*, July 15, 1970. Newspaper clipping located in the Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation Collection.



due to the curvature of the spine that resulted from the polio contracted in Shanghai. One day she came home from work and found Horace dead.²⁸ She always blamed herself for having left him. Harry explained that, other than Horace's tragic death, Frieda always managed to enjoy life. She particularly liked to try her luck at casinos, and Harry often took her to Las Vegas. She loved playing blackjack and tended to blame the dealers when she lost. One time when she was starting to lose a bit too much, Harry cried out, "Hey, Ma, that's my inheritance!" Once again, laughter won the day.

Frieda passed away on February 25, 1993, in San Mateo, California, after a full and active life of ninety-four years.²⁹



The gravestone for Frieda Katz in Skylawn Memorial Park, San Mateo, San Mateo County, California, USA.

Photo source: <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/136973492/frieda-katz#view-photo=110667079>

(Accessed November 13, 2025).

For decades, Harry's Shanghai past remained in the background. Aside from the girls of Hyde Park High, not many people showed interest. Then, "out of the blue," he received an invitation from the Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation to attend a dinner in commemoration of the seventieth anniversary of the Shanghai Ghetto. He decided to go. Thinking back on that event during his October 28, 2017 interview, Harry said that, although it was nice to see people from the Shanghai past, it was somewhat unsettling because everyone had changed so much over the decades. People, naturally, no longer looked as they had in Shanghai, and even those who had been his close friends had drifted away so much due to their divergent life experiences. It was at this time that Harry started to tell his friends locally about his story. He was then featured in an article in the *Carmel Pine Cone* and interviewed by a local radio station.³⁰ Harry's Shanghai experience informed the views he held about religion and immigration late in life. With respect to religion, he said:

I am Jewish. I'm proud to be Jewish and all that, but I haven't followed the faith. As I've grown older and started thinking for myself, I decided that religion as we know it isn't all that good, because probably more blood has been shed in the name of religion than any other cause known to mankind. To me it is much more important [that] the emphasis should be on [being]

²⁸ According to geni.com, Horst/Horace Katz passed away on January 16, 1974.

<https://www.geni.com/people/Horace-Katz/6000000000141678851> (Accessed August 21, 2023).

²⁹ <https://www.geni.com/people/Frieda-Katz/6000000000141960390> (Accessed August 23, 2023).

³⁰ See <http://www.pineconearchive.com/130809-6.html> (Accessed August 23, 2023).



good, whether you are a good Jew, a good Christian, or a good Muslim, that's what's important, not necessarily the religion itself. But also, I think what's important is to have tolerance, that everybody can respect whatever they want to believe and what's right for somebody else, that's up to them. So, that is kind of how I have been leading my life from a religious standpoint: just being as good a person as I can be.

He felt that loving one another is more important than sharing a traditional faith of any kind. He did not believe this love should be withheld from immigrants:

As far as I'm concerned, it's good versus evil or good versus bad. I think any time you show intolerance toward any group, it's bad. We, obviously, had to spend three years longer in Shanghai than necessary because there was a quota system and immigration system that this country had a right, or any country has a right, to make part of their law. And so, to some extent, I feel like "when in Rome do as the Romans do," but that doesn't mean that you don't have some people in high office who use that for bad reasons. And *that* shouldn't be. If you want to say, "we will allow one hundred immigrants to come in, and we would like the make-up of those hundred to be ten from here and five from there" [...] as a sovereign nation, that's your right, as long as it isn't designed to be intolerant. So, when I read the paper or watch the news, unfortunately, I have a very difficult time seeing where any of what we're talking about relative to immigrants is good in nature, it does smack of intolerance, so I don't like it.

Harry never returned to Shanghai but said in 2017 that he would love to do so. He did go back to Berlin at the invitation of the city. He enjoyed the trip and thought the city did a nice job showing his group all the memorials. The most moving experience for Harry in Berlin had to do with his eldest brother, Hans:

After the war, when we inquired and we got the letter—I think from the Red Cross—that said that Hans, my oldest brother, was picked up on January 12, [1943],³¹ and taken to a concentration camp, where he died. One of the memorials we went to was a railway station and it had a huge metal sheet, and they had etched into that the different dates where Jews were picked up and put on trains to take to the concentration camp, and I actually saw the date that my brother was picked up. [...] It impressed me because that this was the last place that I knew him to be alive. [*Harry choked up as he continued.*] And even though I didn't have the emotional attachment, like I said before, every time I think of that, I feel emotion. I can't explain it.

