

RG-50.862: EHRLICH COLLECTION - SUMMARY TRANSCRIPTION OF AUDIO FILES

Introduction by Anatol Steck, Project Director in the International Archival Programs Division of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum:

These are English summary transcription notes of the digitized interviews recorded by Leonard and Edith Ehrlich in the 1970s as part of their research for their manuscript about the Jewish community leadership in Vienna and Theresienstadt during the Holocaust titled "Choices under Duress." These notes are intended as a finding aid for the researcher; researchers are strongly encouraged to consult the digitized recordings for accuracy and authenticity and not to rely solely on the notes. As much as possible, persons mentioned by name in the interviews are identified and described in the text; however, as persons are often referred to in the interviews only by last name, their identification is sometimes based on the context in which their names appear within the interview (especially in cases where different persons share the same last name). In case of some of the longer interviews, including the interview with Benjamin Murmelstein, unless specifically stated at the beginning of each segment by Leonard Ehrlich, it is not always clear whether a particular interview segment continues in the correct order or, in case the interview was recorded over several days, a particular interview segment continues where the interview concluded on the previous day. It is possible that the individual interview segments are not in their correct order. Leonard Ehrlich and Edith Ehrlich are identified in the summary notes as LE and EE.

RG-50.862.0007 Part 1

Interview with **Siegmund Levarie** (July 24, 1914 – March 7, 2010), the son of Sofie Löwenherz and the late Josef Löwenherz. Interview is conducted in English and German. Interview begins with LE stating: "Today is January 24, 1979 and we are interviewing Prof. Levarie in New York." Levarie talks about Benjamin Murmelstein who was his religion teacher in high school in Vienna; mentions that he graduated high school in 1932; that Murmelstein moved into the same apartment building where Levarie lived with his parents;

[05:12] LE asks the circumstances of Levarie having been granted his doctorate even after the Nazi annexation of Austria; Levarie explains; talks about how he was able to complete his exams and graduate just in time for his emigration to the United States; Murmelstein's assistance in order for Levarie to receive his diploma;

[17:57] LE states that he will now begin to ask questions about Mr. Levarie's father, Josef Löwenherz; LE recounts a lengthy story about what he and EE "had heard" happened to Löwenherz after the war: that members within the Jewish community in Vienna denounced him to the Russians who arrested him and took him to Prague where an investigation was conducted, that he was released and then emigrated to the United States under a visa which he had since 1940/1941; Levarie interjects that his father could have "run away" several times during Nazi rule when he travelled out of the country [to meet with Jewish aid organizations] but that he did not do so; LE states that Jewish functionaries were only permitted to leave the country to negotiate with Jewish aid organizations outside of the Nazi territories through "some sort of hostage system;" Levarie states that this is correct; LE goes back to the immediate postwar period and asks Levarie to clarify "what are the real facts here;"

