Key: LF - [interviewee] Leigh Fraser

MS - [interviewer] Marian Salkin

Interview Dates - October 18 & 27, 1993

& November 9, 1993

*Tape one, side one:*

MS: This is a lecture, rather I should say, this is an interview with Leigh Fraser, taken at her home in Ambler, Pennsylvania. This is tape one, side one. The interviewer is Marian Salkin. Leigh, would you be kind enough to tell us a little bit about your childhood, your life in England, a little bit about your family background, and since it's a very interesting story I know it's going to take us a bit of time. So, let's put as much into it as we possibly can. And I know it's going to be of great interest to all of us in the Archive and to students who would be looking at this as well. And my, so my first question, as I say, is would you please just tell us a little bit about yourself, your family, and your experiences as a youngster in England growing up there.

LF: Thank you, Marian. It's going to be my privilege. I was a very lucky youngster. I was born into a very interesting family. My father was a Royal Navy Officer. He was a Captain when I was born. And he made Admiral shortly after. My childhood was spent in Shanghai, China, and then in Hong Kong, and then in Bombay, India, and in various other places in the Middle East. I'm getting a little bit ahead of myself because there are some interesting other people in the family. My mother was a Russian Czarist refugee, and my grandfather was a--her father was a Russian Army General, who was the offspring, the left- hand side of the blanket offspring if you will, of one of the Russian Grand Dukes. He used the name Romanov, which he would have been entitled to, had he been born legitimately. My father's, my grandfather's mother was a Jewish girl. She was the daughter of a banker in St. Petersburg. And my grandfather's father went there to borrow money. Many of the Russian nobles were so frequently in debt. He sort of fell in love, from what I gather, with this young lady. And my grandfather was the result of the liaison. The family, to the horror of a lot of the Jewish community, so I'm told, struck a bargain that Grand Duke Sergei would, in fact, protect the family. There was conscription into the Czarist Army for young Jewish boys at the time, which was almost certainly death. So, Sergei being a man of a little bit more vision, if not very well-trained financially, agreed that he would keep these boys out of the army. And it was a good bargain all the way around, because he was not only good to the young lady with whom he formed a liaison, he was also good to my grandfather. He allowed him to visit with his mother, to remain with his mother actually until he was 11. And then he removed him to complete his education. The grandfather was going home to his mother regularly for vacations, and that sort of thing. He was not allowed to be circumcised, as a Jewish boy would have been, because his father said, "What was the point in doing that?" When he was trying to save other boys, what was the point in exposing him? Because the first order, crude as it may sound, was, "Drop your pants."

MS: Correct.

LF: So, there is the story of grandfather. As a result of his experiences growing up and what he saw, and of course he saw Czar Alexander's pogroms, with which he did not agree, and which he fought mightily to keep his men away from, because he did not want to lead men into a Jewish settlement. His feeling was that it was a terrible thing to do, and he managed to get people sick and have outbreaks of all sorts of things, and never, according to him, took part in a pogrom. He was a great all-around person. He was intelligent. He was a linguist. He was a good army officer. And when I was a youngster, he was both my playmate and my mentor. And this, of course, was in the days before television, and there was no European radio to be had in China. So it was really important to have someone who could share things. And Chinese servants were very nice to us, but they certainly weren't very well-informed about anything. So I had a rather unusual upbringing with him.

MS: Could you just to go back a little way, do you know the name of the Jewish family that your great-grandmother came from?

LF: He never told me. He continued to protect them in that regard. I only know that his mother's name was Rosa. And he would not tell me any more about the family at all. She was dead. The rest of them were dead. It had been a profound shock to them, and he felt that it would be useless, if the time ever came that I went there, for me to walk up and introduce myself--or for any other member of the family. He said, "You know, I, at this point, we have to let the dead past be dead." He was always quoting things. And I think that he was a great shaper of my character. My father was home a lot too, and between the two of them I had some pretty tight upbringing. My mother was fervently, and why, heaven alone knows, but she was fervently Russian Orthodox. Grandfather was much more phlegmatic about religion in all forms. He said it was humanity that mattered, and the devil with the form of the religion.

MS: Was your mother also born in Russia, then?

LF: Yes. She was born in St. Petersburg. And they left during the Russian Civil War. And they had quite, after the Czar's shooting, after the Red Revolution, they left during the time, the Czechs were running the trans-Siberia railroad. And the Whites were fighting, still trying to regain power. And they apparently got on and off that train and walked miles through the forest. And grandfather's troops must have liked him, because he had served with the Cossacks, and they came to their rescue on two or three occasions and got them out of the inhabited areas and finally supplied them with horses. And how the blazes they managed it, I don't know. But they got themselves out of Russia, and back onto the train. And then to Harbin, in China.

MS: [unclear] story.

