Looking for a Chinese Neighbor … for Half a Century

Vera Sasson was born on May 25, 1938 and was taken to Shanghai with her family in 1939, where she lived on Kunming Road. While living in the USA since 1949, Vera returned to Shanghai in 1989, 2006 and 2011 for visits.

In an interview in June 2011, Vera recalled the days she spent in the Ghetto and her Chinese neighbor Mr. Chu and his family, whom she misses very much. With the help of Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum and the media, Vera finally found her Chinese neighbor in November 2011.

Vera clearly remembered that there was a rickshaw arrived at her home every day to take her to and from the Kadoorie School. For many years Vera didn’t know who had made this arrangement. On the way home, she would pass by her neighbor’s home. Mr. Chu, who would always invite her in for a snack, even while he himself was not very well. She appreciated the affection of Uncle Chu so much that she tried to find him every time she returned to Shanghai. She used to carry Uncle Chu’s photo with her on those trips. In June 2011, she came back again but could not find him.

After hearing Vera Sasson’s story, the staff of the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum joined her in the search for her “Shanghai Uncle”. The story was covered by prime-time programs on major TV channels, main newspapers in Shanghai, and the news channel of China Central Television (CCTV).

Shortly thereafter, a lady named Zhou Huizhen called the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum. She said she recognized her father’s picture on TV. Zhou recalled that her family once lived in Apartment 4, Lane 423, Kunming Road, and had a close relationship with their neighbors, a Jewish family. She still remembered Vera Sasson, her childhood playmate, from that family. But she also brought the sad news that her father Mr. Chu, whose real name was Zhou Zhi, had died ten years earlier.

On the morning of November 29, 2011, Vera Sasson and Zhou Huizhen had their first conversation in 65 years, over the web. Seeing Uncle Chu’s daughter on the computer screen and recalling their happy childhood, Vera’s search came to a happy end and the two women promised to meet again face-to-face.