

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

LISA G. TYRE

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Josey G. Fisher
Date: February 24, 1981

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LT - Lisa Tyre [interviewee]
RT - Richard Tyre
JF - Josey Fisher [interviewer]
Date: February 24, 1981

Tape one, side one:

JF: This is Josey Fisher interviewing Lisa Tyre, on February 24, 1981.

LT: I was born February 1, 1929, in Vienna, Austria. My father was of Czech parentage. He had come to Vienna as a young man to study law, and then had remained in Vienna and was a prominent lawyer. He was in his late forties when I was born. My mother was much younger, and a rather flirtatious social butterfly of Viennese extraction. I was the oldest of two children. I have a younger brother, who is about, well, four years younger than I am.

JF: Can you tell me a little bit about your upbringing, as far as your Judaism is concerned.

LT: As far as Judaism is concerned, there wasn't much of it. As far as my upbringing was concerned, I suppose it was a fairly typical Viennese upbringing. When I was little, I had a nurse who took full care of me, I very rarely saw my parents other than being put to bed and kissed good night and that kind of thing. When my brother was born, then my nurse went to my little brother and I got a French mademoiselle to be governess to take care of me. I had absolutely no Jewish upbringing whatsoever. My earliest memories were of a *Yom Kippur* as we were all having our *Mittagessen*, the rather--the big meal of the day in Vienna, and an aunt who had come to visit us, sitting by and being rather censorious because she was fasting and we were not. Apart from the fact that my parents were married in a synagogue, I had no absolutely no Jewish connections whatsoever.

JF: Was your family involved with both Jewish and Christian people, and was your schooling of that nature?

LT: My parents made their friends according to my father's occupation, really; most of my friends, most of my parents' friends were other lawyers and, of course, their wives. Most of them happened by pure chance, I think, to be Jewish, but they certainly did not go out of their way to make Jewish friends. What was the second question?

JF: About your own experiences in school?

LT: I went to the local public school; I walked to it, and it was a totally integrated school. Now, I am only talking of, I went to a private Montessori kindergarten which, of course, was general. I then began my first grade, because in 1938, I had gone to kindergarten, and I guess, I had just started first grade, I'm not quite sure how that worked. But, anyway, I had had one year, I suppose, one year of schooling and then perhaps started my second year of schooling, second grade. And then in March I was in this totally general school. I remember I was very fond of my teacher, and, of course, as far as my schooling

is concerned; then, within a month or so after the *Anschluss* in March 1938, there was the announcement that from that day on, I was going to go to the Jewish school, and that was quite a traumatic event, because the little school that I had gone to was a small suburban school, and the Jewish school that I was sent to was a downtown old warehouse. I am sure that it was not originally built for a school. My memories of it are being terribly dank and dark and wet, and very unpleasant. My teacher at that time, I also remember as being very sad. He was a Polish Jew, and Viennese Jews, of course, had never looked very kindly on Polish Jews. And the two things I think I remember was the tremendous sadness of this man, who greeted us the very first day that I went down there with the concept, well, we will not be long together, we'll not be together very long, but while we are, we might as well make the most of it; and the second thing, and this was where the Nuremberg laws came in, as I later learned, were the vast number of people who were there, children were there, whom I had not expected to be there, children whom I was sure were not Jewish, and who suddenly because their grandmother happened to be Jewish, were defined as Jews. And one girl I remember particularly, whom I had played with, and her father was a--I don't know whether he was a Gestapo, but he was certainly a high Nazi officer, mother, though, that was Jewish, and therefore, she was Jewish again according to the Nuremberg Laws, and also remember a boy whom I had never in a million years associated with as being Jews, as being a Jew, was also in the school.

JF: Do you remember before that time any kind of antisemitism in your experience, or anything that was told to you by your parents?

LT: I know that there was some, but I certainly did not experience any myself, but then I did not really think of myself as anything in particular, and I think that was part of the problem. My parents never expressed it, they seemed to be acting and socializing like every other Viennese. The--I don't know whether this is relevant here--stop me if you would like to, but the one incident really that I think really got to my father, took place the day after the *Anschluss*. Viennese always go to coffee houses and they have their own coffee house and they have a table and they have a waiter, and my father also had this coffee house that he had been going to for 20-30 years, and he had been sitting at this one table and he had been waited on by this one waiter, and the day after the *Anschluss* when my father went to his coffee house, as usual, the waiter looked at him and pretended not to know him. My father said, "Hello, Franz," whatever his name was, and the waiter just looked at him, and said--looked at him up and down, turned over the lapel of his coat and showed a long-time Nazi membership button and said, "I don't wait on dirty Jews." Now, how he even knew that my father was Jewish, I think is an interesting question. My maiden name was Glaser, G-L-A-S-E-R which is not necessarily Jewish. But before that, as far as I was concerned, anyway, and as far even as my parents have mentioned it, they were not really touched by it. As I said, my father had gone to law school in Vienna, and had had no problems. He took over a practice from a non-Jew, an elderly gentleman, who took him in as a young lawyer, and when he retired gave the practice to my father. So, no.

