



Weekly News Item#: 8466

## **BIG WEEKEND with Shanghai Refugees**

Sunday, August 18, 2013, 16:41

 English

## BIG WEEKEND with Shanghai Refugees

After giving a brief overview of the history of Jewish World War II refugees sheltered in Shanghai, keynote speaker Professor Steve Hochstadt, author of *Exodus to Shanghai, stories of escape from the third Reich*, made a very perceptive point. Looking out at an audience of about 150 attending the Spungen Family Foundation's Shanghai Memory Dinner Event (Chicago, Aug 15) he noted not only the importance of keeping this history alive, but also that the history is not coming from the original refugees but from their now adult children. Sixteen of them sat at our individual tables, relating what they could recall from their own memories and the tales told by their parents. It is an important, fascinating, and sadly incomplete view.

Hochstadt and these survivors shared memories, and the next day at the follow-up luncheon held in the Holocaust Museum in Skokie, IL, we discovered another side of the coin from another offspring: Manli Ho, daughter of diplomat and humanitarian Dr. Ho Feng Shan who saved thousands of Austrian Jews by granting them Shanghai entry visas in his role as China's Counsel General in Vienna. A reporter, Manli had not begun investigating her father's life until after his death and for the past 15 years has been uncovering and documenting his work. Dr. Ho received no recognition during his lifetime, but this was rectified in 2000 when Israel awarded him the title *Righteousness Among Nations*, posthumously at *Yad Vashem*.

At both Foundation events, a long table held a display of Holocaust memorabilia from Danny Spungen's considerable collection, as well as copies of Hockstadt's book and several of the new limited edition series of **Shanghai Memory Silver and Gold Medals** to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the Hongkew Ghetto. The large, five-oz gold coin (selling for \$32,000) was, of course, the most outstanding but it is possible to buy one oz gold for \$3,636 or one oz silver for \$188.

What are the coins like? I must note that some explanation is needed to do them justice. Richard Peritz, of the Shalom Show ([www.shalomshow.com](http://www.shalomshow.com)) commented that this is true of all memorial coins, and Spungen does provide a detailed pictorial guide. I believe another hurdle was in the limitations provided by political restraints, which kept the design from being too overtly Jewish. Peritz was in town from Florida specifically to film the events for future TV programs. A small scroll accompanies each coin and both are featured in a fine wood box with a glass top. On one side of the coin, a woman shelters a small girl with her toy panda under an umbrella. They are standing in a lane and behind them is a doorway with a small mezuzah. The address on a door to the left of the Chinese lady is 1943, symbolic of the year the Hongkew District opened to the refugees. The girl represents refugees, the Chinese lady is caring and benevolent and the panda is a symbol of China. Further explanation for this picture lies in the scroll which I did not realize could be opened until told so by Danny's daughter Leanna. The insert tells the following story in English and Chinese, written by Professor Xu Xin of Nanjing University:

I am Sarah, a Jewish Girl from Europe.

In the 1930's, my future was shadowed by the rise of the Nazis. My family and I were forced to abandon our happy lives and beautiful homes to escape the Shoah. A ship called SS Biancamano — a true Noah's Ark — took us on to new lives at the Bund of Shanghai, an international city filled with multinational architectural designs and diverse people.

When my family arrived, we were warmly greeted by our Chinese neighbors. However, the establishment of Designated Area for Stateless Refugees, known today as the Hongkew Ghetto, in 1943, filled our lives with hardship and dismay.

One stormy afternoon, when I got lost, wandering through the rain-swept, narrow streets, with my dog and panda toy, a kind Chinese lady befriended me by holding an umbrella over my head to protect me from the rain and wind. The warmth of her gesture in this dark moment was like the bright rays of light emitting from a holiday menorah. I, therefore, became a witness to history and live today to tell the tale 70 years later.

The other side of the coin shows a large ship pulling into a harbor with the Shanghai skyline behind it; silhouettes of people strolling on the Bund fill the foreground. Seven birds fly in a formation overhead and symbolize the 70th anniversary of the Hongkew Ghetto. The English words “Shanghai Memory” are inscribed.

One fact mystified me — a couple strolling on the bund appears to be dressed in Victorian costume. I was able to ask the father-and-son team – Qiming Zhao and Rocky Zhao — who designed and engraved the coin for the Shanghai Mint — what their intention had been. The answer was that for a Chinese audience, they wanted explicitly to show that these strollers were foreign.

The box is as symbolic as its contents and is accompanied by the following insert written by Pan Guang and Zhou Guojuan

A wooden box with glass inserts is used to symbolize the “Night of Broken Glass” (Kristelnacht). This refers to the November 9, 1938 large-scale anti-Semitic incident which occurred in both Germany and Austria. This event is believed to mark the escalation of persecution of the Jewish people by the Nazi regime. On November 9, 1938 using the pretext that a German diplomat stationed in France was murdered by a Jewish youth, Hitler mobilized his followers throughout all of Germany and Austria to carry out violent-retaliations against the Jewish people.

The slanted certificate scroll inside the box takes the form of a holy scroll found on the doorposts of Jewish people who developed the custom in accordance with the book of Deuteronomy which states God’s commandments “Shall be inscribed upon the doorposts of our houses and on your gates.” The word mezuzah derives from the ancient Hebrew word “door frame.” According to Jewish tradition, a piece of long, rectangular parchment is inscribed with two paragraphs of Hebrew verses from Deuteronomy. After the parchment is blessed, the scroll is placed inside a metal, wood or glass casing and placed slantways on the right side doorframe of the house. Jews believe that the spiritual power of the scroll can both dispel evil and provide protection.

Highlight of the weekend celebration was meeting the Shanghai refugees. Originally, there were to be 13 guests at the banquet, but when an extensive article about the event appeared in the **Chicago Tribune**, three more contacted Spungen and were included, and a frail, 87-year-old man who had been one of the American sailors liberating the Shanghai at the end of the War, drove 200 miles to join us and request information about a refugee he had been seeking for over 40 years. I gave him a copy of the *Bulletin of Igud Yotsei Sin*, the publication of the Former Residents of China that is published in Israel in Hebrew, Russian and English ([www.jewsofchina.org](http://www.jewsofchina.org)) and suggested that he contact them. The Spungen Foundation focuses its grant making on health related issues, especially cancer research, care and treatment, and Jewish causes. Holocaust education using philatelic and numismatic material is one small part of their mission statement. They note that the foundation has no interest in the production and distribution of medals associated with the Shanghai Memory Project. For additional information and future events, see <http://www.spungenfoundation.org/>

Kudos to Danny Spungen on many levels: for conceiving of and funding the coins from the Shanghai mint, for preparing these commemorative celebrations and for his work with disseminating Holocaust information worldwide.