[21:55] Levarie suggests that the Ehrlichs talk to his mother who can give them a first-hand account, that what he knows he was told by his father after his arrival in the United States but that this has been corroborated by people who knew his father; discusses what happened to his father during the immediate post-war period; his arrest by the Russians; there was never a trial or charge; that he was held for months; nobody in the family was informed about his whereabouts; that after four months of internment he fell and broke his arm and was transferred to a hospital in Prague which informed Levarie's mother who went to Prague; that Levarie's parents never returned to Vienna but instead emigrated via Switzerland to the United States; Levarie talks about his mother who is 88 years old; his one visit with Murmelstein in his apartment in Rome; that he has no feelings about Murmelstein one way or the other; LE and EE ask various questions about Murmelstein and Levarie's father Josef Löwenherz; LE brings up the topic of survivors accusing Jewish functionaries including Josef Löwenherz of having been collaborators or agents of the Nazis; Levarie dismisses this as "stupid rumors;" gives examples of survivors who are "eternally grateful" for having been saved; LE apologizes for "uncomfortable questions of this kind" which are necessary to get to the truth; Levarie states that Murmelstein does not have an "endearing character," that this was already the case when he was Levarie's teacher back in school; Levarie repeatedly refers LE and EE to his mother for answers to questions that he does not have an answer for such as LE's question whether Löwenherz knew what happened to those who were deported and EE's question who compiled the transport lists; Levarie describes the responsibilities his father had; LE, EE and Levarie engage in a discussion about the functions and responsibilities of Jewish functionaries; [37:25] EE asks about papers which Levarie has at his home; Levarie answers that his mother has all the papers with exception of a 40 to 50-page single-spaced formal deposition that his mother gave him which his father had prepared for the Eichmann trial but that his father passed away before he could testify; that his mother gave him the document in order for him to translate it into English for her grandchildren; LE asks whether Levarie's children know what happened to their father and grandparents during the Holocaust; Levarie answers that they know about the Holocaust but that it is hard enough for those who have lived through it to comprehend what they have gone through, let alone the later generations; [39:07] LE states in form of a question that Levarie knows little about what happened; Levarie responds that his father told him at length about the later episode of his arrest by the Russians; he discusses his father; that he must have been "surprised and hurt after the war;" [40:45] LE mentions the arrest of Löwenherz, Stricker and Friedmann by the Nazis in the days after the annexation of Austria; asks the reasons why Löwenherz was released but Stricker and Friedmann were not; Levarie answers that he has asked himself the same questions multiple times over the years and came to the conclusion that the reason is that Stricker and Friedmann were "volunteers" in honorary positions whereby his father was an employee of the Jewish community; that his father had been in an honorary position but then decided to switch into the "highest paid position" when it became available; another reason according to Levarie is that the position which his father held in 1938 was not particularly prestigious; that his father was the top administrative employee whereas the others were figure heads; Levarie discusses the positions of the various Jewish functionaries before the annexation ("Anschluss") under Dollfuss and Schuschnigg; that his father was in a leading position in the Zionist movement; the

elections during which the Zionists got the majority when Friedmann was appointed as President; that Löwenherz, Friedmann and Stricker all were Zionists; [46:20] LE brings up Emil Engel who emigrated to New York City; Levarie states that he had forgotten about Engel but remembers him; asks what his position was; LE clarifies that Engel's position was "Amtsleiter," the equivalent of "Office Manager;" that he was near retirement age, in his sixties, when he emigrated in 1940; LE asks whether Levarie has had any contact with Engel when the recording is interrupted;

[47:25] Recordings stops

[47:37] Recording resumes

Levarie states that his mother is in touch with "some people," maybe Friedmann's daughters; Levarie again refers EE and LE to his mother for more information;

[48:59] LE asks about the circumstances of Levarie's father's death; Levarie states that he died of old age, that he was 77 years old at the time of his death; Levarie rejects the idea that the Eichmann trial had anything to do with his father's death;

[49:53] Recording stops

[49:55] Interview with **Sofie Löwenherz**, the widow of the late Josef Löwenherz and mother of Siegmund Levarie. Part 1 of the interview begins in English and then switches to German. Recording starts with LE stating "Today is January 25, 1979 and we are in Kew Gardens conducting an interview with Sofie Löwenherz."

LE asks about her son's graduation in Vienna after the annexation of Austria to Nazi Germany and Murmelstein's involvement; Sofie Löwenherz explains the circumstances; mentions that whenever her husband left, she, together with a few other "prominent" Jews, functioned as hostages; that she sent her two children Siegmund and Ada into exile in Italy during the time when her husband attended the Evian conference; for this it was important to bring the diploma with them, how Murmelstein assisted her in getting the diploma issued; that Murmelstein was a family friend; begins to give another example of what Murmelstein did for them when she pauses and asks for the tape recording to be shut off;

[56:01] Recording is stopped;