JF: What about after the *Anschluss*?

LT: Well, after the *Anschluss* it was thick and fast. Do you want it in more or less consequential order? I am not absolutely sure whether everything is exactly as it should be, but I remember, I guess, the day of the *Anschluss* coming home from school, and my father standing in the living room, I guess, in front of the stove, talking with another man, also a lawyer and the two wives, my mother and this man's wife, who was there; and they were discussing what this might mean for Austria, and they were not in the least concerned. They both concluded that this was just another party. After all, they had had several political parties, and one had taken power from the other, and, basically, it didn't really make very much difference to anybody. And shortly thereafter, as a matter of fact, my father had to go to Switzerland on business, he did a lot of international estate representing for people and so on--the people in Switzerland told him that he really should stay there and should simply telephone my mother to bring the three of us, my brother, herself, and me out to Switzerland immediately. He had thought about that and had just dismissed it, as being quite useless. The people in Switzerland didn't really know, and came back, and then, of course, did not leave again until we left later. As far as other things were concerned, okay, the first thing, of course, was the school. The second thing that I remember was the automobile. We had a small *Steyrwagen* which is something equivalent to the VW beetle, maybe before that, which was kept at a garage. We lived in a suburban house, and had the bottom and two stories, and the landlord lived on the third, and the car was kept a half block or a block or so away in a commercial garage. I remember sitting at lunch one day when the telephone rang, and my father answered it, and he was told that the Gestapo had borrowed his car. And of course, that was the last we ever saw of the car. Then, right around that time, the servants left. We had a cook, we had a maid, and we had a laundrywoman, and then, of course, my mademoiselle and my brother's nurse. And all of them, were Christians, Gentiles, and they left practically from one day to the next, and this was an interesting period for my mother, who had never in her life done as much as poured herself a cup of tea. So, she began to take over, and what happened then I think would interest psychologically, and it interested me fantastically, because as my mother learned to cope better and better, my father sort of dropped by the wayside. I think this was fairly typical of refugee families, especially where the husband is an intellectual. Well, shortly after the car incident, I'm not sure exactly in what order, but there was the situation of assets being frozen, all bank accounts, stocks, bonds, safe deposit boxes, and so on, and the practice of my father being given to someone else. And that also I remember rather vividly, because the same lawyer who had sat with my father the day of the *Anschluss* was at our house, and my father--he had to come consult with my father on some minor point of law--and it was the evening of the day that the announcement had been made that law and medical practices would be handed over to other people, and I remember the totally--well, discouraged is too mild a word--totally almost despairing way in which my father said, "Don't bother asking me, I'm no longer a lawyer. It doesn't matter what I think. I

don't count anymore." And this kind of philosophy really stayed with him for the rest of his life. He was a very, very intelligent, very learned, and very wise human being. His uncle who had put him through law school was the man who had discovered the Rosetta stone in Egyptian archeology. And, so, he--I may be prejudiced--but he certainly was above average for learning and intelligence, and education and so on. It was tremendously hard for him to take that.

JF: Was he in the national army or strongly identified as an Austrian?

LT: He, as I said, was older when I was born. He must have been somewhere in his forties, and he had fought in World War I, had been decorated in World War I, I don't remember exactly what he did, had been wounded, and I remember a story that he tells was that he had typhus. He had caught typhus while on duty during World War I, had been put in a hospital and been fed nothing but rice, and one of the jokes in our house was that he simply did not eat rice. And so, this dated back to the time when for months on end, he was stuffed with rice, just to sort of keep him going. But, yes, he had served in World War I, obviously distinguished himself, fighting for the Austrian Empire. It was not for Germany. And there was tremendous antagonism between Austria and Germany, a slight feeling that perhaps they were--they may have been better in certain ways, such as German industrialization, which even at that point was better versus the Viennese *Gemütlichkeit*--a rather sloppy way of doing things. But also, tremendous pride in Austria and a tremendous love for Austria, especially Vienna, and especially the life that Vienna afforded them at that point. They were--my parents were into everything. You know, they went to the theatre, music, and the opera, and so on. My mother was an amateur singer. She had a very nice voice, but it was the type of at-home singing. My uncle, my mother's older brother, actually left Vienna in 1933. Now, part of it was political for him, I'm not quite sure exactly what. The era of politics made him decide to leave. Part of it, though, to be utterly fair, was that he was the ne'e-do-well of my maternal, ne'er-do-well son of my maternal grandfather, and who had a factory to run, and my uncle did not run too well, and I think it was sort of an easy way out to pretend that politics were what drove him to England. Anyway, he settled in England in 1933. But, he was the only one of the family that did leave early. Very few left later, but anyway...

JF: How was the actual process of informing your father that his practice was to be handed over--how was that done?

