## **The Carmel Pine Cone**

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## China was unlikely haven for Holocaust refugees

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Now 80, Katz was born in Berlin in 1933, the same year Adolf Hitler and the Nazis came to power. Although he remembers few details of his early childhood, he recalls the day when he was 5 years old and soldiers from the Gestapo told his family they had one hour to pack a few suitcases and leave their home. "I heard their footsteps coming up the staircase," Katz said.

He told The Pine Cone his family lived above a Gestapo station, and his father, Julius, a veteran of the German army in World War I, believed his family would be safe — despite the rising tide of anti-semitism prevalent in Germany on the eve of World War II.

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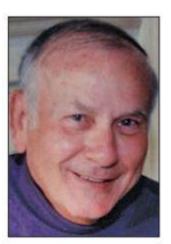


PHOTO/COURTESY HARRY KATZ



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After being kicked out of their apartment, over the next five months the Katz family desperately sought a way to leave Germany. Like many Jews in Germany in 1939, the family had few options, because very few countries would accept them. While Katz had trouble comprehending the magnitude of the events swirling around him, he was aware nobody bothered celebrating his sixth birthday.

Katz's oldest brother, 16-year-old Hans, set out for Palestine in April 1939. His 13-year-old brother, Horst, embarked for England to stay with relatives. Harry, meanwhile, traveled by boat with his father; his mother, Frieda and his sister, Ilse, to an unlikely haven, China.

"Shanghai was the only place we could go that didn't require an entrance visa," explained Katz, who said he was seasick much of the way.

After a lengthy voyage, Katz and his three family members eventually made it to Shanghai, where from 1933 to 1941, more than 18,000 Jews from Europe and the Middle East settled.

Neither of Katz's brothers arrived at their destinations.

Horst, having a change of heart, decided to join his family in China and somehow successfully made the trip there on his own, although he contracted polio along the way.

Sadly, Hans was apprehended by Nazi authorities before making it out of Germany and died in the Auschwitz concentration camp.

## Living in the ghetto

In Shanghai, the Katz family lived in the poorest part of the city and faced difficult, crowded conditions where food was scarce. At one point, the family shared a room with 30 other families. Living spaces were separated only by bed sheets and table clothes. "That was our idea of privacy," Katz said.

Despite the challenges they faced, Katz and his sister somehow continued their education — and filled their bellies.

"We would walk about a mile-and-a-half each morning to get to school," he explained. "And we would get a little bit of money for lunch. Chinese vendors would put coal in the bottom of 55-gallon drums and cook sweet potatoes. We would buy two sweet potatoes and put them in our pockets to keep our hands warm while we walked. When we got to school we'd eat the sweet potatoes."

While the Jews lived in squalor, so did the Chinese who surrounded them. Yet they were surprisingly tolerant of the refugees.

"The Chinese were very accepting of us," Katz remembered. "If it wasn't for them, I wouldn't be here."

When the Katz family arrived in Shanghai, the city was occupied by the Japanese army. Four years later, the refugees faced even greater difficulties when they were forced to move to a one-square-mile area in the city.

While it had no walls or barbed wire, the area was patrolled by Japanese soldiers, and a strict curfew was enforced.

"As long as you obeyed their rules, you were OK," Katz said. "But if you didn't, they treated you harshly."

The Japanese could hardly be described as genial hosts, but they protected the Jews from a far worse fate. Despite the pressure they faced from Nazi Germany, they refused to hand over the refugees to their military ally, which sought to bring the "Final Solution" to China.

## Land of milk and honey

While living conditions improved after the war ended, the family waited four more years before they were permitted to immigrate to the United States. Along the way, Harry had his first taste of American food. One day, he and friend visited a United States Naval ship that was docked nearby.

"The sailors invited us on board," he recalled. "I got a bad stomach ache from all the ice cream I ate."

Katz' father died in 1946. The following year, Horst gained entry into the United States.

Two years later — and just days before Shanghai fell to the communists in 1949 — Harry, his mother and his sister finally boarded a ship bound for San Francisco.

"We got on the last boat out of Shanghai before the communists took over," he explained.

In contrast to the harrowing voyage that brought the family to Shanghai a decade earlier, the trip across the Pacific Ocean on the USS President Wilson was like a fairy tale. The family feasted like it never had before.

"My mother gained 20 pounds on the boat," Katz recalled. "We thought we were going to the land of milk and honey."

Compared to Berlin before the war and Shanghai in the 1940s, Katz's new home truly was the place of abundance he imagined it to be. Over the next half century, he graduated from high school, served as a paratrooper in the Korean War, married and achieved considerable success in the business world before retiring in 1999 — exactly 50 years after landing in the United States.

Katz first came to Monterey County in 1952 when he made a brief stop at Fort Ord on his way to Korea.

Later, Carmel became a favored vacation destination for him and his wife, Audrey. Shortly after retiring, the couple visited Pebble Beach and never really left.

They soon bought a house near Spanish Bay, where they still live. "I tell everybody it would be a shame if I don't get to heaven, because I'm so well prepared for it," he said, comparing his retirement home to an earthly paradise.

While Katz has displayed a lifetime of determination and resiliency to get where he is now, he attributed at least some of his fortune to simple chance.

"I consider myself a very lucky survivor," he added.

By CHRIS COUNTS