

HONG KONG'S WAR CRIMES TRIALS PROJECT

Introduction:

At the time of the Japanese invasion in 1941, Mrs. Luba Estes (nee Luba Skvorzov) was living with her parents on Kadoorie Avenue, Kowloon. Her parents, Russian Christian Orthodox, were stateless and had just applied for British citizenship. Her father, Alexander V. Skvorzov, was the general manager of the Hong Kong Engineering and Construction Co. Her mother did not work and she and her older sister were schoolgirls. Luba was 10 years old. Her father was an officer in the Hong Kong volunteers (HKVDC). He fought in the defence of Hong Kong and after the Japanese occupation, he became a POW and spent the rest of the war in Shamshuipo and Argyle Street camps. Luba Estes writes of her experiences during the war, and the direct encounters that she and her family had with Colonel Tokunaga Isao, Commander of the POW camps in Hong Kong. He was eventually tried by a British War Crimes Court in Hong Kong (Case No. WO 235/1012 in the Hong Kong's War Crimes Trials Collection), he was sentenced to be executed for war crimes; later his sentence was commuted to life.

STATEMENT OF MRS. LUBA A. ESTES (NEE LUBA ALEXANDRA SKVORZOV)

December 8, 1941, the day of the Japanese attack, my father was away on exercises with the HKVDC in Fanling. It was Monday morning and I was getting ready to go to school. The telephone rang; an urgent call for a neighbour, whose telephone was out of order, to tell him that he was to report immediately to the Police department, where he worked. I ran across the quiet street to tell him and on my return, I was surprised to hear the distant sound of bombing. I ran into the house and up to my parent's bedroom to alert my mother. The sound became louder and very frightening. From the second floor verandah we could then see around three dozen, Japanese aircraft flying towards us from the direction of the old Kai Tak airport. Their bombing gradually came closer and over us. Our house was spared, however a bomb fell through the center of our next-door neighbor's house where Mr & Mrs. Searl, an English couple, were both killed.

We spent that day in an air-raid shelter that was dug into a hillside. Later, we were told that an evacuation was being organized for British and HKVDC families to leave the mainland and cross the harbour to Hong Kong island where they expected us to be safer. We packed a Hong Kong basket that we each could carry and my mother quickly sewed all her jewelry in a cloth, rolled it and wrapped it around her body. We were to assemble at the Peninsula Hotel.



That evening we joined a large group of women and children, taking only what we could carry. That night, we all slept in the lobby of the Peninsula. I slept on three chairs pushed together. During the night there was some commotion. A well-dressed oriental man in a suit was arrested for sending signals to Japanese aircraft from one of the top floors of the hotel. He was dragged protesting right past my make-shift bed. The next morning, despite the danger of more bombing, we were all taken across the harbour in small motor launches. We were then driven up to May Road where my mother, my sister and I and other families of officers, were assigned a large private house with an indoor swimming pool in the lower floor. This house was to be our temporary shelter. When we entered the house, all the corners of every room had already been occupied so we deposited the three HK baskets that we had carried, in the middle of the living room. My mother understood the urgent need to accommodate so many families, but she was unhappy about this particular house because to her, it did not look very solid. She later remarked to her friends that, not only would the house crumble if attacked, but in the process one would drown in the indoor swimming pool!

Food distribution centers were efficiently set up in a row of garages along May Road for the evacuated families. Helmets were also distributed. On my mother's first trip for food, she ran into some lady friends who had been assigned space in Abemor Court, a five-story solid looking apartment building next door. These friends urged us to move into their assigned apartment on the 2nd floor. That large apartment, with a lovely view of the Hong Kong harbour, was the home of Charles Boxer, who as a member of the HKVDC was away participating in the battle. Our arrival increased the number occupying this apartment to 21 people. And because it was dangerous to be near a window, most of the time all 21 of us remained crammed in the large entrance hall. The dignified looking Chinese cook, whom we only saw once, was appalled to see so many people in "his" apartment. He would have been pleased to know that we hardly used the whole apartment. Because of the bombing and shelling, none of us dared to stay in any rooms with windows, and trips to the bathrooms and the kitchen were very brief. During all the days we were there, we left the front door open into the stairwell and chairs were set up on the landing. I remember exactly where I was sitting near the open front door the day a man ran up the stairs panting while telling us, as he continued to the next floor, how dreadful the fighting was, "Volunteers are being killed and their bodies are rolling down the hills ... I fainted falling off the chair.

