

## A kid looks at the world in turmoil

Perhaps I am being too hard on myself, but in retrospect, I find it hard to believe that my life through the late 30s and early 40s seemed largely unaffected by what was going on in the world.

Trying to focus on what I knew at the time, not what I subsequently learned, I knew there was a Spanish Civil War and we collected silver paper for the Loyalists. We knew that Hitler and Mussolini supported Franco, and there was an Abraham Lincoln brigade made up of Americans who tried to help the Loyalists. At the time, I don't think I knew about Communists and Socialists, about the Soviet Union helping the Loyalists. About Ernest Hemingway and why the US didn't help the good guys. This was 1936-7, and I was less than 10 years old.

I knew that the Japanese were doing terrible things to China and that they captured Manchuria which was part of China and changed its name to Manchukuo. I knew that the leaders of China were a husband and wife named Mr. And Mrs. (or Madam) Chiang Kai Shek. I knew that there were a lot of people in China and that they had invented lots of things a long time ago: paper and spaghetti and gunpowder. I knew that Japan was able to make a lot of stuff and sell it very cheaply. It seemed that almost all the toys kids played with were Made in Japan, but when people wanted to boycott them, the Japanese put Made in Usa on their toys, to confuse Americans because there was a city in Japan called Usa, and if we didn't look carefully, we thought it said Made in USA.

And most important, I knew that Hitler and the Nazis had taken power in Germany. I knew that Hitler hated the Jews though I didn't know why. Somewhere I learned that he had written a book and said that the Jews were to blame for all of Germany's troubles. I grew up having learned a lot of Bible stories: about Haman at Purim, and the Pharaoh at Pesach, and Antiochus at Chanukah. Always, some tyrant wanted to kill the Jews, and I couldn't understand why. My mother told me about how badly the Jews were treated in Europe, about pogroms and anti-Semitism, but that was because the Christians said that the Jews killed Christ.