TILDE LOWENTHAL, April 11,1978

WH: When and where were you born.

TL: I was born in Markelsheim on the 30th of June, 1895.

WH: Did you grow up in Markelsheim.

TL: Yes. I grew up there until I got married.

WH: When did you get married.

TL: 1924 - December 7th.

WH: Where did you move to after you got married.

TL: To Thalheim bei Hellbronn.

WH: WasThalheim a large town.

TL: No, it was very small.

WH: What did your husband do in Thalheim.

TL: He was a cattle dealer.

WH: Were most of his customers Jewish or non-Jewish.

TL: Non-Jewish and he suffered greatly from this.

WH: From 1924 until 1933, did you have friendships as well as business contact with these non-Jewish people.

TL: Oh yes.

WH: How did things change for you in 1933 when Hitler came to power.

TL: The people were no longer friendly, they pulled back. They didn’t come to the house anymore,they didn’t stand and talk with us anymore on the street, they didn’t ask us anything.

WH: Did any of these people belong to the party or were they active Nazis.

TL: There were some amongst them that I know of. I was only married for 11 years. My husband during the Nazi time so to speak ”er had sich selber durch die Nazi zeit.”

WH: 1935?

TL: That was in 1936. Business became terrible - nothing anymore and that affected him greatly. He was always the type who was friendly and who everyone like and all of a sudden, that was finished.

WH: Was he in the first world war.

TL: Yes.

WH: Was it difficult for him to accept this rejection.

TL: Yes. He didn’t take it lightly. He grew up amongst these people- his parents had lived there.

WH: That must have been awfully difficult.

TL: It was.

WH: Did you have any children.

TL: Yes. We had a son of 10 years old at that time. My son was born in January,1926 and on January 1, 1936, my husband closed his eyes.

WH: Was your son in school in Thalheim in 1936.

TL: Yes. The Volkschule. Then he went to the Jewish school. Then I moved back home to my parents...they insisted so I had to go back home with my child.

WH: Just to go back for a moment. When your son was in school in 1936, there may have been other children in the Hitler Youth. Did your son feel anything like this.

TL: Yes. Naturally he felt it and how. He even felt it in Markelsheim. I sent him to school in Mergendheim. There were more Jews in the Jewish school - more Jews lived there so there were more Jewish children. So I sent him there but he had to go there by train and he came home all the time - every day with something else- thing one said this and that one said that. It was very difficult for me that time with him - not easy. A child with 10 years and no husband.

WH: Did you ever go to school with your son to complain.

TL: No. There was nothing they could do. It was the Hitler time.

WH: How did you explain all this to your son.

TL: Well, he had enough sense already and he knew things were bad, everyday he came home and cried - this one said this and this one said that. Then, I had a brother in Stuttgart who was very friendly with a teacher and my brother said to me we should send my son to this school in Esslingen, it was the only thing that was open in Esslingen in the Waissen schule (orphanage). Waissenhaus in Esslingen am Neckar.

WH: He lived there?

TL: Yes. But this was only good for a few years. Then everything was stormed and the children had to go away from there - they couldn’t stay there.

WH: That was the Kristallnacht.

TL: Yes.

WH: When you brought your son to Esslingen, did he understand.

TL: Es war ihm nicht recht. Absolute net. And how did he carry on. He had to leave home. He didn’t like it but what could we do. We had to put him in school.

WH: That must have been very hard for you too.

TL: Yes. My heart was bleeding. The child didn’t want to go but there was no choice.

WH: How long did you live in Markelsheim.

TL: From 1936 until 1941.

WH: How did things go on from 1936.

TL: In Markelsheim we really didn’t feel that much until the Kristallnacht. I mean we really couldn’t get together with the non-Jewish people anymore - they didn’t want it. But they came at night and brought us things. For example, I had a friend who had a grocery store and also piece goods and she always brought things to me.

WH: Was it hard to go shopping.

TL: Yes. In the stores...well, I always went to my friend where I had no trouble but in the other stores, it was no pleasure. They would give us the things but grudgingly.

WH: Were your parents still in Markelsheim.

TL: My father died in 1938 and my mother I was able to bring with me to America.

WH: What happened in Markelsheim on the Kristallnacht.

TL: They threw in all the windows. We didn’t have a quiet minute during the night, my mother and I. You know how it is in a small town. We lived on the first floor of a two story house and we moved upstairs.

WH: Did they also burn the synagogue.

TL: No.

WH: Did your father have a business in Markelsheim.

TL: Yes. He was also a cattle dealer.