The battle for Hong Kong lasted 18 days, and we spent most of the 18 days in this apartment. We all slept in the entrance hall on the floor like sardines. We didn't bathe and we did not remove our clothes. We probably got to wash a week after Hong Kong surrendered to the Japanese. But we kept on wearing the same clothes for a very long time.



Early in the battle, the mainland was overrun by Japanese forces who were then able to launch continuous artillery shelling and bombing in the direction of Hong Kong island. Abemor Court was under a constant barrage of shelling. For Hong Kong in those days, Abemor Court was an imposing building at mid level and it was hit several times. To add to the shattering noise, a bomb landed right in the well of the building, a place where we as children were allowed to play between air-raids.

Around the 15th day of the battle the Hong Kong water supply was hit and we had to survive for three days with no fresh water! We had no bottled water, there was only a small decorative pond nearby; the water was covered with algae. Attempts were made to strain the green water and boil it. Around the 16th or 17th day, my father appeared from the front. He looked battle worn and was in a great hurry. He said that he had heard how bad the shelling was in the mid-levels and was determined to take us downtown where he thought it would be safer. He drove up in a large borrowed convertible with the top down and offered to take anyone else who could get into or onto the vehicle. I should point out that Hong Kong in 1941 was not the jungle of skyscrapers of today. The winding roads down from the peak had almost uninterrupted beautiful views of the harbour and the road was, therefore, open and visible to aircraft. As soon as there was a lull in fighting; no dog fights over the harbour, no shelling or bombing, we piled in the convertible and started down the hill on the winding road. I cannot remember how many people my father took, but I sat on top of the back-seat with a lady hanging on to my legs to make sure I didn't fall out. Soon after we started down the road, a small Japanese fighter plane appeared over us. He spotting our overcrowded convertible and proceeded to strafe us. He flew very low and flew by two or three times hitting the road all around us missing the car each time. My father pulled over, we abandoned the car, ran down the hillside and spread out hiding in the bushes until the fighter plane gave up. My father dropped us off at the Gloucester Hotel. He couldn't take us into the hotel, he had to get back at once. It was Christmas Day or Christmas Eve, but we didn't realize it. We also didn't realize how important this moment was. This would be the last time we were able to embrace my father for almost four years.

In the hotel, several women and children like ourselves, occupied two large adjoining rooms. It was at the Gloucester Hotel, that we heard the shocking news that the Hong Kong Government surrendered to the Japanese. And it was there that my mother had the to tell a friend that her husband, Samuel Gerzo, HKVDC, had just been killed. He was killed on the last day of the battle. Two days later my father was taken prisoner of war, for 3 years and 8 months.

With the surrender, there was great tension amongst us watching from the hotel window the arrival on the island of the conquering Japanese forces and not knowing what would happen to us. My mother decided that it would not be safe to remain there. She took the two of us and we



walked the back streets in search of shelter. She had an idea where she might find friends. We walked towards Garden Terrace, a row of two-storied buildings, on Garden Road. From the ground floor of the first building, someone called out to us and we were welcomed by friends who had already gathered there. I think we stayed there for one week (I don't remember). In the first days of the occupation, we didn't go out and never switched on any lights. We were told that Japanese soldiers were all over the streets and were mostly aggressive and often drunk. It seemed the Japanese soldiers were permitted to vent their hatred on the defeated population. They were permitted to get drunk, to rape and to help themselves to whatever they wanted.