LT: As far as I remember, it was a newspaper or radio announcement. Possibly there was also a letter that he received. I honestly don't remember, but I do know that it was on one certain day, and it was around that time, also, then, that all kinds of strange things began to happen. The *Anschluss*, of course--everyone had expected that Austria would rise up in arms, and really greet Hitler with guns and cannons--and in point of fact, they greeted Hitler with waves and flag-waving and jubilation. And I remember very clearly that the one day of the *Anschluss*, when our cook who had gone to see him riding into Vienna, came back and--she was an older woman--I guess she was what--in her fifties

or so--but she was truly sexually carried away. Obviously, as a child I did not realize it, but the way that she talked--and I can still hear the ringing way in which she talked about this man who will now give us law and order, and he will make us great again--definitely had sexual overtones. I remember her saying, "He looked at me, and the way that he looked at me"--you know, when there was a crowd of a million people, whatever--uh, was not just that of a soldier who happened to take over a country. This was much, much much more.

JF: Do you have any memories of your own experiences with friends that you had before the *Anschluss*, and what happened afterwards?

LT: Well, let me rephrase that. As far as friends were concerned, I had some friends, of course, at the Jewish school. I had one girlfriend who lived just a couple of doors down, and we had been friends ever since, I guess we were old enough to toddle over to each other's houses. And she and I would take the trolley downtown together, and we would walk home. I remember the ages, I suppose we were about eight at that point. She and I made a pact that whatever we were talking about, if we were stopped by Gestapo or anyone else and were asked what were you talking about, we would simultaneously shout out that we were going to talk about our sick doll, whose name was Gerda, who was sick. Because we were totally aware that whatever we said could be a political action, and we didn't really need that to take our parents away, but it could certainly be used against our parents, against us, etc. And again, I don't know whether this is relevant to this question, but I remember walking to the trolley one day after school with Gerda, and we came by a crowd of people, and the police standing around, and the crowd of people had just obviously just looted a man's clothing store and the people were just streaming out, loaded with men's clothes, and there was the big *Jude*, J-U-D-E, on the plate glass window, and there was the poor man, obviously a Jew, who was being beaten up, and there was a soldier--I mean, the policeman, just standing by. And another episode that I remember right next door to us, was a friend of my father's and his wife, an elderly couple. One night, I have no idea how late it was, but it was during the night sometime. I woke up, looked out the window, and saw this woman being pushed down her front steps. She was wearing a red coat, and I watched to see what was happening. I couldn't quite figure it out, there were two Gestapo men behind her. I went back to bed, and the next morning I discovered that what had happened, they had rounded up a number of middle-aged Jewish women, and they were wearing nothing but red coats. They were driven by Gestapo to a central square where there was a great big statue of some hero riding on his galloping horse, and they had to take off their coats and, totally in the nude, were given pails, were given scrubbing brushes, and had to scrub the statue of this hero. Again, people standing around, people cheering, you know, nobody really saying anything. That was the problem. Coming closer to home, my father, of course, at that point, began to spend all his days trying to get the papers in order to get us out. Now, we were luckier than most insofar as my father had represented the Sassoon family in England, and the Sassoon family was a very wealthy, influential family, and he had had the foresight to have had his fees paid into the Bank of

England, rather than being sent to Austria. And they were personal friends of my father's also, so they tried very hard to pull strings in order to get us out. But I remember, weeks, months, I guess, of my father leaving in the morning, and standing in line, being shunted from one office to the other, filling out forms, doing this, that, and the other thing, trying to get both the exit permit and the entrance permit. And as I gathered, you could not get the exit permit until you had an entrance permit, and nobody gave an entrance permit unless you had an exit permit, so there was sort of a Catch-22 situation, which was exceedingly discouraging. My father aged almost well, quite visibly. Before, as he was a strong, healthy, dark-haired man and he must have aged a good 20-25 years with gray hair, and sallow face, and so on, in a few months that we were there. During that time, again, eight o'clock or so one night, and I guess we're now talking about June or July 1938, my mother and my brother and I were home one night, and at eight o'clock or nine o'clock or so we were still up. The doorbell rang and there were two Gestapo and they--before then let me go back a little there had been a telephone call to my mother and someone who did not identify himself, merely said, "Tell your husband not to come home", and shortly thereafter, then, the doorbell rang, and there were two Gestapo in full regalia: where is my father? Ostensibly, they wanted to ask him questions about one of his clients. By that time, this was two to three months after his office had been taken away, so it was a rather ludicrous question, because they had all the files, they knew more about his clients than we did, than my father did. Anyway, simultaneously as I understood it later, someone had found my father and told him not to come home, and he, of course, had to make up his mind, would he try to make a run for it, if that was possible, or would he come home, and of course, had he run for it, I imagine, I would not be here to talk to you today. Anyway, he decided the Gestapo came and my mother said "He isn't home right now, he'll be home later." They said, "All right, we'll wait." They came inside the door and sort of planted themselves on either side of the front door, and waited there, arms crossed, in full Nazi uniforms--it was a rather frightening experience. They did not talk to my brother or me, they did not ask us any questions. My father came home, I suppose, about ten o'clock that night. They had been there about two hours, and they were quite polite. They said, "We want to take you away; we want to ask you some questions. You better pack a toothbrush." Well, there had been people we knew about who had disappeared mysteriously, all right. We had no idea at that point where they were going, or had gone. There was talk of "labor camps." That was, of course, before the crematoriums, this was in 1938, I think they were probably labor camps, I don't think know that the gas chambers etc., did not exist. However, I also knew, even at that time, that people were not coming back from these interrogations. Well, my father packed his toothbrush and went with them. And, we waited for him all night and he did come back until almost 24 hours afterwards. They had, indeed, asked him a few questions, and why they asked him, I don't know. They had beaten him up. Whatever else they did, I don't know, because he has always refused to talk about it. And, however, he did come back, which, you know, was very, very know rare, and I don't