³¹ Harry mistakenly said "1942" during the October 28, 2017 interview with Kevin Ostoyich. Ostoyich has inserted 1943 here based on the information from Yad Vashem and the USHMM.



Moreover, Harry still had the power of humor on his side. A few years prior to the 2017 interview, he told a joke that can still provide strength to anyone who faces the odds of time:

Somewhere, I don't know who told me this, that there are only two things in life that can happen to you, you are either healthy or you are sick, if you're healthy, you've nothing to worry about, if you are sick, only two things can happen, you either get better or you get worse. If you get better, you have nothing to worry about. If you get worse, only two things can happen, you're going to live or you're going to die. If you live, you've nothing to worry about. If you die, only two things can happen, you can go to Heaven or you can go to Hell. If you go to Heaven, you have nothing to worry about. If you go to Hell, you'll be so busy shaking hands with all your friends, you won't have time to worry. So, why worry?³³

A Note from Harry Katz

After reading a rough draft of "A Survivor's Luck: Reflections on Berlin and Shanghai," Harry wrote Kevin Ostoyich the following e-mail on January 17, 2018:

Dear Kevin,

What a wonderful article. I lived it and still found it exciting reading. In response to your two specific questions, my sister's name is Ilse and Ralph Hagemeyer needs an extra "e". The only other thing you might want to make note of is that my brother changed his name to "Horace" after coming to the States.

I really find it amazing that such a lengthy article had no details that required changing. Thank you for applying your skills to make my life look like a movie script.

*Sincerely,
Harry Katz*

Kevin Ostoyich has since made the edits.

Harry Katz passed away on August 20, 2018.



Harry Katz, March 4, 1933 – August 20, 2018

³³ Robert Peritz interview of Harry Katz on August 15, 2013.



Math Problems at Night

Harry was fortunate to have a close relationship with his sister, Ilse, throughout his life. As children they had often quizzed each other with math problems until they fell asleep. Later in life, they lived not too far away from each other in California.

In the United States, Ilse married Walter Steirman. Walter passed away on July 28, 2008. According to Walter's obituary, "After fleeing Nazi Germany, Walter served in the U.S. Army during WWII, and was a Purple Heart recipient."³⁴ Ilse passed away on December 29, 2020. Her obituary is available at <https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/name/ilse-steirman-obituary?pid=197398611> (Accessed November 13, 2025) and <https://jweekly.com/2021/01/04/deaths-for-the-week-of-jan-3-9-2021/> (Accessed November 13, 2025).

Fortunately, Ilse was interviewed about her life on February 12, 2001. To listen to her side of the equation, click on the following link at the USHMM website:
<https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn509609> (Accessed November 13, 2025).

Items Pertaining to Harry Katz in the Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation Collection:

Documents:

- Affidavit Issued by the U.S. Consulate in Shanghai to Harry Katz on April 13, 1949.
- Certificate of Identity issued by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration to Harry Katz on May 3, 1947.
- Harry Katz's Declaration of Intention of becoming an American citizen. Dated November 7, 1951.
- Harry Katz's Certificate of Naturalization issued on June 12, 1954, at Camp Hakata Japan.
- Newspaper clipping. *South Bend Tribune*, July 15, 1970. [Article discussed Harry Katz as president of the Big Brothers of St. Josephs County.]
- Scan of poem/lyrics titled "Atheist Song"

Material Objects:

- Die-Hard Cut Fan Club membership card issued to Harry Katz. [The card states that Harry was a Charter Member since 1949.]
- Chicago Cubs hat
- Trophy from the U.S.S. President Wilson. [Harry won first place in a sports competition held on the ship during his journey from Shanghai to the United States.]

Photographs:

- Harry Katz playing table tennis in military uniform.
- Various photographs of Harry Katz (primarily taken by Danny Spungen)

³⁴ <https://www.eastbaytimes.com/obituaries/walter-m-steirman/> (Accessed November 13, 2025).