LF: Or, in Mongolia. And then they wound up in Shanghai, which is where my father and mother met. Grandfather and my father were both voracious readers, and they introduced me to reading at a very young age. I can remember being able to read when I was four years old. I can also remember shocking the family by asking what certain words meant that weren't acceptable that kids should know, that I found in newspaper accounts, and getting roundabout accounts of those. And my father had a brother who was an Episcopal Bishop, not at the time that I was a tiny child, but when we went to England to live. And he also played a large part in my education. And it seemed as though I was always getting some do-right type thing said to me. Grandfather was very fond of quoting Rabbi Hillel. "If not me, who? If not now, when?" And that stuck with me, because it was a statement of personal responsibility more than a question. And that's one of the things that I've always been noted for, is accepting responsibility for my own actions. And it was unforgivable in our family not to accept one's own responsibilities. My father could, absolutely could not stand anyone who lied in any way. We were very seldom punished for our mini-transgressions. We got lectures. But if we lied, then we were punished. And the earliest thing I remember getting a lecture about was being very rude to a servant. I told the servant she couldn't tell me what to do. She was only a servant. And this is the point at which I think responsibility began to be hammered into me because I was made to think about what I had said, which meant sitting on a straight chair. And I don't know to this day whether it was ten minutes, ten hours, or ten days, but I sat there seemingly forever. And then father came into the room and said, "What are you doing here?" And I said, "You made me sit here." And he said, "What for?" And I said, "Because I was rude to Chin Tam." "Oh, that's right. Now you go and apologize if you've thought about it enough and then come back." Which I did. Then he sent me back again to make my bed and pick up my room, which was the subject of contention in the first place. And at that point, when I returned from the second trip, he said, "Come here." And I went and stood beside him. And he said, "Just think about it again, a minute, young lady. What does Chin Tam do for you?" And I, "Well, she brushes my hair." And he said, "And she bathes you. And she mends your clothes. And she dresses you. And she takes you out. And she loves you. She does things that your mother doesn't do sometimes." And I said, "That's true." And he said, "Do you think you have a right to be rude to her because she is 'only' a servant?" And I said, "No sir." And he said, "Well let me tell you about 'only' anything, young lady. And I want you to remember it. I want you to remember that people have dignity, all people, whether they sweep streets, whether they empty honey buckets, whether they sell vegetables, whether they scrub floors, or whether they are mighty kings and princes. They all have dignity. And you're not supposed to take it away from them by making derogatory remarks. Do you ever hear anyone around here allowed to call anybody else stupid?" And I said, "No, sir." And he said, "Why do you think that is?" And I said, "Because it's undignified." And he said, "Yes." Well, I am well into my sixties, and that conversation took place when I was about four or five. And I can quote it almost verbatim, so you can guess it really made an impact. That's the kind of family. We were happy kids. We had to--there were five brothers and one sister, and she was not at all well. Only one of them was younger than me. We had to entertain ourselves, because there was no radio. There was no television. We got books. We got jigsaw puzzles. We got crossword books. We got everything to do something with. And, when we got bored with those things, we were made to race and chase and run around and get some exercise, and we were also taken out by my grandfather, who taught us to ride. And that of course was an interesting experience, because he was a magnificent rider. And he could ride Cossack style. He could lie alongside the horse. He could roll underneath the horse. And he taught us all to do it, to my mother's great chagrin. She was quite sure that we were all gonna die under the hooves of a pony.

MS: [chuckles]

LF: And none of us did. We continued to move around the world, and the older boys went off to school, and then my sister went home to England to school because she couldn't take the heat of India. And...

MS: Your father was on assignment?

LF: My father was on assignment. My father was the British Chief of Staff in the Far East during the gunboat days based in Shanghai. And then we went to Bombay in eastern, in, I'm sorry, on the west coast of India, where he was the commanding officer. And then we went home to England. We'd gone home once in the interval. When I was about four-and-a-half, five, we'd gone home for about a year. And, I didn't think much of England the first time I went home. It was a gray place with people with funny color. Because I was used to yellow people, and brown people. And I couldn't understand all these gray people and all this rain that we incessantly had. Nor could I understand the fact that nobody seemed to make much noise in the streets, because the Chinese are very noisy people in their daily life. And there's always somebody screaming and shouting. And there are always magnificent smells up and down the roads, and along the Shanghai *Bund*. And of course none of those things existed in England. So [unclear] I got used to the smell of fish and chips and hot pies. But, I did get one enormous surprise, because the whole family went. And my grandfather was an opera fiend, an absolute fiend. And he began to go and line up, so as to stretch his allowance. We weren't short of money, but he still wanted to be careful with it; he'd go and line up to get gallery seats, and then at some point in the day I would be allowed to get on a bus, or the underground, and go and join him.

MS: This of course was in England.

LF: In England. And Amah [nanny] would take me, and then she would release me to him at the end of the street. And I would then stand in line and eat all the forbidden street foods that my mother would have died if she'd known we were doing. And grandfather and I would then wait and get, go in, and either get our Standing-Room-Only place, or our place in the gallery. And that was my introduction to opera. And I thought it was a wonderful, magical world.

MS: Which it is.

LF: And of course he knew all the stories, and all the characters. So we discussed them endlessly. And we discussed the various qualities of the singers. I didn't know much of what I was talking about, but I talked anyway. And usually fell asleep on the underground going back to my father's London house, or my grandfather's London house as it then was.

MS: Was your father away from home for long periods of time during...

LF: Actually he wasn't away from us for long periods of time because he kept my mother with him. My mother was an intensely nervous person. I think she never got over her escape from Russia, which was pretty traumatic. And she was absolutely crazy if he was out of her sight for very long. And it wasn't until much later, until World War II came, that he was gone from us for long periods of time. So we spent a lot of time with him, and we sailed, and they went to garden parties and did all the usual social things that happened with overseas postings in those days. And it was really rather a privileged life, a life that's almost vanished now.