exactly [unclear] why. There is a possibility that one of his clients who was a rather high muckamuck either in the S.S. or Gestapo, I don't know which, might have put in a good word for him, and so it's possible that saved his life, and also that saved our lives, too. I don't know. But, anyway, he did come back. Finally, what happened--not finally, but eventually, what happened, we got a six month entrance visa to England, and on the basis of that, we got an exit permit. However, the exit permit was good only for my parents, not for my brother or myself, so my parents, of course, were faced with the possibility of a choice: did they leave us behind, or did they go? And I guess, like most parents, they decided that either all of us go or all of us stay, so they decided to stay. They risked the expiration of their entrance permit. However, we were fortunate, and eventually we did get an exit permit, which allowed us to leave, and we had the six months entrance permit. Now, in the meantime, a cousin of mine, who is about my age, and who lived in Chemnitz Germany, had been in--the situation there was reversed. They got his parents, a doctor and his wife, the wife I think is my mother's first cousin--they had got an exit permit--they got all the papers for this young boy, little boy, eight, nine year-old boy and had sent him out, and he had got to England, and been taken out by the Quakers. The parents went into a concentration camp--Theresienstadt. The father never survived. The mother is still alive and living in Germany again. Anyway, so we did get our papers together, finally, and I think with the help of this same SS man, who obviously risked not just his career, but his neck, in doing that.

JF: Were you aware of any involvement of the Jewish Council in your getting out?

LT: I was not aware. and I frankly don't think that they had very much to do, not at that time, in Austria. Now, I may be wrong, but I think it was pretty much what influence you had, whom you knew, and whom you could pay off. That's primarily what did it.

JF: How did you live financially during that time? Was there enough money free from the frozen assets? Or...

LT: You know, I've asked my mother that, and all I can get from her is we somehow managed. Again, whether perhaps funds, small amounts of funds, were sent by, from England to my father somehow is a possibility. For some reason, she, well, she refuses to talk about any of her...

Tape one, side two:

Of an interview with Lisa Tyre on February 24, 1981.

LT: The last few months were rather harrowing. My father had stood in line for months and months trying to get all the papers together, trying to, being pushed from one office to the other. It was necessary to get both an exit permit and an entrance permit, and the entrance permit was not given until you had an exit permit; the exit permit was not given until you had an entrance permit. His clients, the Sassoons in England, did their best, and finally, we received a six month entrance visa to England. It was good for only six months. My father then had to stand in line only for the exit permit. That was granted, however, it was granted only to my mother and my father. They were then faced with the question should they leave their children behind and save themselves, or should they risk the expiration of the entrance visa, and possibly risk everything. Well, they decided that either all of us go or none of us go. Now, this is in contrast to a cousin of mine who at that point was living in Chemnitz, Germany, Saxony, Germany, where a similar situation, but reversed, had occurred. The parents were able to get all the papers for their son, aged 8 or 9, but not for themselves. And what happened in that case was that the son was sent over to England, was brought up in a Quaker family; the parents landed in Theresienstadt, where the father, a doctor, perished, and the mother somehow managed to survive. Coming back to our situation, a tremendous number of weeks, months, elapsed. The exit fee the entrance visa to England was still there. Finally, an exit permit materialized. We went--we now had an exit permit for the four of us. Various formalities still had to go through. One of them was that the Gestapo came to our house and decided what we were allowed to take out. There were several Persian rugs in the house. These were simply rolled up, and some burly people, burly men, who obviously had been hired for that purpose, carried them away, presumably to the houses of the Gestapo or the SS men. They went through everything that we could take out, and when they were through, we were allowed to take out three paintings--my father had collected paintings. Each one had to have a stamp on it. The stamp said that this is the property of the *Deutsches Reich* and can be taken out of the country. On two of the pictures, two of the paintings, the stamp was put in back, on one of them the stamp was put in front. As a parting gesture, just before we left, armed as I said, with two pictures, a ring of not terribly great value of my mother, ten shillings for each us--the shilling at that point, I think was only 25 cents--and a bare change of clothes, not much else. Just before we left, my mother took my brother and me to, I guess, the Schönbrunn Park, the park of the Schönbrunn Castle, and we got as far as the gates. She had often taken us there, before Hitler, and we got as far as the gates. There was a huge sign that said, "Jews and dogs are not allowed in the park," and she very cautiously turned to us, and said, "I purposely came to bring you here because I want you to remember that." And, of course, we have. We went to the airport. Each of us was put in a separate cubicle; we had to strip, and every fold of our body was examined for hidden jewels, money, I don't

