

Lost in Shanghai

Peter in his GI cap with the 'High House' and Garden Bridge in the background and sampans moored along the river bank.



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Photos: George Szekeres and Google Images

The Tank Man of Tiananmen Square

Set 15 (333 words)

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Special words

Shanghai, was, parents, who, were, Hungarian, Europe, Nazis, outbreak, their, soldiers, heroes, over, one, old, me, couldn't, eventually, thought, money, go, sure, there, GI, Broadway, building, called, what, hours, suit, shoulders, any, some, where, Seward, nobody, Russian, believe, eyes, you, your, haven't, don't, move, finally, everyone

I was born in the Chinese city of Shanghai.

My parents, who were Hungarian Jews, fled Europe to escape the Nazis, just before the outbreak of World War II.

When the war ended, the Americans sent in aid, and their soldiers, who were heroes to us, took over Shanghai. Their army trucks went all over the city and it was easy to hitch a ride with them, to get around.

One day, when I was 5 years old, my mum and dad took me to a park by the river. They spotted a little green frog on a big leaf in a lily pond. But I couldn't see the frog and that made me so cross, I got in a paddy. Mum and Dad decided to leave me and sat down on a bench nearby.

Eventually, I saw the frog. But, by then, I was so cross I thought, "I'll show them!" and I walked out of the park. As it cost money to get into the park, I couldn't go back in, so I decided to hitch a ride home in a

GI truck. Sure enough, there was a GI truck on the Garden Bridge by the big Broadway Mansions building, which I called the 'High House'.

What I didn't know was that the truck was going in the wrong direction and before long I was in a part of Shanghai I didn't recognise. I got off the truck as soon as I could, as I was too scared to admit my mistake. I wandered about for hours in strange streets, getting more and more lost, until it got dark. And then, I began to cry.

A nice Chinese man, dressed in a suit, saw me and stopped and asked me if I was lost. I said I was. He told me his name was Mr Chang.

I was so tired, he put me on his shoulders and walked around asking me if I could recognize any landmarks. And then I saw it - my 'High House'. He wasn't sure, and as he lived nearby, he took me to his home.

When we got there, Mr Chang's wife prepared a little food, some rice and vegetables, and watched me eat it. Then Mr Chang took me to his children's bedroom. He had about ten children and they all slept together on one big mattress on the floor, alternately head to foot. It was easy to find room to slip in an extra one, and that's where I spent the night.

In the morning, Mr Chang took me to the corner of the 'High House' on his way to work. He didn't want to leave me, but I insisted I could find my way home from there.

It was a very long walk along Seward Road to the lane where we lived. I eventually got there and ran up the stairs to our little flat at the top of the building. But there was nobody home.

I went downstairs and knocked on the door of the old Russian man who lived in the ground floor flat. When he saw me, he couldn't believe his eyes. "Everyone's out looking for you. Your parents haven't slept all night, with worry. You stay here and don't move!" When my mum got

back, she gave me a big hug. But when I finally met up with my father, he was very, very cross and I was grounded for a month.

Questions/Activities

After reading the text ask students one or more of the following questions. If students are working in pairs, alternate Partner 1, then Partner 2.

- Do you think this story is true? Give a reason for your answer.
- What do these words mean: sampans, Jews, Nazis, grounded, eventually, GI
- What is 'aid'? Why do countries send other countries aid?
- What do you know about what happened to many Jews during World War II?
- Tell me 3 things that are different about Peter's life when he was 5 and yours.
- When Peter got to his flat, why was nobody there?
- How do you think Peter's Mum and Dad felt when they couldn't find Peter?