At this time, with so many homes and businesses abandoned, there was rampant looting all over the colony. While Japanese soldiers openly demanded wrist watches from people, they punished Chinese looters mercilessly. The cruelty and public atrocities were horrifying. The Japanese military would punish individuals on a whim. In front of the apartment we were occupying, one day, I heard dreadful agonizing screams. I was nearest to the window on the ground floor. I looked through the curtains, about 25 feet away, I saw three Chinese men piled one on top of each other, being systematically bayoneted by three Japanese soldiers. They stabbed their bodies in unison with a fierce shout each time ... over and over again. An adult pulled me away because I was staring, frozen in horror. The three men did not die right away. These poor men took all day dragging themselves on their stomachs, spreading out in different directions and no one in our house dared to help. By morning they were dead. In the same apartments, at the other end of the row, we were told that the families were ordered outside. Then all the men were made to line up on one side and the women and children on the other. And in front of the women and children, the Japanese soldiers proceeded to execute the men. We never found out why they were punished.

I don't remember when we ventured out to line up in a government building to obtain permission to cross the harbour to be able to return to our home in Kowloon. Crossing on the ferry we sailed past bloated bodies floating in the harbour. On Nathan Road in Kowloon, I saw a truckload of dead bodies piled to the very top. As we approached my family home, on foot, we walked by Chinese men, probably looters, strung-up, tied to pillars or chain link fences with their feet just a foot or so above ground. They had been beaten, bayoneted and were either dying or already dead. This became a common sight.

When British and American civilians were sent to the Stanley camp, my mother showed the Japanese authorities papers that we had applied for British citizenship and that we were under British protection; they turned her down and only recognized our stateless status. My mother's worry was that in the situation we were in, we were totally unprotected.

We found our home had been looted but the furniture was still there, however, there was nothing in the pantry to eat. We were told that some Japanese officers had stayed in our house but they were not there when we returned. They had removed all the books from the shelves of my father's study and made a large bonfire on our lawn. The greatest loss was about a dozen volumes of my grandfather's writing. As Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in Harbin, Manchuria, appointed by the tsarist government, he recorded court cases of the Russo-Japanese War. All we found were ashes or very badly charred books. My mother had very little cash and the banks were frozen. It seemed that the city had come to a complete halt. For us, this was the beginning of real hunger. Eventually food and clothing could be bought in the streets from vendors sitting in rows on the sidewalks. The currency my mother used was her jewelry ... two or three tins of something for a gold ring. We spotted some of our looted belongings for sale, but we could not afford them. We were constantly hungry living on half a bowl of rice for the whole day. My mother would add a tiny bit of something to give the rice some flavor and often just grass with soy sauce. The next door neighbor, who was killed in the first bombing, had planted vegetables in her small garden. I remember that we found some snow peas ready to be picked; we thanked her memory. Once my mother bought tins of Carnation Milk. She sent perhaps three to my father and kept three for us; we opened one tin and found it was filled with water ... we found where the holes had been welded on the other tins also. It was painful to think that my father, as hungry as he was, would have the same disappointment.

Col Tokunaga Isao, Commander of the POW camps in Hong Kong unbeknownst to us, ruled our lives. My father's and, in a way, ours too. Tokunaga decided the fate of the prisoners, their treatment, their meager-starvation diet and withheld their medical supplies. And he must have condoned the cruelty of the officers and guards under his command. The erratic rules for sending food parcels to the prisoners, and allowing families to gather outside the camps to be able to see the prisoners, must have been at his pleasure and whim. Initially my father was imprisoned in the Shamshuipo camp. On days when we were allowed to send him food parcels, we were able to see him in the distance standing with the other prisoners. My mother's anguish must have been how little she was able to send him and how little she could keep for her two very hungry daughters. I would accompany my mother on some of these visits to Shamshuipo. Because my sister was a pretty teenager, my mother preferred to leave her at home and away from any Japanese soldier eyeing her. Parcels to the camps would be curtailed usually as a punishment: Once they were stopped for a period of time because written notes were discovered in lids of glass jars. During the times when visits were allowed, the guards were always nasty, threatening and ready to hit you with the butt of their rifles if not obeying one thing or another. Once, to disperse us, the guards simply shot their rifles right over our heads. Another time, when they thought it was time for us to leave, they yelled and threatened us with their bayonets ordering us to leave. Because it was January, I was wearing a coat that protected me from an angry soldier

