

## FEATURES

# Author chronicles Jewish flight to Shanghai in WWII

By DERRICK SOBODASH  
Special to The Oakland Press.

When 20,000 Jews fled Germany for Shanghai between 1937 and 1941, young Berl Falbaum and his family were among them.

They escaped the persecution of dictator Adolf Hitler, who came to power as chancellor of the country in 1933. It wasn't long before he revoked the Jews' German citizenship and banned them from holding government office.

With the world's doors closing to immigration — including in the United States — choices for a new home were limited to the Dominican Republic or then Japanese-controlled Shanghai.

Falbaum, 66, a former Detroit newspaper reporter, chronicles his experiences in "Shanghai Remembered" (\$27.95), published in March by Momentum Books.

The book is a collection of stories and photographs of 24 Jews who lived in Japanese-occupied Shanghai during World War II.

Living there between the ages of 10 months and 10 years, Falbaum admits his early memories are a bit fuzzy, but the environment remains painfully clear.

"I remember hearing the rats at night as they took over our house, and every day eating and drinking little. For a young child, that was terribly traumatic," he says.

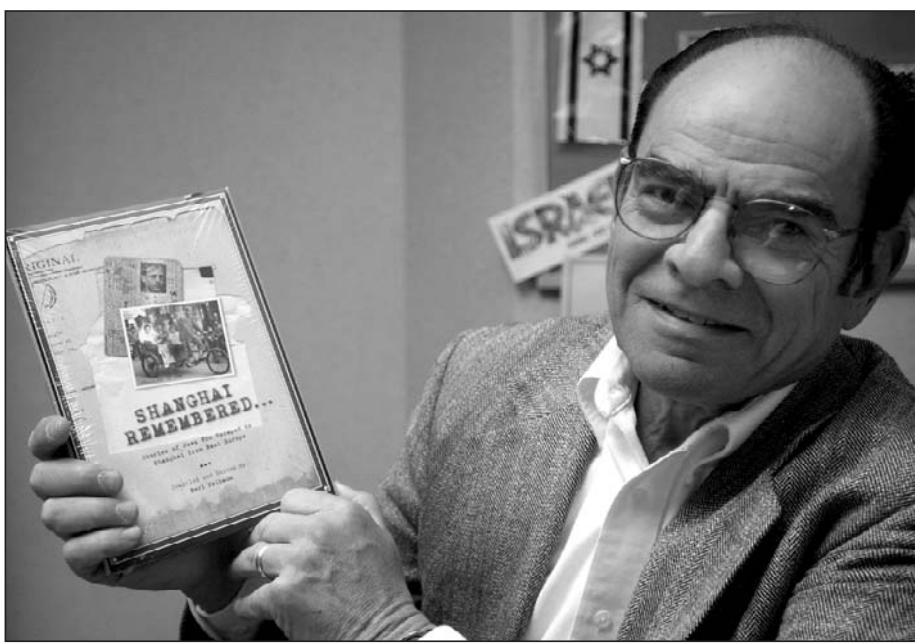
"Everyone got sick — worms, tuberculosis, dysentery and other illnesses (were common)."

With the mix of people in the ghetto, Falbaum grew up speaking German in his home, Yiddish with Russian Jews, smatterings of Shanghaiese when playing with Chinese children and English when attending Kadoorie School, a local school opened for refugees by Horace Kadoorie, a prominent Iraqi who provided aid.

But the book is not Falbaum's account. Rather, it's the accounts of men and women who were children, teens and adults in Shanghai.

**Author Berl Falbaum of West Bloomfield Township wrote a history of Jewish refugees who fled Germany for Shanghai.**

The Oakland Press/CHARLIE CORTEZ



Ernest Eick, a West Bloomfield resident and "Shanghaier" whose story is recorded in Falbaum's book, moved to Shanghai at 2 years old in 1939.

After a few years in an apartment, his family was forced out by the Japanese military and sent to the Hongkew Ghetto with other Jews.

"The kids like Berl and myself, I can't really say we had a terrible time — though the adults had it rough," the 67-year-old says.

When even his family's diet of kasha and millet became scarce, Eick's parents gave him up to one of the Russian Jews who came to Shanghai in the 1920s, who were caring for the children of newly arriving Jews.

But even after his mother and father separated because of the tension of such dire conditions, Eick found some measure of happiness in his stepfather and new step-brother.

The Shanghaierlanders received little news of what was happening in Germany.

"Some of (us) found out by radio," Falbaum explains, "but we didn't understand the extent of damage until after the war."

More than 50 years after their time in the ghetto,

Falbaum and Eick live only blocks from each other — part of the group of Jews whose entry to the United States was sponsored Michiganian.