MS: How did your father meet your mother?

LF: Oh, that was funny. That was rather funny. Mother, and grandfather had this thing about their money might run out. They did have a fair amount of money, but they had this incredible fear that their money would run out. And so they began doing the most ridiculous things. Grandfather was teaching writing. And he could earn some money doing that. Mother tried teaching French, but didn't have the patience. And she spoke excellent French. Most educated Russians did. The other skill that she had was that she was a magnificent needlewoman. And she started embroidering things. And then she found out that she could make some money by sewing lace on naval officer's uniforms. The gold trim is called lace. And it is a very difficult thing to do, and the Chinese never quite got it right, because there's a certain way to pleat the top ring that goes onto a naval officer's uniform and mother was so patient, and so good, that she learned how to do that very quickly. And she did, she took other sewing on. She took on menial things, like sewing on buttons and repairing things for the same officers that she was sewing on lace. And they went back several times prattling about this absolutely gorgeous Russian girl who was doing all this stuff. And my father had to see for himself. And he went down to get something mended, and to get some lace sewn on, and was smitten. And apparently he didn't have too much of a tongue in those days to say what he wanted. And he kept on going back with various bundles of sewing. And finally one day she confronted him and said, "I have sewn the buttons on this shirt four times." And he said, "Oh, not that shirt." And she said, "Oh yes I have." And he said, "No, not that shirt." And she said, "Don't tell me lies. Here are my initials." [both laughing] She had sewn her initials behind the button, that she'd previously put on. So finally he had to say what he was there for, which was of course, her. And he married her, and the family, of course, was the result. And I think they were pretty happy together, despite mother's outbreaks of temper. And she had a terrible temper. I mean, it was the kind of household where you never knew when my mother was gonna have an outbreak. And kettles of hot water went flying around, knives got thrown across the room [chuckling] and there were some pretty dreadful scenes. And later in life I discovered that I had her temper, but I was much more able to control it. And I also had my father's temper, which was a cold, furious, slow burning rage. And...

MS: Your father, excuse me, your father was, had Scottish descendants?

LF: That's, my father was pure Scot, on both sides of the family. His father was Fraser, and, which of course is the name that I've returned to, having both, been both widowed and divorced. And my grandmother was a Campbell. And they were both extremely nice people. Grandmother was extremely insightful, very helpful, and always very concerned with the people that lived around them, and the people that lived on the farm, in England, to which grandfather retired. And my father's father was an army general officer, a British Army General Officer. He was an engineer. And I got to know them best during the years in World War II. Unfortunately, at the time that they were both coming pretty close to their deaths, because grandfather died a rather lingering death from prostate cancer and bladder cancer, for which there was very little treatment in the 1940s.

MS: Yes.

LF: And grandmother also subsequently died from cancer, having valiantly concealed the fact that she was ill, because she was trying to help take care of grandfather. And they were rather tremendous people. And grandfather was not always a nice character. He got pretty drunk at times, which was one way of controlling his pain. And he wasn't at all nice then. He'd rant and rave and shout and it wasn't very amusing. But, grandmother seemed to be able to handle that. And she had this just enormous streak of humanity. If someone was sick in our village, she would set off with a basket of food, blankets, medicines, and she might be gone for two or three days. If it was a sick child, she'd sit up all night so that the mother could get some rest. If it was a mother that was sick, she'd take over the cooking and the cleaning. And this was a lady who came from a noble family and didn't have to do that sort of thing. But, she said that we all have responsibility for other people. Again, that good old word that runs through our family--responsibility. So, that pretty well sums up, you know, why I am the way I am. I skipped over one thing in starting to talk about England. We spent some time in Alexandria. Father was posted to Alexandria, Egypt. And he went there at the end of 1936. And in the Spring of 1937, my Russian grandfather, Dejya, said that he wanted to take me to Europe. He could see the storm clouds gathering. He felt that Hitler was going to precipitate an enormous war, and he knew that we could never go back into Russia as long as the Soviets were there. But he wanted me to see Europe at first-hand. And it sounds like a braggart to say it, but I was considered to be an extremely intelligent child. And I was absolutely bored with normal lessons. So, they decided that they would give me one gigantic summer long history, geography, and sociological lesson. And grandfather and I traveled all through Europe. We went everywhere.

MS: Leigh, how old were you during this summer that you traveled?

LF: In 1937, that was the summer before I was 11. I was 11 in October.

MS: Yes, fine.

LF: And I was a big child. I, people frequently took me for about 12 or 13, and we were never really treated as little children, beyond the nursery stage. Because we had so many guests coming in and out of the house, and it was part of our social training to come into the room, to behave politely, to take part in the small talk, and in family discussions we were always allowed to represent our own point of view. We were allowed to say absolutely what we thought about anything, as long as we phrased it politely. You could not be rude. We were allowed to swear when we were outside with the horses. We were allowed to express ourselves in the most earthly terms then. But not in the house. And if you were going to take part in a discussion, you were not expected to just argue your point, you were expected to contribute something to it, and to comment on what other people's points of view were, and to try to understand why they had their point of view. It was exceptionally good training, and I think that that was basically at my father's insistence that we did that sort of thing.

MS: A very mature type of--experience for a--really a very young adolescent child.

LF: That's true. That's true. Of course children in those days, you know, here we go, 'those days'...