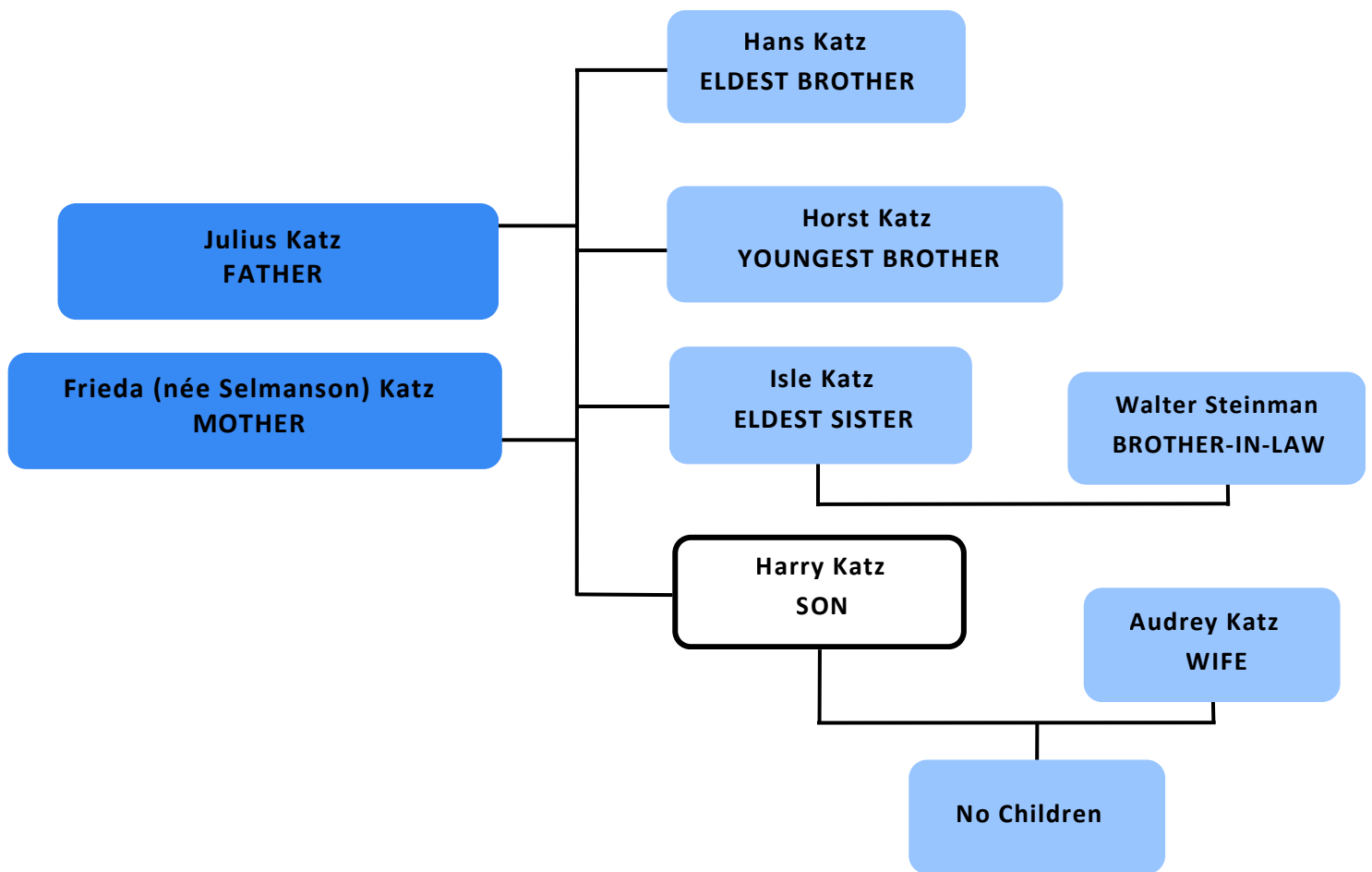


Scans of Documents/Photographs Harry Katz Donated to the USHMM:

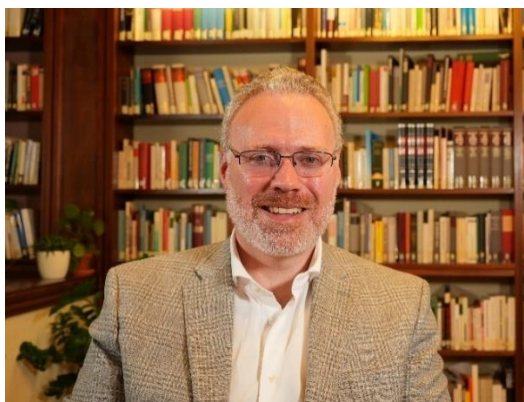
- Frieda Katz's "J" Passport. Issued December 27, 1938.
- Harry Katz's 11th Place certificate in Shot-put from the Jewish Recreation Club issued in Shanghai on September 19, 1948.
- Harry Katz's First Place Award for the J.C.C. Chess League. Dated August 1947.
- Harry Katz's 3rd Place certificate in the Ping Pong League.
- Horst Katz's "J" Passport. Issued December 27, 1938
- Inoculation certificates of Frieda Katz and Harry Katz. Various dates in April 1949.
- Julius Katz's "J" Passport. Issued December 27, 1938.
- Photograph of Harry Katz in military uniform holding a trophy.
- Photograph of School Group in Shanghai.



Harry Katz' Family Tree: A Survivor's Luck



About the Author



Kevin Ostoyich is a professor of history at Valparaiso University. Kevin and his students at Valparaiso began partnering with the Florence and Laurence Spungen Foundation in 2013. The Foundation provided artifacts (mostly documents & postal history) to the students from Holocaust survivors who were in the Shanghai ghetto, “Shanghailanders,” for archival studies and the curation of temporary exhibitions at the university. In 2021, he collaborated with the Foundation to author the preface and two additional chapters in the Foundation’s book, *Forging Secrets: Faces and Facts Inside the Nazi Operation Bernhard Scheme*, published in 2022. In July 2023, he joined the Foundation staff as a researcher, writer, and interviewer, focusing on artifacts from the Spungen Foundation collection. He has interviewed and written stories about Shanghailanders on the Foundation’s behalf.

At Valparaiso, he served as chair of the Department of History from 2015 to 2019, was the recipient of the Dixon W. and Herta E. Benz Fund for Faculty Support (an endowed position) from 2020 – 2022, and was bestowed the Excellence in Teaching Award for 2017-2018. He holds his B.A. from the University of Pennsylvania and his A.M. and Ph.D. from Harvard University. He was recently a fellow at the Käte Hamburger Kolleg (global dis:connect) at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München and is currently a fellow at the Centrum für angewandte Politikforschung / Center for Applied Policy Research (CAP) at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München.

He is a board member of the Sino-Judaic Institute and the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum and a non-resident fellow of the American-German Institute of Johns Hopkins University. Kevin has served as a fellow and guest professor at multiple institutions and universities; has written many articles and book chapters; has co-edited *The History of the Shanghai Jews: New Pathways of Research* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022) and authored *The German Society of Pennsylvania: A Guide to Its Book and Manuscript Collections* (German Historical Institute, 2006); interviews Holocaust survivors; gives lectures about the Holocaust worldwide; and creates historical theatrical plays about Shanghai Jewish refugees with students.

The Spungen Foundation can devote many pages honoring Kevin’s work, so let’s just say he keeps very, very busy teaching, writing, conducting interviews, and working on documentaries.



About the Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation

The Spungen Foundation was established in 2006 by Florence Spungen and reflects the individual and collective philanthropy of the founders, their children, and their grandchildren. The Foundation focuses its grantmaking typically in Santa Barbara, CA and Lake County, IL. One of the Foundation's strategic areas concentrates on the Holocaust and genocide education. The Spungen Family Foundation has one of the largest collections of Holocaust artifacts in private hands, mainly consisting of postal history, such as letters, post cards, stamps, along with money, children's artwork, and more. The collection has been used for Holocaust education all around the world.

The mission of the Foundation is to improve the quality of life of individuals and families facing health challenges, and to address issues that particularly affect the Jewish community.

Visit us at: www.spungenfoundation.org

