

## **RG-50.407.0278**

### **Summary**

Erwin (Hebrew name, Yitzhak) Lamm was born in Vienna on January 7, 1921. His father's family had lived in Vienna for centuries. They were Orthodox attending the synagogue, Schiff Schule, and non-Zionist. His mother, Gisela Figdor, was from Eisenstadt, a provincial capital. They had four children (Herbert, Amy, Erwin and Felix). His father owned a silk textile wholesale business, which had a branch in Bratislava.

Erwin describes his primary and secondary school experiences. He went to a shiva in Slovakia for a year before attending a public high school where his education stopped with the Anschluss. Openly negative and hostile attitudes towards Jews began immediately. His sister, who had married a Hungarian, had a greater latitude to emigrate, which she and her husband did to Australia following the Anschluss.

In July 1938, Erwin's parents were able to get him a passport and visa for Czechoslovakia where he stayed with an aunt and until gaining a visa to London in December arranged by a Rabbi Schoenfeld. His parents and younger brother, Felix, never could leave and died in a camp in 1944.

In England, Erwin found housing through the rabbi and found a job in a factory. About a year later, his aunt and uncle also arrived in London. Though they were termed "friendly enemy aliens", they were interned on the Isle of Man after the war started. He was sent by ship to Australia. During the passage, the British crew pilfered many of their belongings. He also tells a story about a U-Boat refraining from sinking his ship believing it carried German POWs. On arrival, they were sent to a separate kosher camp in Victoria. While not mistreated, they were not greeted warmly by local, 'Anglicized' Jews, as evidenced by Walter Brink of the Jewish Welfare Society who explicitly told them that they weren't welcome.

After Erwin joined the Army when war started with Japan, he remained in Melbourne. He was released from the Army early by becoming the minister of the Brighton Road Synagogue. He soon met Elsa, who became his wife in 1946. He talks of the Jewish community leaders who provided support, and the activities of the community at that time, including his struggling business ventures. Erwin and Elsa had their first son in 1949, and then his daughter, Kenda.

As Erwin became more involved in the Caulfield community, he was elected to the Jewish Board of Deputies (later the Jewish Community Council), and hosted Menachem Begin during a state visit to Australia. His brother and his family joined him from Europe. He had survived the war by hiding, moving from home to home until the end of the war when he was confined to Theresienstadt. Erwin describes the development of the Mizrahi Community in Caulfield. He concludes with observations about how Judaism survives in a larger society.