know what. They didn't find anything. They even took my little brother's teddy bear, which he had clung to for the four years of his life. It was his security blanket--and they took a knife and just slashed the teddy bear from top to bottom and threw out all the stuffings, and then threw the teddy bear to my brother. He took the teddy bear back and I'll never forget his crying all the way to England. On the way to England, we stopped in Prague, where the airplane stopped in Prague, where a great many of my family had fled to. We, a whole branch of my mother's family had always been resident in Prague, and they were all at the airport to meet us. My father entreated them, "Get out now!" and they said exactly what he had said six months earlier--"We can't, we've got houses, we've got silver, we've got property. There is no way we can leave and, anyway, this will pass, just like everything else did." My father even, once we got to England, sent ambassadors, and here, possibly the Jewish Council that you had asked about, possibly took, had something to do with it. I know there were ambassadors, Gentile ambassadors, who went back and forth between Prague and London, carrying my father's messages back, and then bringing back the answers from all our relatives saying that they couldn't leave yet. And, they did not leave, and we are talking about 50 people there, 54, I think, who within the space of two or three days after Czechoslovakia was annexed, could not, well, they were all in a group of houses. It was sort a complex of houses there, and one of my uncles went up and took poison, another one threw himself out of the window. The others went to, well, were taken to Theresienstadt and I think about 50 of my, I am trying to think what, this must be my mother's aunts, uncles, they were elderly people, for the most part, and one cousin, most of them perished in Theresienstadt. Now, the one cousin was a young boy of about 18 or 19, and he went to Theresienstadt and then was sent to Auschwitz. He knew how to type, and he hasn't talked, he didn't talk about it until quite recently. But, one of his duties was to type up the list of people who would be sent to the gas chambers that day. It was he who had to type up the names of his father and his mother. He had to type up his own name. Instead of inserting his own name, he inserted someone else's name, and has tried to live with that all these years, and has had a very, very difficult time with that.

JF: There was no family, then, that was left in Austria?

LT: There was no family left in Austria. There are two survivors from the Prague family. One is a cousin who was married by proxy in Vienna, but what had happened there was that her fiancé, they were both from Prague. Now, her fiancé decided, "I've got to get out," and he went to Israel. He was in Palestine. From Palestine he somehow told someone to stand in for him, and the marriage was performed between my cousin and this absentee husband. She, then, was able to get out of Vienna, Hungary, and eventually to Tel-Aviv. Her brother, also from Prague, eventually after his family had all been taken away to Theresienstadt, he managed to get out and very circuitously he smuggled his way, he was a young man, 21-22, so he marched across borders, hiding during the day and so on, and eventually landed in New Zealand, and joined us and lived with us as a matter of fact in New Zealand.

JF: To your knowledge, then, your exit from Austria was in no way expedited or aided in any way by the Jewish Council? There was no involvement?

LT: To my knowledge, absolutely not. I think, if anything, it was helped, as I say, by the family Sassoon, and I think with the very much behind-the-scenes help of the SS Gestapo officer that I mentioned.

JF: The plane that you took after it left Prague, was this filled with people like yourselves?

LT: I don't remember at all. You know, my whole memory was: we were here, my brother, his teddy bear. I know it was filled, but who was on it, whether it was Gestapo, whether it was German tourists, I honestly don't know. I imagine that there were quite a few refugees. This was September 1938. This was before the *Kristallnacht*. So, but, that I don't know.

JF: What happened once you reached England?

LT: Okay. We lived in England for about six months, and at that point, we lived on, as I said before, my father had some funds in the Bank of England. We lived on that. We lived, I must say, very, very tightly. We had one room in a Pension type of boarding house, and all four of us promptly came down with the mumps. How four people can come down with the mumps simultaneously, I don't quite know. But, anyway, here were all four of us and I remember this absolute feeling of leprosy. You know, here we were in a foreign country; we didn't know the language. My mother had sort of learned a little schoolgirl English, but that was about it. My father knew a little English. I did not know a word at that point, and we all promptly came down with the mumps, and our landlady was ready to kick us out, because she didn't want the boarding house contaminated. So, that was a pretty horrendous time.

JF: Was this London?