MS: Yes, right.

LF: Were a lot differently brought up to children today. And, lots of children of my age group were never allowed into the drawing room, except on an occasional visit. That was the difference between us and other children of the day. But certainly no child was allowed to be rude, or to back answer. The thing that was the most wonderful thing about it, looking back, is that it gave us such great training in how to behave in almost any situation. You were literally never at a loss as a young adult because you had all that background behind you. You knew what was expected of you. You knew what you had to do. And, you better learn to be a very good copy-cat in our family because you only got one chance most of the time. If you didn't behave well, Father took you aside and told you precisely what you had done, and made you feel about an inch high, because he told you he was absolutely disappointed in you. He thought that you had more intelligence and more breeding than that.

MS: He guilt-tripped you.

LF: Oh, did he ever!

MS: [chuckling]

LF: And I don't think that that was such a bad thing, though, because it did make you take stock of yourself continually. And life wasn't always a free ride either, because there were boxes that arrived every six weeks from England. They arrived wherever we were. And some of those boxes were marked The Victoria School. The Victoria School was a curriculum planning group in London, and they sent out an entire teaching curriculum and books according to the grade levels that the parents had requested.

MS: I see. So you were being in a sense tutored at home?

LF: That's correct.

MS: All through your European and Indian and China experience.

LF: That's correct. There were no real European schools, but most of the fathers took part in teaching us mathematics and practical things. We got very little in the chemistry, biology thing.

MS: The sciences.

LF: The sciences. But we got lots and lots of math and we got history on a world scale. We got geography.

MS: Well you were living the geography.

LF: And we got all sorts of sociology, world development, and lots of languages, because we were being exposed to languages. And I suppose among the group of parents that we knew, they spoke about ten languages between the various people. And there were three spoken regularly in our household, plus whatever the servants were speaking. And we always picked up some smattering of what they were speaking. We promptly forgot it when we moved onto the next thing, or retained just a few words. But by the time I was sixteen and finishing school, I was completely fluent in three languages. I could read them and write them and speak them, and I could take part in a trilingual conversation, which might begin with Russian, progress to English, back to Russian, and back to French, and then to French, and then back to Russian again, without missing a beat, which was also tremendously useful.

MS: I can well imagine.

LF: Because it teaches you again to be self-possessed and to think on your feet. And it's also very interesting, because the comments that are made by one national group of people are not the same as those that are made by another national group. People don't always see things from the same viewpoint. And the Russians very frequently, even though they were--and we had lots of Russian visitors--even though they were frequently guests and not paying guests either in English households--didn't always like the things that they saw us doing, and didn't like being ruled by the British, even though they were being saved by them--and said so in no uncertain terms, which was pretty shocking to most conventional people.

MS: You mentioned that in your household and amongst your friends there were many Russians that had left the country, of course, and they were, what were they called, they had a name.

LF: Emigrés.

MS: Emigrés, yes, Russian emigrés, and they were harbored in England?

LF: That's right, and many of them who had taken refuge in China usually wound up with one of the English families, or a French family, as a tutor, or a piano teacher, or a governess or something in the family.

MS: So you had contact with them in [unclear].

LF: We had lots of contact with them. And many of them were very erudite people. Musical, well traveled, and certainly usually very well-read. And not at all like the type of Russian emigré that one sees today, who haven't had those privileges. [beeping sound] That's that half minute calling [unclear].

MS: We'll continue this interview in just one moment.

*Tape one, side two:*

MS: This is tape one, side two, of an interview with Leigh Fraser, and we will continue now with her experience in Europe.

LF: When we were in Alexandria the year that I was ten, when I was going to be eleven, at the end of October that year, they decided that I'd been such a pest in the home-tutoring sort of classes that we had, and my grandfather proposed to my father that I be allowed to go with him to Europe. My mother didn't want me to go. She was very afraid. Grandfather had a very prescient sense of what was happening in Europe. He used to refer to Hitler as, "That very bad man who is going to make this world change." And his argument for taking me was that I should see Europe as it was. I was considered to be pretty intelligent, and they thought that this might really spark my interest in world history, and that it would also be something that I would remember all my life if the world did change. And of course they proved to be exactly accurate in that. So, in the Spring of 1937, just after Easter, we set off from Alexandria and we went to Greece. And we took a car in Greece, and we drove up through Albania, funny little country on the Aegean. And then went into Italy. And that was the first country after Greece. We didn't spend much time in Greece, and Greece wasn't considered to be tremendously important politically. But, Mussolini was making an awful lot of noises, and you know, Mussolini was, of course, later known as the "Jackal of Europe". But for a jackal he was making some very loud noises in the mid-1930s. And Hitler did, to some extent, model his behavior on Mussolini until he outgrew him, and then began to laugh at him.

MS: At this particular time, of course you were quite young. You said you were about ten or eleven, were there any specific antisemitic statements or actions that you could determine or were aware of at that time?

LF: The only place in Italy that we saw anything like that was when we were in Rome. And grandfather drew my attention to it. Despite the fact that grandfather was half- Jewish, he didn't particularly look it. He was a very tall man. Now, I don't mean that to sound at all derogatory either.

MS: No, no of course not.

LF: But he was a very...

MS: No.