[56:02] Recording resumes with Sofie Löwenherz describing Murmelstein as unpolished, that he lacked manners ("keine Kinderstube"), that he was highly educated even at an early age, how some of his pupils disrespected him in class, that she asked Murmelstein to help many individuals during the "Hitler times;" because she could not leave due to her husband she asked Murmelstein for help on behalf of other people; how his secretary in his office disrespected him; that he deserved it because he lacked manners; talks about her and her husband's relationship with Murmelstein, compares it to a "Schicksalsgemeinschaft;" talks about the Israel Consulate in New York interviewing Josef Löwenherz before the Eichmann trial; mentions a certain Bienenfeld [i.e. Wilhelm Bienenfeld] who was married to a non-Jew and worked for her husband during the war; describes how she and her husband were spared from deportation to Theresienstadt due to Bienenfeld's refusal to be Löwenherz's successor in Vienna and that as a result Murmelstein was deported instead of her husband; the arrest of Rothenberg [i.e. Alois Rothenberg] of the "Palästina-Amt;" Löwenherz's ability to fundraise aid monies from abroad; [1:10:50] Sofie Löwenherz describes in detail the three times that she was summoned to appear before Adolf Eichmann in her capacity as president of WIZO;

[1:13:55] Sofie Löwenherz returns to the subject of her husband being too ill to testify at the Eichmann trial; she leaves the room to retrieve a collection of documents from Vienna which her husband had ordered to be sent to him by Bienenfeld and then gave the Israel Consulate in New York for use in the Eichmann trial; Mrs. Löwenherz received the documents back after the conclusion of the trial. She states that she is blind and cannot see but that the documents are in the very same order as they were when she received them back from Israel. EE reads aloud the title of the document collection: "*Akten der jüdischen Kultusgemeinde Wien 1938 - 1945. Josef Löwenherz gab dieselben dem Vertreter Israels in New York leihweise zwecks Vorlage im Prozess Eichmann in Jerusalem.*" States that she has asked her son to translate the documents into English so that her grandchildren can learn about their grandfather; that the document collection begins in 1938 with the visit to Vienna by representatives of Jewish aid organizations to meet with her husband;

[1:19:36] LE asks Sofie Löwenherz to clarify the circumstances of her husband's arrest after the war; she explains that the main accuser was one untrustworthy individual whose name she has since forgotten and whom her husband "had shown the door" at the end of the war and who denounced him after the war [see also Part 2 in which Mrs. Löwenherz remembers the name of this individual as Benzion Lazar]; talks about a Mrs. "Kerpel" who worked for the community and who phoned Mrs. Löwenherz to let her know that her husband had been summoned by the Russian authorities but that he returned home later that same day; a few days after, Mrs. Kerpel called again to let Mrs. Löwenherz know that her husband had been summoned once more by the Russians but this time her husband did not return and she received no word about his whereabouts; she describes how she searched for her husband but to no avail until months later when she received a postcard from her husband in which he informed her that he was being held in a "Czech camp." Recalls how she continued to search for her husband.

[1:34:30] Recording ends.

Quality: Very good

RG-50.862.0007 Part 2

Interview with **Sofie Löwenherz**, the widow of the late Josef Löwenherz and mother of Siegmund Levarie. This Part 2 of the interview is conducted in German. Mrs. Löwenherz continues to recount her search for her husband, her meeting with the Mayor of Vienna, Theodor Körner, and how she reconnected with her husband in Prague and how he was released from custody. Recalls what Josef Löwenherz told her about his imprisonment, his treatment and his journey. LE asks whether Mrs. Löwenherz knows the reasons why the Russians arrested her husband but she does not know; instead, she shares anecdotes about the Soviet occupation forces in Vienna and their behavior and treatment of the civilian population; LE asks for more specifics, such as the name of the contact who helped Mrs. Löwenherz in her search for her husband; Mrs. Löwenherz interrupts the interview stating that she will call her friend and that maybe she will know the answer.

[17:21] Recording stops.