nudging me and others harshly with the point of his bayonet. On leaving, we always had to bow to the guards. So many people were hit for neglecting to do so ... or the guard would grab the person's head pulling it down to hit the ground with the forehead. To shelter me and my sister, my mother often went to the camp without us. Later she told us about the horrible cruelty she had witnessed. One day she was roughed up by a guard who grabbed her hair shaking her and hitting her. That was a mild occurrence compare to what others had gone through.

Around April 1942, officers in Shamshuipo, including my father, were moved to the Argyle Street camp which was very near to where we lived. My mother, my sister and I would go on walks along Argyle street and my father would stroll along on the inside of the three rows of electrified barbed wire fences. Neither he nor we would look at each other except an expressionless glance once in a while. At that time there were hardly any pedestrians around and we often were almost the only ones walking along Argyle street. The Japanese guards in the two turrets on that side of the camp were not fooled. To scare us they pointed their machine guns at us following us all the way. We gave them no reason to shoot or yell at us, as we tried to pretend not to notice my father walking along. We knew we could not give the slightest sign of recognition because we had heard about a young wife who had been severely beaten just because she waved. Her husband on seeing this rushed towards the fence and the guard shot him dead on the spot.

Around March or April 1942, a car drove up to our house; a disturbing occurrence for us at that time. We opened the front door and in came an imposing, obviously important, portly Japanese officer in uniform. He was very much the military man. He was accompanied by an interpreter also in uniform. The very polite and courteous interpreter introduced Col. Tokunaga. Tokunaga was also polite but he had a self assured manner and he expected to be invited in. We sat in the living room. My mother my sister and I sat on edge, wondering why he came. The interpreter also sat perched on the edge of a chair, while Tokunaga sat comfortably in the armchair. I seem to remember that we started with small talk. He asked my mother if she spoke French, she did not. Both my sister and I spoke some French. I learned French before I learned English, when I started school at the Sacred Heart Convent in Shanghai. Tokunaga spoke some French to us which I thought was not very good. He showed interest in our family history in Manchuria. He was interested that my mother's father was a colonel in the Russian cavalry and that my paternal grandfather was the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in Manchuria. My mother noticed his familiarity with Manchuria and his good pronunciation of Russian cities and names. After he left, my mother warned us not to say anything derogatory in Russian because she felt that he would understand. She also told us never to leave her alone with him in a room.



Similar visits took place about three or four times (I don't remember). On the second or third visit he told us that he would be taking over our house, and allowed us time to make arrangements to move. He told us, however, that he needed a room immediately to use for storage. The very next day soldiers made deliveries of non-perishable food to be stored in a locked bedroom upstairs. This was probably food meant for the POW. In 1942 my mother was an attractive 32 year-old. While Tokunaga made no passes at her, on a subsequent visit he brought a gift, a small tin of meat or fish and also suggested that we could remain in the house and live with him. Fortunately it was not an order and my mother was able to decline the offer. My mother decided she had to find a way to leave Hong Kong, and managed to sign us up on a Japanese ship sailing to Shanghai.

The next day on our walk on Argyle street, my mother asked me to skip and act as a younger child ... and play-act sea waves to convey to my father that we were leaving. On seeing this, my father bent his head down indicating that he understood. A day or so later the door bell rang. It was Tokunaga's interpreter. He was very tense and told us that he did not have the authority to come to see us. He came to tell my mother that he would take a letter from her to my father. He told us that he was distressed at the behaviour of the Japanese military in Hong Kong. He apologized and told us that the Japanese people in Japan were not cruel and inhuman. He said that he had a degree in German literature and was also knowledgeable in English literature. While he was talking, we thought we heard the sound of a car driving up to our house (that was unusual). He immediately stiffened and stood at attention expecting the worse. I went to the front door and no one was there. The relief on the interpreters face while reserved was obvious. I wish I had remembered his name. My mother wrote a short letter in Russian to my father only saying that we were sailing to Shanghai. Knowing the horrible punishment that would be inflicted should the letter be intercepted, she wrote very little.