LF: Very tall, very Russian-looking man. He looked extremely Imperial. And he was very, very imposing. He was over six feet tall, and he had a habit of making himself look like a giant, particularly if he was outraged about something. I didn't understand much Italian, but he could manage to get along, and we used a phrase book a lot. It always seemed as though he had a phrase book in one pocket or another. But we went around looking at things. And we got lost one afternoon. And of course there were an enormous number of Mussolini's Black Shirt people, all over the place, all the time. And they were extremely nasty. They were just plain thugs. That whole Axis bunch were just nothing but thugs, as history later proved. We somehow in getting lost managed to get into Trastaveri [Trastevere]. Trastaveri is the slum section of Rome, and it's intensely Jewish. And it's also a lot of other things, too, but that's, of course, where the Jews of Italy, or of Rome, were pretty much driven to, because it was cheap housing and they were being discriminated against. They were being denied employment, and they were being forced into very sub-standard conditions. And there were some restrictions about going to school, as I later understood. There was one episode in which I really wondered whether grandfather was going to make it or not because we saw a man being beaten by some of the Black Shirts on the corner. And he was an older man. And grandfather, as I said, could get pretty outraged. And he went across the street in about four strides, yelling, "*Basta*! *Basta*!" "Stop!" And these two that were beating the old man were so shocked that they turned to look and see who was yelling *Basta* at them, prepared to defend themselves. And literally, when grandfather began to yell and storm at them, with his rather imposing, somewhat regal appearance, they just fled. They literally fled. And I ran across the street from where grandfather had left me, and we picked the old man up. And he was Jewish. He was thanking my grandfather, and my grandfather was talking to him. And they were making out fine, because grandfather had a fair command of Yiddish. And with the exception of the Russian Jews, most of the Jews of Europe spoke Yiddish.

MS: Absolutely.

LF: I know it's a Germanic language, but it spread almost universally in the Jewish communities. And we took this man home. And he hadn't managed to complete the family shopping, which is what he was doing, when these people beat him. My grandfather stayed with the family to help take care of him. The woman was sobbing, and the other adult members of the family hadn't come home. This was the grandfather of the family that these people were beating. And I took the shopping basket and got my grandfather to write a list of the things that they wanted. And I didn't know how to speak any Italian, but I went out and did the shopping, and came back with the shopping basket. I just took one of the little kids with me to show me where to go. And he explained to everybody that I was carrying the basket and doing the shopping because the Black Shirts had beaten his grandfather. And I think some of the shopkeepers probably gave us an extra pile of something or other or a few extra pieces of bread, because they were trying to show that they were sorry. That quarter was practically destroyed in a night similar to the "Night of the Long Knives", during the war. And of course Mussolini did allow many of the Italian Jews to be deported. And they had their own little Final Solution. Excuse the sarcasm, but--That's a pretty terrible expression. And their lives were not fun in 1937.

MS: This was...

LF: And the war didn't end for Italy until 1943, '44. And then of course the Germans kept it going in the north much longer.

MS: That's correct.

LF: Even after the Italians gave in. So they had a very unfunny almost ten years of it.

MS: Were there other places in your experience that summer through Europe that you had a sense of what was happening to the Jews?

LF: Yes--The--journeys through the center of Europe weren't terribly remarkable. They were pretty, they were interesting. Grandfather, of course, was a very lively companion, and he knew something about almost every place we were going to. We went to Yugoslavia. We went to the mountains in Croatia, to the area where the present conflict has been going on. We went to Sarajevo and he explained about the assassinations of Grand Duke Ferdinand, and how that had led to the beginning of World War I. And we began to talk about fanaticism because he talked about the Serbian student who had been the assassin at that. And I think this is where he began giving me my sociology lesson about what was going on in Europe. He wanted me to see Russia, and he took me to the very edges of Europe, without going into Russia, because of course he couldn't go, being a former Czarist. He would have been killed. And that would have been the end of me, too. So, he did take me to Romania. And after that, into Poland. And we weren't in Poland long the first time, and we went on up to the Baltic States. There was a distinct antisemitic feeling in Lithuania. Not so much in Latvia. Not so much in Estonia. But the Lithuanians have some very nasty characteristics as a people. And there was a lot of Jew-baiting going on. And there were some restrictions being imposed on the Jews there. And people were quite fearful, and not very trusting. And that was one place where we didn't really truly have much fun. And of course what we were doing up in that area was, grandfather was getting me to the Gulf of Finland. And, so that I could at least look across the water...

MS: And to...

LF: To Russia.

MS: And see Russia. Interesting.

LF: And, we left before I really understood some of the hateful things that were being said. And then we went back to Poland. Poland was ghastly. We saw lots of things. I have this wonderful series of photographs in a book by Roman Vishniak about European Jewry as it then was. And it's frightening to look at those people who didn't have much. And lots of those photographs were taken in Poland. People were just, they were so ordinary. They were bakers, shopkeepers, porters, and porters worked very hard. They towed huge loads of boxes through the street and harnessed themselves to the carts, like horses. And they weren't very well-dressed. And, in the Jewish quarters of the villages, the *shtetls*, they were not very comfortable. They lived in dreadful conditions, literally hovels. Some of them were so poor that their kids didn't have shoes and couldn't go out in the winter time. And Poland is an intensely Roman Catholic country. And here are some of my personal prejudices coming out, because for such a so-called "Christian" country, their behavior was remarkably uncharitable.

MS: Interesting, yes.