[17:23] Interview continues with Mrs. Löwenherz talking about memory and how the memories fade over time; EE wants to know whether she ever visited Vienna since then; Mrs. Löwenherz states that she would die if she ever went back; talks about the mistreatment the Jews suffered

at the hands of the non-Jewish Viennese population; describes the order to affix the Jewish star; affirms that Eichmann slapped her husband on one occasion although he did not admit it to her; however she could see how emotionally hurt her husband was that day; when she asked him how he responded to Eichmann, her husband informed her that he told Eichmann: "Sie haben das Recht mir Aufträge zu geben aber nicht mich zu beleidigen." Talks about her husband's strong character; the systematic persecution of the Jews in Vienna; [22:10] LE asks when Josef Löwenherz first learned what happened with the Jews who were being deported to the East; Mrs. Löwenherz states that the first time she "learned the word Treblinka" was from Rudolf Kasztner (1906–1957) when he visited Mr. and Mrs. Löwenherz in their home in Vienna but that they did not know about the existence of gas chambers; makes disparaging remarks about Kasztner; calls his assassination justified.

[24:45] The dialing of a rotary telephone can be heard but Mrs. Löwenherz is not able to complete the call; she states that she knows other individuals who are living in the New York area who might be able to help with the identification of the names LE and EE are looking for; she offers the name of Leo Balaban whom she refers to as Murmelstein's former secretary; states that she and Balaban are in contact and that he lives in New Jersey; discussion about Leo Balaban during and after the war; LE asks for his address and Mrs. Löwenherz gets up to retrieve it; LE and EE ask about the "Kriegsopferverband;" LE asks about Benzion Lazar and Mrs. Löwenherz suddenly remembers Lazar as the individual whom her husband "had shown the door" and who denounced him after the war; discusses the incident between her husband and Lazar; states that her husband paid attention to assembling a good "team," lists some of her husband's staff members: Bienenfeld, Kapralik, Feldsberg; calls them good and trustworthy persons;

[31:54] LE asks about Desider Friedmann's and Robert Stricker's alleged involvement with the Schuschnigg regime that lead to their arrest by the Nazis after Austria's annexation to Nazi Germany; Mrs. Löwenherz explains. Recounts her encounter with Alois Brunner ("Brunner 2") who ordered her to disband the WIZO offices within 24 hours. Mrs. Löwenherz again tries reaching her friend by telephone but the call does not go through. LE asks whether Mrs. Löwenherz has any proof whether it was Benzion Lazar who denounced her husband.

[36:20] The telephone rings and Mrs. Löwenherz answers the telephone; it is the friend whom she tried calling several times during the interview; her friend confirms that the person who denounced Josef Löwenherz was Benzion Lazar; they go over the names of who was the first president of the Jewish community in Vienna after the war and who was the second president; Mrs. Löwenherz asks her friend to clarify whether Leo Balaban (whom she refers to as "Bali") was Murmelstein's secretary or worked in the emigration department; her friend confirms that Balaban worked in the emigration department.

[38:26] While on the telephone, Mrs. Löwenherz asks LE and EE to confirm whether Leo Balaban's address is still current by comparing the address in her rolodex with the address her friend is giving her over the phone: 515 Mount Prospect Avenue, Newark, NJ 07104. Mrs. Löwenherz thanks her friend and concludes the phone call.

Mrs. Löwenherz talks about her friend, Mrs. Brill, and how they met in Vienna when she was assigned to the Löwenherz household as a housekeeper, mentions that Mrs. Brill's husband worked for the community in Vienna and was "one of the first" to be deported to Dachau where he perished.

[45:30] LE asks Sofie Löwenherz whether she knows what happened to Murmelstein's apartment and its contents, including his library, after he was deported; Mrs. Löwenherz states that she does not know;

[46:36] Mrs. Löwenherz begins to recount an anecdote about Murmelstein in Theresienstadt when the recording ends [a few second of warped and inaudible chatter between EE and Mrs. Löwenherz can be heard at the very end of the taped recording].

Quality: Average