"We actually had wanted to stay in San Francisco, but the man who sponsored us was from his area," Eick says.

Starting in the 1950s, Berlin sponsored fully paid trips for former refugees to return to see the city and how it has changed. Ten years ago, Eick and his step-brother took up that offer to visit their homeland.

"They took us on a lot of tours and were very nice and hospitable," Eick says. "My brother remembered exactly where we lived and took us back to the apartment where

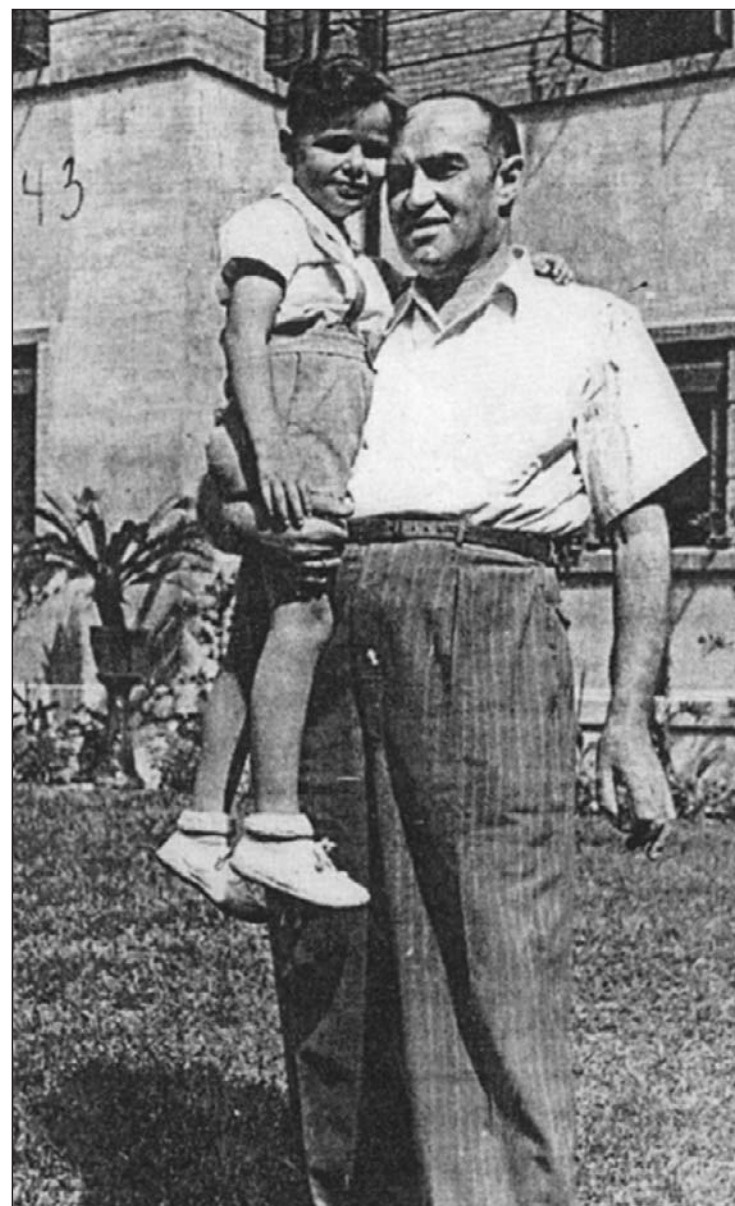
he grew up. He also knew exactly where my mother and father had lived."

Falbaum says the situation was better than the alternative.

"As bad as (Shanghai) was, it was paradise compared to those left behind," Falbaum says.

Between 1942 and 1945, as many as 6 million Jews and 7 million other people were executed by the Nazis.

The photographs and stories collected in "Shanghai Remembered" are only a fraction of Falbaum's research, which has been donated to the Leonard M. Simons Jewish Community Archives of the Jewish Federation of Metro Detroit.



Ernest Eick's parents could not feed him, and so he was given to another family to raise. Here he is at age 4 with his surrogate father, whose name he doesn't recall.

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The Pontiac Branch of NAACP  
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Pontiac City Councilman Joe Hansen-District 5  
Attorney Elias Escabedo  
Everett Seay, President Pontiac City Council  
Willie Payne, Mayor City of Pontiac  
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Pontiac City Councilman Arthur McClellan-District 1  
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Greater Pontiac Citizens Coalition - Committee of 25  
Pontiac Education Association  
AFSCME, Local 719 (Custodians, Media Aides, Food Workers)  
AFSCME Michigan Council 25

Supervisors Association of Engineers  
Local 1917 Cafeteria Managers  
United Skilled Maintenance Trades Union  
Pontiac Para-Professional Instructors Association  
Pontiac Educational Secretaries Association  
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