LF: I won't even just say un-Christian. Un-charitable. Lacking in all understanding that anyone else could hurt, that they could bleed, that you could hurt them by words, and hurt them by denying them certain places in the natural order of things in a country. And it was pretty terrible to realize that children, who were the same age as me, were being denied the right to go to school. Couldn't go to school. The Jewish shopkeepers were being locked out of their shops so they couldn't earn a living.

MS: And this was, you saw this happening in 1937.

LF: This was in 1937. And then, and we stayed very frequently in small inns. But because grandfather was such a talker, and because he understood people, and because he was trying to show me something, we went into many of the Jewish quarters in the smaller towns. And then we wound up in Warsaw, which was pretty grim.

MS: And yet Warsaw was a cosmopolitan city, compared to the *shtetls* that you witnessed.

LF: Supposedly. Supposedly. But, there was a very uneasy rubbing of shoulders. You could feel it. It was not the usual, "Well, you stay on your side of the fence and I'll stay on my side," or like watching one cat arching its back and trying to scare the daylights out of another one. It was uglier than that. There were always gangs of youths around, on the edge of the Polish-Jewish quarters. And there were invariably some sort of scuffle, or a fight. And we saw a lot of small degrees of physical violence. Not organized, official violence, but just generalized nastiness. An ugly, ugly feeling that one set of people were the haves, and the others were not going to be allowed to have it. Not that they were have-nots, but they weren't going to be allowed to have it. Whether they deserved it or not. And I find it frightening, and found it frightening even then...

MS: I can understand.

LF: That one set of people could determine the future of another set of people, not on an intellectual basis, not on a moral basis, but just on sheer strength. And what we were seeing was, as far as I was concerned, a morally bankrupt people. I knew the difference between right and wrong. And what I was seeing was very wrong.

MS: Did your grandfather comment about these situations to you?

LF: Oh lots of times.

MS: Yes.

LF: Lots of times. We would go away from one of these things and he'd say to me, "Did you see that? Tell me what you saw. Tell me what you thought about it. Why was it wrong? What were they doing? Do you think those people deserve to be treated like that? Do you think it was right? Why wasn't it right?" And he really made me think about it. "Why was it wrong for that man to push that woman out of his shop?" We saw a Jewish woman try to go into a shop. And a man hollered at her that he didn't want any dirty Jews in that shop. I didn't understand what he was saying, but grandfather did. And grandfather went up to her in the street, and asked her what it was she was trying to buy. And whatever it was, she told him. And grandfather then told her to wait at the corner and he would go and get it for her: And he went into the store, and got it, and came back out. And I asked him why he did that. And he said, "Because he doesn't have the right to deny to sell those things if he's in business. And I wanted to see if he really didn't have the things, because he told her he didn't have what she wanted and he didn't want any of these people in his shop, so rudely put. But he did have it. He was lying.

MS: Sure.

LF: And that was just another one of the things that I'd been taught was wrong. And grandfather, in full view of the man, who came out to watch him, because he was quite a figure to see when he walked around, in full view of the man, walked over and handed the woman the things, and refused her money.

MS: My heavens.

LF: And then walked back and spat at the man...

MS: [chuckles]

LF: Who didn't dare do anything! I mean, you know, there are some very ugly expressions for people like this man, and one of them begins with "Chicken".

MS: [chuckles]

LF: And although we chuckle at them, they weren't at all funny, and they were terribly frightening. Really terribly frightening. And Germany was even more frightening.

MS: It would be interesting to hear of some of your experiences in Germany at this period of time, if you can recall.

LF: Germany was terrifying at times. And, I knew, of course, that grandfather was half-Jewish. I'd been told this. He had told me bits and pieces about the family. He told me never to say that in Germany. Never, never, never, because we would not get out alive, unless we were remarkably lucky. I was to be exactly what I am, the daughter of a British Naval officer, with my British passport, which makes of course no reference to one's religion. And of course I wasn't being brought up as Jewish either. I just knew that I was partly Jewish, and I knew that it was wrong to castigate anyone for what they believe in. And that has absolutely nothing to do with being Jewish or being Christian or being Hindu or anything else. That is people's right. And if they believe in nothing, well then I pity them. But, he did say that for our safety, I should be very English. And I should not utter one single word that would make them think in any way that I understood what was going on. And he himself became very much the Imperial Prince. I have never seen him so rude to so many people as he was. He was, he out-Prussianed the Prussians. He was completely Imperial, utterly demanding, and laying down the law. And the Germans are strange people in that regard, because if you give them orders, they'll rush to obey them if they think you've got the authority. And there was no denying this figure of authority. And people bowed and scraped to him. But we saw ugly things. We saw people being dragged off the street.

MS: Yeah.

LF: Hitler's Brown Shirts were everywhere. There was plenty of evidence of Gestapo, and lots of people looking over their shoulders. And lots of evidence in Jewish sections of stores being closed rather abruptly.

MS: And this was even before *Kristallnacht* and...

LF: Oh yeah.

MS: The pogroms.

LF: It was...

MS: But of course the Nuremberg Laws [Nürnberg]...

LF: It was a year before *Kristallnacht*.

MS: Yes.

LF: But it, the, but the Nuremberg Law had been passed.

MS: Passed.

LF: And so Jewish property was being confiscated. Jews were being denied the right to go about their daily business. They were being denied the right to go to schools. Synagogues were being, if not...