On Tokunaga's last visit, my mother asked him to allow us to meet with my father to say goodbye. At first Tokunaga said that it would be very difficult to make such an exception, but after a while he agreed. We were to go to his office within the Argyle Street camp grounds. What an emotional visit it was to be for us. I recall that Tokunaga's office was near the main gate into the camp in a two story building. His office, on the second floor, was large with his desk standing in the middle. Facing his desk on the left side was a large window over looking a yard below. We arrived, nervous and full of expectation yet dreading the painful emotion of saying goodbye under these conditions. However, when we arrived, Tokunaga told my mother that he was very sorry but he could not, after all, make an exception for us. And the meeting would not take place. He said, that instead, my father would be brought to the yard below where we could see him from the office window. We would be allowed to wave. He also told my mother that she could write a letter in Russian and he would have it delivered to my father later. After she wrote a page



and handed it to Tokunaga, she later told us that the way he scanned the letter, made her think again he knew some Russian. Next, we moved to the open window and there was my father standing below. We put on our best smiles while tears were streaming down our faces. My father stood there, not moving, just looking up, smiling and mouthing something over and over again. A few days later, we sailed to Shanghai.

Our three years in Shanghai were very trying with some hunger, some illness, avoiding epidemics and having to move from place to place. We had friends and my mother had two aunts that helped her throughout our stay in Shanghai. The hardships were not as severe as was our time in Hong Kong. The hardest part was that there was no communication with my father at all. Some months after we arrived in Shanghai, my mother heard that there were some Hong Kong prisoners of war in transit to Japan in the former YMCA building. On hearing this my mother marked our name in large letters across the side of a Hong Kong basket (just as school children did in HK), and she and I slowly walked around that building. As we strolled, we saw a group of men looking over the bar-curtain across the three large windows on the ground floor. We could only see their faces from the nose up. We made no gestures, just walked slowly with the name on Hong Kong basket facing them. There seemed to be some reaction amongst the men until one man indicated to us that no, Skvorzov is not with us. At this point, we noticed a European man in a dark raincoat a little way behind us. On sensing that the man was following us, my mother said to me that we are going to step into the next open doorway. And we did. It was an entrance into an old office building with big heavy doors wide open. There was no one there so we slipped behind the door unnoticed. Through the crack, we could see that the man stopped, lit a cigarette and kept glancing at this entrance. We hid for about half an hour before he finally left. Years later, a former POW who had been shipped to Japan during the war, wondered if perhaps these prisoners were the survivors of the Lisbon Maru. If so, did these men, behind the windows, wonder if my mother knew of the sinking of the Lisbon Maru and was she asking if her husband survived. This is conjecture and we will never know.

During the last months of the war, my mother my sister and I were living in three different places because it was difficult for my mother to find accommodation for the three of us to be together. I will never forget the day in August I was walking to visit her. I was on a wide street with very few pedestrians, a Chinese was man was walking quickly on my side of the street. As he past me he said excitedly, "War finish, war finish!" (I was now fourteen.) I stared at him as though he were mad. He then repeated, "It's true, it's true!" And walked away. I stood there alone dazed trying to absorb what he had just said, and then I started to laugh and to sob all at the same time.

After the war when we returned back home to Hong Kong, we had Japanese soldiers/prisoners working to remove a pool that Tokunaga had added to our lawn while he lived in our house. It



was a pool in the shape of an eight to commemorate the Japanese attack on HK on 8 December. We were told that he would have women swimming in the pool to entertain him. I remember I could not look at these Japanese soldiers. I had a sick feeling, of a sort of intense pity ... a sort of hitting a man when he is down feeling ... I just wanted them to go away.

During the war crimes trials in Hong Kong after the war, I don't believe that my father attended them, but I remember two friends of my father's telling him how they were restraining themselves while attending the trials. In the discussions Tokunaga was talked about, but I did not know the names of the other Japanese officers.