LT: This was London, Hampstead. We did recover from the mumps, all of us, and I was put in a public school, I don't mean public in the sense of English public, just the little neighborhood school. At that point, I knew French fluently and I knew German, of course, but I didn't know English. So, I was put in a school and had to learn English, and I learned it very fast. I knew how to make myself understood within three weeks, and I knew it fluently by then in a couple of months. I do think it's the best way to learn a language. My brother also, of course, was put in some kind of little school. Now this was September '38, and, of course, it was just about the time that Munich happened, and Chamberlain went to Munich. And almost as soon as we got there, I suppose as soon as we had recovered from the mumps, we were getting ready to be evacuated. Because, while Chamberlain has come back with "peace in our time", everybody knew that war was imminent, and I remember being fitted for gas masks; I remember even being told to report to a certain station at a certain time to take the train. And I remember the horrendous feeling of just total uprooting. Here we had we survived together this long, and now, being so-called freed, living in London, now I was going to be separated from my parents. And

that was tremendously, tremendously rough. As it happened, of course, we were not evacuated at that time. My mother had a cousin, whom she really had very little to do with, but who had left Germany in 1936, and she and her husband and her son had gone to New Zealand and settled there, and he was working in a sock-making factory. Now, when we got to England, they set all kinds of strings in motion to get us an entrance visa to England [Mrs. Tyre must mean New Zealand] England was harder to get into at that point if you don't happen to be White, Anglo-Saxon Protestant of British descent, than any other country. Somehow or other, they did succeed and it was really touch and go, because, first of all, we had a six month visa in England. Secondly, the Civil War was raging in Spain. Everybody knew that the Second World War was about to break about. Whether we would make it before the war broke out, which, of course, would close all sea lanes, was the big question. But somehow or other, again, pure luck or whatever, we were able to leave England and get to New Zealand before the Second World War broke out. And...

JF: How did that come about, that you went to New Zealand?

LT: Simply because, well, we had applied for visas to America, which, of course, was the obvious thing to do. However, as Austrian citizens--my mother was Austrian, and my father had lived in Austria and had an Austrian passport--the quota system was such that the Austrian quota was filled for a long, long time. And so, we had applied, we had applied for visas to all kinds of places. I don't remember at this point--I do know that Argentina was one of them, and New Zealand, Australia, and America. America turned us down flat. New Zealand for some reason accepted us.

JF: What experience did you have with the people in London when you were there? Was there, what was their attitude toward you as Austrian refugees?

LT: Very, very standoffish. Now, I don't remember that I had any friends in school. I remember going to school, but I remember going totally by myself. I remember sitting there by myself. I don't think it was a bad experience. I don't think anybody was outright cruel, but I think it was, "Let's just not bother about her", type of attitude. And I think my parents had very much the same experience. Now they were taken under the protection of the Sassoons, and I think that helped. But as far as any human contact, and real outgoingness was concerned, there was very, very little of that. Probably there was none of that. So, going to New Zealand was sort of, well it was really going to the promised land, and being allowed to do that...

JF: There was never any chance to wait for that visa to come through to...

LT: Absolutely not, because we had the Second World War at our heels, we had the end of the six month visa at our heels, which had, that had expired. I assume we would have been sent back to Austria. The whole state of the world was very, very unsettled at that point.

JF: Were you able to get funds from your English bank account out at that time?

LT: That was no problem.

JF: That was no problem.

LT: Yes, yes that was what bought our ship's tickets to New Zealand. And that was transferred remember, New Zealand at that point was a British colony, so it didn't really matter very much whether they were used in England, or whether they were used in New Zealand. There was not, you know, a great deal, but at least there was enough to just barely live out for the five months we were in England, and to buy the passage and get us over there. Now, this is the time, then, that my mother came to the fore. My father had taken care of the emigration procedures, and my mother really took over when the immigration to New Zealand started. And from that moment on, he very much receded into the background. He did really very, very little as far as making money was concerned, as far as really anything was concerned, retreated more and more into books. He felt he had lost his tongue for all practical purposes. He had lost his profession which he dearly loved, and he had lost his language, which he had fought for, which he has loved. The whole *Kultur* of Austria was taken away from him, him personally that was the feeling. And he really became a shell of a man who remained alive really only when he would help me with my Latin. He could talk over a political point. He was very interested in politics. He was very interested in what was going on. As far as actually the practical side of life, that was my mother's role at that point. So, we got to New Zealand, and they started a lending library. There was no public library system in New Zealand. They settled in ChristChurch, New Zealand which is at the South Island, and they started a lending library, which, well, it just sort of barely supported us, together with--I remember my mother sitting for hours and hours on end, and she would paint wooden buttons by hand, you know, pretty little flowers. She was never really an artistic person, but she had to do it and she did it. She had two small kids to bring up. And also, you know what a child's paint brush looks like, you know, there's the hair, and then there is a metal circle and then there's the wood. Well, she got paid for putting the hair through the metal thing, attaching the wooden thing to it. I guess, I'm sure now that's made by a factory, but at that point, she made it. So, we survived in New Zealand, all during these years. My mother was very, very unhappy there because it was not the *Kultur* that she was used to. On the other hand, it was a very, very safe place to be. My brother and I got a great education and we survived.