WH: Was he still doing business.

TL: No. Nothing anymore.

WH: How did you manage to live.

TL: We didn’t earn anything anymore. We lived on what we had.

WH: Did you think of emigrating.

TL: Early on, never.

WH: When did you begin to think about it.

TL: I missed to get a number, an application for immigrating to America because I didn’t believe in it since I couldn’t get any affidavit for America. Then, they wouldn’t let me register without an affidavit.

WH: Who told you about registering.

TL: That was common knowledge - from a Jewish organization - the Juedische Oberrat. But I didn’t do it - stupidly but I didn’t do it.

WH: Did you have relatives in America.

TL: My sister left Germany in 1938 - in the fall. They couldn’t vouch with much. In 1938 it was so terrible with getting a job here and always the affidavits weren’t enough. We were three persons. Then a cousin helped and added an affidavit that we could come.

WH: Did you ever think of any other place other than America.

TL: Only America. I also had a brother, the one from Stuttgart who left in 1938 and he was in San Francisco - he had been taken to the concentration camp already, during the Kristallnacht.

WH: Did the Nazis get stronger in Markelsheim after the Kristallnacht.

TL: Of course. Nobody was friendly anymore. Only a few who were nice. Although they always said to me, you don’t have to leave. What could they want from your old mother. Such an old lady still has to go away? But I always said I’m not going to leave my mother here if I can possibly take her.

WH: When did you write to America to try to get out.

TL: Right after Kristallnacht. They knew it here already and they right away undertook to get us out. My sister and brother and I had another brother who left just after the war began, in 1939. He went first to Belgium and then here.

WH: Did you have to move out of your house in Markelsheim.

TL: No. We stayed there until we left.

WH: Did you have to wear the Star.

TL: No. I was no longer there then.

WH: How did it go with shopping.

TL: Well, the farmers always gave me some eggs and milk. We had good neighbors.

WH: Was your son still in the school in Esslingen.

TL: No. That was disbanded after the Kristallnacht and then I sent him also to an orphanage in Dresden. He was young, he had to go to school, he had to learn something. Then, all the Polish Jewish children were sent away from this school and what I went through until I knew that my child was still there. You can imagine. And then I took him home and then it was hard to find something. He just couldn’t walk around. Then I found an “anlernenwerkstaette” in Munich which too him and he stayed there and studied for a year. They still took Jewish children.

WH: How did you find out about all this.

TL: I don’t know anymore but I think it was from the director of the orphanage in Esslingen.

WH: This orphanage was under Jewish direction.

TL: Yes. Rabbiner George, the brother in law of Rabbi George supervised this.

WH: And they made the arrangements for you.

TL: Yes. They helped.

WH: Was your son still upset when he was in Munich and Dresden.

TL: In Munich, he was satisfied.

WH: Did he ever have any trouble with the gentiles.

TL: There were no non-Jewish kids at all. It was isolated, everything was in the school.

WH: After the Kristallnacht, there was the Juedische abgarbe and other taxes.

TL: Yes, we had to register everything but still I didn’t give everything but I still came here with nothing.

WH: Were you afraid of bodily harm.

TL: No. But we lived secluded. My father they took, in fact on a Saturday. It was the first Saturday on which he had to ride. He carried on - such an old man - about 80. This was before the Kristallnacht. On the Kristallnacht, he wasn’t living anymore. But my uncle they mistreated very badly. They beat him up so badly that his whole body was raw. A doctor in the neighborhood said if you want to see raw flesh, go and see (my uncle).

WH: Did a doctor treat him.

TL: Yes. He was decent.

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WH: During the time from 1938 to 1941, ...Markelsheim was a small place and you must have know everybody, did anybody help you.

TL: Well, we really didn’t go out anymore. Some few came to us still at night. If they knew the Nazis were around, they stayed an extra hour and then left when they thought it was safe.

WH: Were the Nazis in Markelsheim local people.

TL: Some of them. Naturally, like everywhere else, there were some but actually not that many in Markelsheim. That’s why we didn’t have to suffer that much. Often, they broke our windows and then I would go to the police (landjaeger) and he would tell me to go home and not to be afraid, he would watch out and make sure nothing more would happen.

WH: Did you think that Hitler would not remain in power for long.

TL: Oh yes. My mother always used to say “strong men don’t rule long.” But it took a lot longer than we would have ever thought.

WH: That must have been terribly hard for your parents. They had spent their whole lives in Germany.

TL: My father never could overcome this. The people used to be so friendly to him on the street and then he would come home and tell, this one didn’t say hello and that one wouldn’t say hello. That hurt him a lot. He often said he would like to know why they wouldn’t talk to him anymore.