My father was an artist by hobby. In camp he managed to sketch the interior and exterior of the two camps. If the sketches were found, he would have been severely punished. Especially the sketch of the map of Hong Kong that he sketched from memory, may have suggested that he was planning an escape and could have been punished by a beheading. To sketch the exterior of the camp he had to do it inside his hut from memory. He had to be on a lookout for guards and be clever in changing hiding places for his sketches from the constant hut inspections. Drawing helped him to ignore the gnawing hunger and the ever-present bedbugs, even on chairs while he sketched. My father's sketches were published in 2005 in the book *Hong Kong Prisoner of War Camp Life*. They are well known to former POWs as they are the only visual record of what Shamshuipo and Argyle Street camps were like. They have been featured in several publication and most recently Nathan Greenfield has used one sketch in his new book *The Damned - The Canadians at the Battle of Hong Kong and the POW Experience, 1941-45*.

Years later, as an adult living in Beirut, Lebanon, I was invited by an airline on an inaugural flight over the pole to Tokyo. I accepted the invitation because it gave me a round trip flight and I could stop in Hong Kong. I planned to spend 10 days with my sister and many friends in Hong Kong. But, I had to spend a night in Tokyo. So I booked the earliest flight out of Tokyo, leaving the very next morning. Leaving the hotel, a very nice young, friendly Japanese bellhop took my bags to the waiting taxi. Once I was in the taxi, he stood by my window, bowed as Japanese do. And with a friendly smile looked at me and said, "Sayonara." And ... I wept.

SAILING FROM HONG KONG TO SHANGHAI IN 1942

In 2006, The Hon. Sir Michael Kadoorie contacted me and told me that Tony Banham was writing a book that would include the 1942-43 evacuations of some of the civilian population from Japanese occupied Hong Kong. Michael thought that my sister and I would be able to remember our experience sailing from Hong Kong to Shanghai on the same ship with him and

his family. Tony Banham's book, *We Shall Suffer There* had been published (April 2009) by the Hong Kong University Press.

After a great deal of research, it was concluded that the Japanese freighter we sailed on was the Tainan Maru. Tony Banham helped me in my research. On the web, I found a picture post card of the ship. During those years there were one or two more Tainan Marus, but the post card I have attached to this report looks exactly like the ship we boarded.

Michael Kadoorie was just a babe at the time and could only tell Tony Banham what his parents had told him throughout his life. Therefore, Michael asked me if I could still remember enough to write down my recollections. Michael also said that his parents had told him that I had saved his life at that time and that he would be interested in the details of how it actually happened.

This is what I remember:

I remember the Tainan Maru was a small freighter. It was known that the ship had sunk and had been re-floated before our sailing date. I remember its drab appearance very clearly as I remember the whole scene with us gathered on the docks before going on board. The time was May, 1942. I was to turn 11 years old on the 20th.

We were to travel in the hold of the vessel with around 40 people, which included Nicholas Spooov and his mother. His father was also a POW in camp with my father. The ship also carried a handful of cabin passengers; I seem to remember around 10. They were, William Pote Hunt, an American business man, the Belgian consul to HK, his wife and daughter, and Lawrence and Muriel Kadoorie with their children Rita and baby Michael. Their may have been others. The cabins for these passengers were tiny and were located close to a very modest lounge that also served as the dining room. Because we were not allowed in the cabin passenger's area, I don't recall seeing any of the privileged passengers during the ten-day voyage except for the Kadoorie family. Other passengers onboard were Russian seamen, members of a crew of a Soviet cargo ship which somehow got disabled during the fighting in HK. The Soviet sailors' quarters were on the stern deck level. Walking by once, I could see into their communal quarters, however I never encountered any of them during the voyage. As a Russian speaker myself, I would have remembered. Nick Spooov, who was then 15 years old, wrote to me in an email, "The trip lasted some ten days, instead of the usual three, as we were hugging the coast, and with good reason: During that ten day interval, the first major naval encounter, The Coral Sea Battle, took place, and all sorts of rumours were floating about..." As a result, we sailed very slowly with the ship taking a zigzag course in an effort to avoid American mines, an ever present danger in those waters. Our departure from Hong Kong was a traumatic and heart wrenching event for my