MS: Closed.

LF: Well, they were being closed, and those people who looked obviously Jewish were being harassed on the street.

MS: Did you...

LF: And you know that there are certain facial characteristics in certain parts of Europe that mark you immediately. And, of course, the Germans made such an enormous mockery of that. They caricatured the Jew--and I saw those caricatures--as being vile, and as being misshapen, and less than human. And I couldn't understand this at all.

MS: There were posters in many of, in many places, that were publicly displayed, of cartoon versions of the Jew.

LF: That's exactly right, and I saw those. And I was kind of horrified by them. And I asked grandfather why they were putting things like that up because we had books at home that were political cartoons from the 18th century, by a man called Hogarth, William Hogarth. And these things were more obscene than, and Hogarth could be pretty ugly, and I knew that. I'd been exposed to that kind of art. And I knew what political cartooning was. But these weren't political. These were hate, pure, unadulterated, ignorant hate. And I never saw anyone that looked like these cartoons. They were just dreadful. They--portrayed these people as being only half-human.

MS: Absolutely.

LF: And of course that was their attitude.

MS: Yes it was.

LF: And this is something that was very well explained to me by my grandfather. And of course my father had told me before we set off that we would be going to Germany, and that I was to obey grandfather implicitly. And if he told me not to do something, not to say something, I was not to do it. And grandfather told me, "For your safety and mine, you will not display any sympathy when these things are being done, but we are going to be taking reports back." And that was one time where I didn't know what was going on with him because I never saw him really do much to help anybody overtly. But, it seemed to me that he wrote something down every night. And when we got to the British Embassy, he turned lots of pieces of paper over to people in Berlin.

MS: In Berlin?

LF: Yes.

MS: At, to the...

LF: At the British Embassy.

MS: British...

LF: Because he had been told to take me there to register me, and to carry a letter from my father. And he turned lots of pieces of paper over. And when we left Germany, when I asked him about it, he said, "You didn't see anything of the sort." And I knew he was telling me a lie, and I couldn't understand that because nobody in our family lied. But he emphatically denied it and told me that I was mistaken, that I'd got the letter and some other papers muddled up together in my head. When we left Germany to go back, he ex-...

MS: To England?

LF: No, to go back to Alexandria, Egypt.

MS: Alexandria, O.K.

LF: He explained to me then what had happened. Actually we left Germany and went into France. And that's when he explained to me, "I'm sorry. I did tell you a lie. But it was very dangerous in Germany. Very dangerous. And what I had been doing was noting various events and then handing them over to the British Minister as evidence that this sort of thing was beginning."

MS: Interesting. Because you would think that the Ministry itself must have been quite aware of...

LF: I'm sure they were aware, but father had said that grandfather was acutely observant and had apparently asked him to note the most blatant of the things that we saw. And to make them aware that it was going on all over the place.

MS: Very interesting.

LF: And of course Nuremberg was just such a center of hate. We only spent about four hours in Nuremberg, and it was like being in a city full of blood. There were Nazi flags everywhere. There were Hitler youth groups everywhere. The people didn't seem to give a damn about anything except this mad, blind obeisance to Hitler.

MS: Was this shocking to your grandfather?

LF: It was terrifying to him. It was absolutely terrifying to him. He said it was worse than when he'd left Russia, that what was happening when he left Russia was much more organized and sort of committee-based. He, his feelings in Germany as he expressed them, were that this was a--he used a Biblical word--a Baal-like obeisance to a false god.

MS: Hmm. Baal.

LF: He said, "They've made an icon out of those flags." And, of course, I knew what an icon or icon was. And he said, "They're acting as though they are a religious object, and they are representative of this man."

MS: He was comparing the Hitler approach to the Jews as a, to the Russian approach to the Jews, saying that it was much worse in Germany. Their reaction to the Jews is much worse than what he had experienced...

LF: That's right.

MS: In Russia.

LF: And afterwards when I heard him, I was in the room when he was discussing with my father. And he said, "What they are doing is far, far worse than the pogroms. The pogroms were sporadic."

MS: Right.

LF: And were inspired only periodically and they were dreadful while they lasted, but they weren't a day-to-day continual occurrence, that doesn't excuse them. But he said, "What goes on in Germany is insidious. It's in every bit of daily life. No schools, no shops, no jobs, miscegenation laws. It's designed to put an end to a people."

MS: Absolutely.

LF: And that was the first time I ever heard that expression. And I said to them, "How can you end a people?" And my father said, "There's a word for it. It's called ‘genocide’. Go and get a dictionary and look it up." [sighs] Which of course was always their approach. Go find something and then bring it to me and I'll talk to you about it. And when I found it, and came back, and we discussed it, I began to realize that that's what we were seeing. It was an awful experience.

MS: Oh my.

LF: I didn't like the Germans very much at all. I loved the food that I ate there, because I, you know, I've just, I like peasant-type food. I always have. And, but I didn't like them. They didn't seem to be like people. They seemed to be like big, stuffed, automatic dolls. All of them. All of them. And there wasn't anything attractive. Berlin seemed to be full of, even to my eyes, as a child, seemed to be full of uniforms, and full of brittle, artificial, loud people. Nuremberg, as I said, was like a bath of blood, with these enorm-

*Tape two, side one:*

MS: This is tape two, side one, of an interview with Leigh Fraser. And we are continuing our conversation about her experiences in Europe in 1937.