WH: Did he ever think he would have to leave (I know he died in 1938 but before).

TL: No. I don’t think he thought about it.

WH: When did you finally get your papers.

TL: In 1941. We came here in June, 1941.

WH: Was it hard for you once the war began in Germany.

TL: Well, we didn’t get things so easily anymore. Jews couldn’t get coffee anymore - that was strictly forbidden but my friend always got me some. I’m still in touch with her. She was very nice.

WH: Did she ever get in trouble for helping you.

TL: No. They left her alone. They knew we had to eat. There was also a teacher who had taught me when I was in school who was always very nice to me. She also was never intimidated. She stood next to me and talked with me when I passed her on the street.

WH: You must have seen people emigrating all the time. Were you ever afraid that you wouldn’t be able to get out anymore.

TL: That fear we had all the time. I always said “just get out, even if I have to cut stones in America - just get us out of here, it’s enough.”

WH: Was your son still in Munich?

TL: He wasn’t in Markelsheim long after I got him in Munich. We left shortly after I picked him up. I had to go to Munich anyway for the Spanish and Portuguese visas.

WH: How did you arrange to leave.

TL: The travel agency in Stuttgart arranged this.

WH: Was this the only route open.

TL: Yes. That was the only way. Once before I had trouble. I mean we got the notice that we should come, we could leave Germany - my son and I first. I didn’t want to leave - I kept saying I wouldn’t leave my mother alone, absolutely not. But everybody said to me that I owe it to my child, you have to go. Your mother is old. But I said I can’t leave her alone. Also then my uncle and aunt had to get out of their house and they moved into our house - we had enough room. This was ordered by the Nazis. And they had a son and daughter who had already left for America. For them, I had arranged everything to leave and they were then able to leave with us - we were 5.

WH: When did you find out that your mother could leave.

TL: Shortly after. We went together to Stuttgart - also my aunt and uncle. The problem was not that we all didn’t have the papers, it was that we only had two airline tickets - for my son and myself. The travel agency had called me and told me I had to be there and first I had to go to Stuttgart. There I was told that the next day I had to be in Eschterdingen (the airport) and we went there with our suitcases and the suitcases were put in the plane and then we were told, my son and I, we had to get out again. The Nazis came. They were allowed on the plane (they needed the seats). So we couldn’t get on the plane - we got our suitcases back and we had to go back to Stuttgart. I didn’t know where my head was standing. What should I do? I went back to the travel agency and he said...that the next day the airport was closed. We couldn’t even leave from Eschterdingen anymore. So the travel agent told me I had to go to Munich with my son and he would try to arrange it that I could leave from there. So I went with my son to Munich by train.

WH: And your mother.

TL: My mother wasn’t with us. We were then able to leave from Munich on the next day. From Munich to Lisbon. My mother was still in Markelsheim with my aunt and uncle.

WH: But they had the papers.

TL: Yes. And then I went to the travel bureau in Lisbon on the next day and told them that my mother and my aunt and uncle were still in Germany. They told me they should come to Lisbon and they would insure them a place to fly. I sent a telegram to my mother in Markelsheim and told her to leave everything standing and go. And this is what they did. We left with what we hd on and what little we could pack in our suitcases. But it didn’t matter because they inspected everything and everything they wanted they took out anyway - in Stuttgart already, they took it out.

WH: How did you get from Lisbon to America.

TL: We flew over Spain - we changed in either Barcelona or Madrid. We were just happy that we were on the plane. Then in Lisbon, I sent the telegram and the day before the ship left...we all had passage on the Exeter...the night before the ship was to leave, my mother and my aunt and uncle arrived. How happy we were.

WH: How did you arrange the payment for the trip.

TL: We paid in Germany for the trip to Lisbon and the trip across to America, my sisters and brothers in America paid.

WH: It must have been very hard to live since you hadn’t been able to earn money in years.

TL: Well, we knew that we had to leave everything anyway so we just lived on it. Anything that was left, we gave to relatives or people we knew still in Germany.

WH: Who met you at the boat.

TL: My sister and brothers picked us up with great joy.

WH: I can imagine. Where did you go on that first night.

TL: To my sister who lived in the Bronx. She took us in. They (consolidated) and later we got a bigger apartment together until I got a little bit settled and then I took my own apartment.

WH: How did you earn a living.

TL: The first four weeks I didn’t work. My brother in law told me to rest a little. I stayed with my sister and brother in law for a year and a half. My brother wasn’t married then and he lived with my sister, and my mother and my son and I. After the first month, I got a job through friends.