mother, my sister and for me. We were leaving under dreadful conditions and we were leaving my father, a prisoner in a Japanese POW camp, without so much as an embrace. As difficult as it must have been for my mother to leave my father behind, staying in Hong Kong was not an option for her with two young daughters. And our house had been taken over by Col. Tokunaga Isao, Commander of all the POW camps in HK. My mother knew we had to flee because of severe hunger and the dangerous conditions under which we existed in Kowloon. The possibility of moving to Shanghai was the obvious choice.

Shanghai, though under Japanese occupation, in 1942 had a very large international community and a large community of white Russians. The British and American population had not yet been interned at the time and life there was relatively normal compared to war torn Hong Kong.

After the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong, the YMCA building in Kowloon was taken over by the Japanese Gendarmerie and the Peninsula Hotel next door was in Japanese hands. The location of these two buildings was not too far from the Kowloon docks. Shortly before our departure my mother, my sister and I were walking on the street between the Peninsula Hotel and the old YMCA, when my mother looked up at the hotel, and saw Muriel Kadoorie looking out of an upper window. My mother had assumed that the Kadoories were interned in the Stanley Camp but seeing Muriel at the Peninsula, made her guess that they were transferred there to be near the wharf in preparation for their departure. Because of the Japanese military presence in the streets, my mother was afraid to wave to Muriel, instead she made a subtle gesture depicting waves, indicating a sea voyage and she saw Muriel nodding and repeating the wave gesture. My mother was so relieved that they might be sailing on the same ship.

When we were preparing to leave our home, we took very little. In fact we had no luggage except for the few things that the three of us could carry. My mother carried the little jewelry that she had not bartered away for food, sewn into a cloth and wrapped around her body. When we arrived at the docks on the day of departure, we saw some people we knew there and the Kadoorie family. It was a joyful sight for us that they would be onboard. We were all fumigated for flees and lice as we approached the flimsy gangplank to go onboard. The gangplank was narrow and the steps were just planks so you could see the water below between them. The hand rail was simply a rope looped through metal supports. Climbing up, it felt wobbly and unstable. The whole gangway jerked and moved, reacting to waves and to the weight and movement of the passengers climbing up. As we were boarding, we climbed in a very tight single file, almost touching one another. I clearly remember Lawrence Kadoorie was ahead with Rita who was just a small child, next Muriel Kadoorie carrying Michael in her arms. Michael was an infant and was wrapped in a tight bundle. I followed inches behind Muriel; behind me, my sister and behind her, my mother. Half way up the gangway, a violent jolt sent all of us swaying forward. In that



moment, Muriel looked instinctively to her husband and to Rita, concerned for their safety, and simultaneously, to maintain her balance she reached for the rail to stop herself from falling, her right hand straightening to grab the rope, the rope gave way, and Michael, the bundle, began to roll out of her arms! Being right behind her, I too lunged forward from the jolt leaning onto Muriel, but instead of grabbing the rope with my right hand, I grabbed the bundle that was Michael, and hung on tightly. When the movement swayed us back, I helped the baby roll back into his mother's arms! Because of Muriel's concern for Rita and trying not to fall, she didn't realize how it was that Michael returned to her secure hold. I, on the other hand, was stunned and shaken. I knew if I weren't there, Michael would have fallen in the water. This memory haunted me for many years. Looking at the water below the gangplank, reminded me of all the bloated bodies floating in the harbour earlier in January of that year when we were crossing on the ferry to return to Kowloon after taking refuge on the Hong Kong side during the Japanese attack. And now, the thought of a baby almost falling into the churning water between the dock and the side of the freighter was terrifying.