JF: What was the attitude of the natives there toward you?

LT: At the beginning, tremendously hostile. They could not understand why we would be there if we were not German spies, and as an example of that, my mother is a very active letter writer, and she loves to write letters on the typewriter, and so at night she would sit there and the light would be on. The neighbors could hear her typing letters, and more than once the police appeared, because obviously what she was doing was writing communiqués to Germany about what was going on in New Zealand. You know, the absurdity, first of all, nothing was going on in New Zealand, and this woman, who was kept more than busy with her buttons and her paint brushes, and her lending library, and her children, and her house and so on, the absurdity of her knowing anything other than the pure facts of survival never entered anyone's mind. And also at school, my brother and I

were often accused of being German spies. Eventually, as the war dragged on, and we obviously did not bring death and destruction upon New Zealand, I think that they eventually accepted us as just plain people next door.

JF: Were there any other Jewish families that you knew there?

LT: Yes, as a matter of fact, at that point, I guess, I had my first experience with Judaism, because my uncle--my cousin, my mother's cousin, you know who had brought us over--they were much more religious than we were, and I suppose they introduced us to a synagogue and I was sent to Sunday School for about three months. Whether it is correct or not, my memory is that all I ever learned about was Jacob, and I was royally bored and refused to go anymore. And that the the beginning and the end of my Jewish education.

JF: So there was a Jewish community there?

LT: There was a Jewish community there.

JF: Can you tell me anything about it?

LT: No, because we did not--apart from that one rather abortive attempt at trying to send me to Sunday school, which probably wasn't even three months, but you can't study Jacob for three months. It was probably about a month, and that was it. There was a very definite feeling, I think, engendered in me that if I disavowed Judaism, then the things that happened to Jews cannot happen to me. It's a feeling that is still with me very much, but much less now than it was then. But my plan at that point, and I was probably about 12 or 13, was that I was going to marry a rich English lawyer, rich English lord, or something, and put all that behind me. But it never happened that way.

JF: Was your family able to get any news in New Zealand of what was happening in Austria or in Prague?

LT: Oh, absolutely not. No. Our last communication was with my cousin Frank who had come from Prague. Now the fact of my one uncle having committed suicide by poisoning, and the other throwing himself out of the window, the rest of the family being taken to Theresienstadt, came from him. This was about in 1942, and that was end. After the war, there were frantic attempts to try to find out who, if anybody, was still surviving, and with a very quick realization, I guess at that point, through the Red Cross, that nobody had survived, except this one cousin, as I mentioned before. But during the war, 1942 to 45, there was absolutely no communication.

JF: Did you know what was happening in Europe in the death camps?

LT: Not really, not until the rest of the world knew about it. I think consciously it did not really get to me until long afterward, when I suddenly realized that other people had many more relatives than I did, you know, what happened to them, and so on.

JF: What happened after the war, then, to your family?

LT: My immediate family? Well, my parents had not been terribly happy in New Zealand, so my mother my father sat still my mother was responsible for getting the necessary papers, offices, etc, and got us into America on the basis of my father's Czech [unclear]. Now after the war, the fact that my father, though a naturalized Austrian citizen,

was a native-born Czech citizen, made all the difference in a world. So, in 1946, I guess, on the basis of his Czech quota, his Czech citizenship, we were able to come in under the Czech quota. And came in--now there was some problem, because, of course, the waters between New Zealand and the rest of the world had been mined by Japanese, and in the interest of safety, I guess, there were the international laws, the children could not cross the waters until all these mines were taken care of. This is why we stayed in New Zealand from about the time that my mother started setting things in motion, which was right after the Second World War ended, until about '47, about a year and a half prior to for the waters to be unmined, for it to be considered safe for children to come over. By that time, I had gone through the whole New Zealand system of education. I had won a scholarship to the good, the academic high school in New Zealand, and in New Zealand, as in England at that point, you had very early demarcation, either destined for an academic career, or you were destined for a non-academic career, and this was decided by your examinations when you were eleven, and so having passed...

(There are several minutes of unused tape at the end of side 2, Tape 1.)

Tape two, side one:

This is side tape two, side of an interview with Lisa Tyre on February 24, 1981. This is Josey Fisher interviewing.

LT: In New Zealand our life was very, very quiet. There was very little for my parents to do. I, as I said, got a marvelous, typically classical English education. Having passed the "eleventhes" and doing very well in them, I was given a scholarship to the academic girls' high school and went through that. My mother did a little pushing, and so, I finished high school at about 14, and took the matriculation examination to admit me to the university. However, they decided that 14 was a little young, so I stuck around and took another year of high school, went to college then, and had one year of college under my belt before we left in 1947.