WH: What kind of job did you get.

TL: In a factory to sew stuffed animals and dolls.

WH: How did you manage with English in the factory.

TL: I managed.

WH: Were many of the other employees German Jews.

TL: Only my friends. The others were all kinds. I should have worked in American places more. I would be able to speak much better today. That was stupid.

WH: How long did you work there.

TL: Not too long - just about a year. Then I looked for something else. I got a job with Ideal Toys in Queens. I lived in the Bronx and went out to Queens.

WH: That was a long way.

TL: I couldn’t do anything about that.

WH: Did you take your son to school here.

TL: Yes. Then, nights he tried to work so that we could manage. I couldn’t do it alone. My first salary was $11. a week.

WH: How did your son feel about school here.

TL: He learned English so quickly - I used to wonder. And he found out everything so quickly - like getting around. He was happy.

WH: Did you notice a difference between the time that you took your son to the school in Munich and when he started here.

TL: He was a completely different boy. He had to work but...unfortunately he learned a serious life very early, unfortunately. He didn’t have so much good in his life. Nothing but work, work, work since he was 14. Before, his father, the orphanages...all that he went through.

WH: How did he get these jobs at night.

TL: Through my brother in law.

WH: Downtown or in the neighborhood.

TL: Downtown.

WH: What did he do.

TL: In the anlornenwerkstelle, he learned “tool and die.” That was good. He finished high school here. At the end, he went to Brooklyn Tech. He went at night then. He worked during the day. Then he continued in tool and die.

WH: I guess he was too young to be drafted...

TL: No, he was there. He was gone for two years but he was here in America. He was not sent overseas. Thank god that he was spared that.

WH: How did your mother adjust to America.

TL: Good, she adjusted very well. My sister lived on the Grand Concourse and she used to look out of the window and see all those cars - she used to give up counting them. She couldn’t get over it.

WH: That was different than in Markelsheim.

TL: Yes, yes. You are quite right. But my mother adjusted. She didn’t get out too much anymore but anyway. She saw that I got an apartment - that made her happy.

WH: Where did you get an apartment.

TL: On 171 Street.

WH: Why did you move to Washington Heights.

TL: I had friends here. When my brother in law died, then my sister came to live with me.

WH: When you first went into the subways...

TL: That was a very peculiar feeling. Someone was with me the first time and then I got used to it. I was much younger.

WH: What was the biggest change for you between Germany and New York.

TL: Firstly, that we could speak freely, that you didn’t have to watch each step so careful. In the beginning, we were so careful we didn’t want to say or do anything wrong but in time, that went away. In Germany we said “aushalten and das maul halten.”

My mother still has - she is not afraid of the police but...

The feeling - it stays. I don’t think we will ever get rid of it. We have the feeling when we see the police, it must be something.

WH: You didn’t work in Markelsheim. Was it hard to get used to.

TL: At first, it was not so easy but I got used to it. There was no other choice. Thank God, we could get used to it.

WH: What was the hardest thing to get used to.

TL: Going off in the morning and coming home at night. Being away from the house for the whole day. I wasn’t used to that.

WH: What was it like to work in a factory.

TL: I never worked in a factory before. Everything was different. The whole surrounding. I was in Ideal for a few years.

WH: Were you ever back in Germany.

TL: Once in 1970. I was two weeks in Merkendheim and from there, I went to Markelsheim.

WH: How did you feel.

TL: Strangely enough, it didn’t bother me. Those people that I knew were very nice. They acted as if nothing had happened. I stayed with a friend - the one who had the grocery store. We saw people who we knew were not Nazis.

WH: How do you feel about the Wiedergutmachung.

TL: I didn’t get much. My husband died very early and I only get a small pension.

WH: Are most of your friends today German Jews.

TL: Yes. Washington Heights is completely German (laughs).

WH: What did you do with your free time in the beginning.

TL: There wasn’t much. I worked all day and at night, I was busy. On my way home, I shopped. My son came home to eat and I had to cook. I came home, got undressed, and started to wash and cook. On the week ends, i got my house in order. Washing, ironing and cleaning. If you work all week, there is a lot to do.

WH: When your son got out of the Army, did he come back to live with you.

TL: Yes, until he got married in 1959. He married a German Jewish girl.

WH: Did he date other American Jewish girls.

TL: Yes.

WH: Did you prefer the German Jewish girls.

TL: Yes. Actually yes. I don’t know why. But we knew who the family was or could find out.