Once on board, the Kadoories were directed to their cabin with the few diplomats, and we were directed to go down into the hold, which seemed like a cavernous vault, where we occupied a space on the crowded floor. We were allowed on deck most of the time. There were no provisions to feed the hold passengers. Those who were able had brought food with them. I do not remember the three of us carrying any provisions. An enterprising Chinese man set up a huge hibachi type of cooker on the deck where he sold cooked rice by the cup. The cooker looked more like a large barrel. The first night in the hold, was miserable. Fortunately, because it was May, we were not cold and probably did not need blankets. I remember being awakened sometime during the night by a large rat sitting on my hip; I froze, moved slowly, and the rat ran off, to disappear amongst the heaps of sleeping passengers on the floor. I said nothing and fell asleep. Thanks to Lawrence Kadoorie, we only spent one night in the hold.

The Kadoorie's kindness and concern for us was extraordinary. They were assigned two minute cabins. When Lawrence found out our sleeping conditions, he gave up his berth so the three of us could sleep in the cabins with Muriel and the children while he slept in the lounge on an uncomfortable narrow settee. My mother, my sister and I would sneak into their cabin at night and slip away in the morning to join the hold passengers unnoticed. The Kadoorie's kindness extended beyond that; they smuggled food to us daily from the dining room which we ate in the cabin every night. We spent all day on deck during this voyage. The weather was mild and the seas calm. I remember the agitation felt when we were ordered down into the hold and locked in when approaching Formosa, the only port of call. The ship did not enter the inner harbour of Formosa on the west side of the island, instead it anchored on the eastern side. We were relieved to be allowed on deck once the ship anchored there. I don't remember seeing additional

passengers come on board but there was a lot of activity between ship and shore. Food supplies must have been replenished but the only thing I saw was fruit.

While we were still anchored, I was walking around the deck alone watching all the activities, when a young drunk Japanese sailor, who must have been ashore, returned to the ship with a bunch of bananas. He approached me smiling offering to give me one. I thought that it would be wonderful if he gave me one to share with my mother and sister. But instead he grabbed my hand pulling me down to the sailor's deck below. Because he was drunk, I easily freed myself from his grip while he was navigating the steep narrow steps and I ran away. His intentions may have been innocent but he frightened me. When leaving Formosa, we again were ordered below into the hold to stay there until we were well out at sea. We continued sailing in the same manner, hugging the China coast, as we did before with land visible now and then. The actual arrival in Shanghai, for some reason has faded from my memory. I just remember the first day being in the home of old friends of my parents, a Russian couple. I clearly remember taking my first bath and the friendly Russian lady fusing over me. I remember she exclaimed that she had never seen such a dirty child! I wonder what my clothes looked like, they were never removed during the ten-day journey!

Our first temporary home was arranged for us by the Kadoories. We settled in Muriel Kadoorie's aunt's house which, I think, was on rue Pichon. I cannot remember if it was the Nissim or Gubbay home; at the time no one was in residence. The lovely home was shuttered up and closed with just a grounds keeper to let us in. We settled in one room on the upper floor which was probably the master bedroom with a verandah overlooking beautiful grounds. We stayed there for about a month. It was to be one of many temporary homes in Shanghai during the following three years and three months.

In Shanghai, the Kadoorie family who, as British subjects, were soon to be placed in an internment camp. We, on the other hand, had not received our British citizenship until after the war, were stateless and free in Shanghai.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Luba P. Estes". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

MRS. LUBA ESTES (NEE LUBA ALEXANDRA SKVORZOV)

Date: 30 NOVEMBER 2010

DECLARATION OF CONSENT

I, Mrs. Luba Estes (nee Luba Alexandra Skvorzov), have given this statement voluntarily and with full knowledge, in order to assist the research project on Hong Kong's War Crimes Trials, headed by Professor Suzannah Linton.

I consent to my statement being made public, either through academic published works or by placing the interview in its entirety or relevant extracts thereof on the database of the court cases that Professor Linton is creating with the assistance of the University of Hong Kong Libraries.

Handwritten signature of Luba A. Estes in blue ink.

Signature of Mrs. Luba Estes (nee Luba Alexandra Skvorzov):

Date: 30 NOVEMBER 2010