JF: Were you identified as Jews when you were living in New Zealand, and did you experience any kind of antisemitism there?

LT: Well, we may have been identified as Jews; I don't think so. We certainly did not identify ourselves as Jews. There's a difference. We still were simply people. My parents built up a circle of friends. My brother and I built up our separate circle of friends, and I think the only important thing at that stage of my life certainly was to do superbly well in school, not to do anything that would cause my parents greater unhappiness, and my job was to do well in school, and that was really all that mattered. The fact of being Jews, I think, was pretty academic; it really didn't matter much.

JF: Was your father not able then to use his Czech citizenship in getting out of England, originally?

LT: At that time, no. I don't know whether it was that the laws changed, or that maybe that he hadn't hit on that aspect of the law, but in order to get out of Austria, he was identified as Austrian, and either came or did not come, was admitted or not admitted, under the Austrian quota. By 1946, as I say I don't know whether the laws changed, but at that point, then, he could use his Czech citizenship, and was admitted.

JF: When did you then come here?

LT: We came in November, was it '46 or '47? It was November '46. As a matter of fact, it was Armistice Day. It was November 11 when we landed, and my experience, we came on a New Zealand ship, landed in Newport News, Virginia, and my first experience of the United States was getting off in Newport News, Virginia, and having the separate Black and White drinking fountains and restrooms, etc., which made an enormous impression on me, because we had had Maoris with the natives in New Zealand. You know, they lived with people. All of a sudden here, I was coming to the Land of Liberty, and the segregation was really incredible. Coming then from Newport News, we just stayed a day, went up to New York. And we lived--now here is where the Jewish Council,¹ I suppose did come in--we lived in the Jewish Congress House, which, at that time, was in

¹Congress house was an institution of the American Jewish Congress.

New York, about 72nd, 76th Street, something like that. It was set up specifically to house new refugees and give them someplace to go--[unclear] to live home themselves. We stayed there probably for two weeks, and I found that very, very difficult to take. We had, after all, not been identified as Jews, we had not--I have never in my life experienced Orthodoxy and did not know what an Orthodox Jew is or was or believes in. Here I was stuck in a place where, first of all, there was one huge dormitory for the women, and one huge dormitory for the men. Admittedly, I was spoiled, but being put in a huge dormitory with a lot of women of all ages, I found terribly difficult, but I think I found that less difficult than what I considered the pure irrationality when it came to my turn to wash the dishes--of having to use a separate set of dishes, kosher soap and all that. I'll admit I was spoiled, but it was just something that probably made as big an impression on me as the experiences, you know, in Vienna and Austria and so on. This was obviously a very spoiled, small-minded point of view, but it certainly happened. It didn't help that I was practically raped by a Yeshiva student. The Yeshiva was right next door to the Jewish Congress House, and it was at that time, I guess I was 16, and brand-new little girl of the neighborhood, you know, especially total, total, totally innocent. We had gone to an English school, knew that there were such things as boys in the world, but never, never gone--I had gone to a girls' school, didn't know what it was all about, and so, my memory of those two or three weeks is not very pleasant. My parents, then, who had lived in New York for two or three weeks, were overwhelmed by just the hustle, the bustle, the massive size of New York, had lived seven years in total isolation in New Zealand, and couldn't quite handle it, handle New York. So they took off, and left me in a well, rooming with a friend of theirs. I don't know whether she was widow or a divorced woman, but she had a daughter my age, and she had a room, a spare room, on 96th Street, I think. So I lived with her for a little while. I applied for Barnard and they decided I was still too young to go there, so, I worked during the day as a secretary to a concern, called [unclear] Press, and went to Columbia at night taking courses there. And stayed there, I guess, this was from about November of '46, to about May of '47, and in May of '47 my parents decided that this 16 year old innocent, had better come to Los Angeles where they had gone, and I was told to take the next train to Los Angeles, which I did.

JF: Is there anything else that you want to add about your experiences?

LT: No, I think that just about covers it.

RT: What about your current attitude toward Judaism and organized religion?

LT: Well, let's try organized religion. I don't know whether that's really relevant to this.

JF: Do you feel in any way that it was affected by your life experience during those years?

LT: Oh, exceedingly so. Yes. I think it's very difficult to live through something that is directed at one particular minority, and not react in one of two ways. You either become very much, very totally religious. I know people who have become Orthodox and

more believing, or you react the other way, which is the way I have reacted, and I find all organized religion very difficult to understand and very difficult to take, and I distrust it. And I find it very difficult to believe in a God, who arbitrarily has decided that 54 of my relatives are going to be killed, and not just killed with nice clean shotgun, but killed in all kinds of horrendous ways, which I don't even know about and I think one of the main points, the main differences that we have had, Dick and I have had in our many years of marriage--we've been married for almost 30 years--is that I am strongly--do not believe in religion, and Dick, of course, has been active in the usual Jewish way of (unclear)...

RT: [unclear]

LT: That's about it.