הקשר הרב דורי – סיפורה של מרי שוורץ מטיינזין שבסין (באנגלית)

**Childhood in Tientsin, China**

By: Meri Schwarz

Country of Birth: China

Meri's story of her childhood in Tientsin, China:
I was born to parents who left Russia in the wake of the October Revolution, also known as the Bolshevik Revolution, a revolution that took place in Russia between October 24 - 25, 1917.
My father - Mordechai (Motia) Schwartz, was a soldier in the White Army - and was saved thanks to his Jewish chutzpah when all the soldiers stood in line before being sent into a battle which no one returned from, he noticed that the commander who was guiding them was wearing a broken pin. He left the line and said to the commander, "Sir!"
The commander was stunned by his action (it was something that no one else dared to do) and told him to "Speak up". Father told him that his pin was broken, that he was a jeweler, and that he could fix his broken pin. The commander took a look at his pin, told him to leave the line, that the other soldiers were going to battle, and that he is staying. That's how he was saved.
He then crossed the border into China, where his family waited for him in a city called 'Harbin'.

My mother's parents, Chana nee Zimbler, crossed the border from Russia to China in 1913, and left my mother with her grandmother since she was only a year old. On the border, her father was killed and only her mother got to China. She had a very difficult time settling in, and there she met a *Goy* whose family name was Joharovsky and married him. She told him she has a child and he accepted it and welcomed her, but her grandmother did not want to give her granddaughter up, since her daughter married a *Goy*.
Her mother returned to Russia, hid in the bushes, took my mother with her who was on the balcony when she was two years old. She arrived in Harbin with her.
Following the abduction her grandmother also arrived in Harbin and stayed with her brother's family who was my father's father.

My mother grew up with the *Goy*, not knowing that he wasn't her father. Her mother and the *Goy* had 3 children: two sisters and one brother. My mother was inferior and got punished for every bad thing one of the children did. When she asked why she was the one getting punished the answer she got one was, "because you are the eldest".

My mother had a very difficult life and when my father heard of that, he decided to help. My father started wooing after her and told her that the person she thinks is her father, is not her father, and that she was born to a Jewish father named 'Michael', a short while after that they got married and moved to Tientsin (today known as Tianjin). I was born a year later.

My father was a jeweler and a theater lover. In the evenings he performed in plays at the Kunst Club of Jews in Tientsin.
In addition to the club, we had a synagogue, an elders place, a Jewish school 'Tientsin Jewish School – TJS' and a cemetery. In school we had our own Beitar club.

I studied at the Jewish school and in 5th grade they decided to transfer me to Saint Joseph – a Catholic monastery that was run by nuns so that I could learn French. When I arrived to school they added me to one of the 5th grade classes and learned that my standard was higher than the rest's, during noon they transferred me to a 6th grade class and during the next day transferred me again to a 7th grade class, which indicates the high standard of the Jewish school I came from.
In school I joined the choir until they noticed that I was a bad singer and by that ruined the choir's singing. I was taken out of the choir in disgrace.

Once, the convent girls accused me of killing Jesus, I argued that I had not killed anyone and that Jesus was a Jew himself, that angered the girls and a fight broke out. After that, I left the monastery and came back to the Jewish school. I took part in the Beitar club, we learned about Jabotinsky and we got to learn the values of the movement.

During the time I lived in China it was under the reign of Chang Kai Shek. During my childhood, on every 31st of October, my birthday, there were beautiful parades with dragons in the streets of the city. As a child, I thought the parades were for my birthday, until I learned that this particular date was the birthday of Chang Kai Shek and that the parades were in his honor.

During World War II the Japanese conquered Tientsin. When we found that out, my mother and I were vacationing in a city called 'P-Ty-Hoo', there, there were only women and children and they all tried figuring out how to behave, they wondered if they should go back to Tientsin that night or wait for the next day. My mother and another woman decided to wait for the next day. Everyone thought it was dangerous since on the way to Tientsin there were many bandits, and their activities during night time grew. Despite that, we started heading towards Tientsin. The rickshaws drove around the area and we reached a train station, there we boarded the night train.

Early in the morning we arrived in Tientsin and from the train station, on our way home, we thought father might be coming to pick us up back from our vacation. We looked for father and when we were on a bridge we saw him driving a rickshaw ahead of us. I called for him, "Motia! Motia!" and my mother called for him as well, until we reached him in the middle of the bridge.

Later, The Marines conquered China, and there was great prosperity, many Jewish soldiers came to our synagogue and club. At that time my parents turned my father's jewelry shop into a restaurant and they had a lot of business.

In 1949, there was a Communist Revolution that was led by Mao Zedong. The Communists declared that China was intended for the Chinese and that anybody else needs to leave China. Many traveled to Australia, the United States, Russia and some to Israel.

At first it was possible to take everything out of China and slowly, restrictions began: It was forbidden to sell apartments, it was forbidden to take your furniture with you, and later on all you could take was clothes and personal belongings.

My father packed the metalwork tools in the crate, and as we stood in the harbor waiting for the ship to take us to Hong Kong inspectors approached us, I was afraid that problems would arise because of the crate, I shouted at them in Chinese "Why do I have to leave my country, where I was born, why do you have to force me to leave?" while crying. They tried to calm me down while signing the crate which allowed us to take the crate with us outside of China.

My last memory from China is: When I was riding a rickshaw with my cousin to the harbor, she told me "Meri, look, look, you'll never get to see all of this ever again", and my uncle ran after the ship, the last one of them all, until the ship furthered away from Tientsin.

We stayed in Hong Kong for a month, and from there we flew to Bangkok where we exchanged our way of transportation from a ship to a plane. We flew to Calcutta, India, and from there to Lod. It took us 36 hours.

On the 28th of August 1951 we arrived to Israel.

I want to mention my grandfather - Yosef Schwartz who was a Gabbai in the synagogue, he was the last to shut down the synagogue before immigrating to Israel.

The beginning of our life in Israel:
We arrived in Lod with $12 for which we received 6 lira, that's how we started our life in Israel. They loaded us on trucks and took us to an immigration camp called 'Sha'ar Ha'aliya'. They gathered 20 people from China in one hut where there was only room for beds. From there, they transferred us to Beit She'arim, and there we received a tent. During the night while it was raining, the tent collapsed on us.

My mother got ill and my father was desperate, he decided to transfer me through Youth Aliyah to the kibbutz so that I could have a better life.
I was accepted to Kibbutz Maanit, where there were children from all over the world. Luckily there were some who spoke English, a girl who spoke Russian and so at the age of 15.5 I began to cope and live among strangers without speaking the language.

My parents moved to an immigration home in Netanya. They lived in Netanya until the day they died.

When a youth group from the "Ma'anit" kibbutz grew up and joined the Nahal Brigade, I tried joining but they didn't accept me because I was too young. I returned to parents' home in Netanya.

Today, my eldest grandson Tal Ziv is studying international relations and Chinese-Asian studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and he received a scholarship to study in China in order to improve his Chinese.

Enrichment:

The October Revolution, also known as the Bolshevik Revolution, was a revolution that took place in Russia between October 24 and 25, 1917. In this revolution, the Communists, led by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, overthrew Alexander Kerensky's social-democratic and liberal government. The October Revolution brought about the establishment of communist rule in the Soviet Union, which existed until 1991.