LF: Well, of course, we did go on from Germany to France, and that wasn't particularly significant. It was a nice part of the trip. Politically, as far as this is concerned, I don't remember seeing anything that one could consider very significant.

MS: Certainly compared to what you had just experienced.

LF: And certainly not compared with what I had just experienced. We had been briefly in Holland. I had seen nothing bad in Holland, and I had seen nothing in Belgium either. And when we left to go back to Alexandria, Grandfather abruptly changed our plans. We went to the south of France and we went from Marseilles on a small freighter, down to the boot of Italy. And there we were dropped off by that freighter, and we managed somehow from, I think, from Taranto, he managed to pick up something else, which took us across to Alexandria. And that's how we arrived back in Alexandria. And then of course began this discussion between my father and my grandfather and I about the trip. And I began to understand some of the things that had happened. Because my grandfather had been very emphatic that he hadn't handed anything over to the British Minister all these pieces of paper I thought I saw. And then during the French leg of the trip, he apologized to me and said he would explain to me when we got back to Alexandria that he had told me a lie but he had told it for our safety because he didn't want me to know anything if I was asked. When we got back to Alexandria, Egypt, and we began to talk about these things, he explained that I had indeed seen him turn pieces of paper over that documented the ill usage of Jews in Germany, but that it was simply not safe for me to know. That what I didn't know, they couldn't extract from me if something went wrong, and if they took us prisoner. And he told me that after the way I had expressed myself in Nuremberg, he could not wait to get me out of Germany. Because I had literally told him that I thought they were all hideous, over-fat, stuffed dolls and automatons and that I didn't think they had any souls. And he made the comment to my father, "The greedy little pig stuffed herself with German food and couldn't be bothered to be polite to them." [both laugh] Which was absolutely true.

MS: Did he express at any time his feelings about Hitler?

LF: Not while we were in Germany, but he...

MS: No.

LF: Certainly did when we got out of the country. And he didn't have much complimentary stuff to say, and some of it was certainly about his ancestry. Grandfather was quite colorful sometimes. Russians make a real art of swearing.

MS: Yes.

LF: It's not the same few repetitive bodily function words that one hears in this country. They just make a real art of describing exactly what they think of the person. And when he was talking to my father, some of his more colorful soldier expressions came out, and I don't think Hitler would have felt very complimented. And certainly had he expressed them in Germany, that would have been the end of us. I've never seen such fanatical people as they were then. And of course I didn't realize that I was going to see them under different circumstances later. But what I saw, I didn't like. I didn't really understand it. Because I'd never seen people behave like this.

MS: And it made an indelible impression.

LF: And it made a tremendous impression on me. And when people talked about them later, during the war, when we were safely back in England--safe except for the bombing--I knew exactly what refugees were talking about when they arrived; when we had contact with people who had come across on French fishing boats and we had contact with the French, free French. I knew what they were talking about when they talked about Europe being raped, and about the Germans literally disregarding everybody and using everybody.

MS: What year did the f-, did these first refugees start coming into England, that you can recall?

LF: Well, we went home to live, you know, from Alexandria we went to Malta. And we went home to live during the Munich Crisis of 1938, September 1938. We made a pretty swift trip from Malta to Toulon, and the French Navy then fed us and assisted us to get to Marseilles. There were lots of us. And we had then to catch the train to Paris. And...

MS: With you on it, that leg of you journey back to England, do you think there were some refugees in amongst, in, [unclear]?

LF: Not on that. That train was crammed with basically English refugees.

MS: English nationals.

LF: English nationals, British nationals, and their immediate family, and a few normal French travelers. But even they were pushed pretty much off that train. And...

MS: Well, were you being asked to return? Now the war was not that imminent at that time.

LF: Well, the Royal Navy apparently thought so, because they had literally told us to leave Malta and get home. Malta could not have sustained the number of us that were there. You know that the Maltese almost starved during the war.

MS: Yes.

LF: Under the German bombardment. And when we left, about 400 people left, families, extended families, grandparents that were visiting. You know, because Malta was a very, very active British naval base at the time. And look at our family alone. My brother, my grandfather, my mother, my amah [children’s nurse, nanny] and me. That's five of us. Now, it isn't too hard to get to 400 when you consider that there were a vast number of Royal Navy families, all of whom had two or three family members going home and sometimes a nanny. You know, which would be...

MS: Right.

LF: The same as our amah. So, almost every family was leaving in three or more, in a unit. Well, that can add up very, very quickly.

MS: Where was your sister and your brothers at that time?

LF: They were in England, in school. So they were, my older brothers were already in the Royal Navy. My sister was at school, and one other brother was at school. And, it was just this pure whack of fate that they had decided to completely educate me, and that I had had this trip, you know, that I wasn't already home in school.

MS: Right.

LF: And, of course, my younger brother was Mother's baby. And Mother was not going to be separated from her baby, which he didn't like. And he was profoundly grateful to get home and be allowed to be a schoolboy. Because he felt like he was, as he expressed it, a sissy, being kept at Mother's apron strings all the time. Not that she ever wore an apron. [both chuckle] And, when we got back to England, we stayed in London for a while. All of us needed things done to our teeth. We needed different clothes because we'd been wearing primarily Mediterranean clothing, and none of us had proper English coats and winter clothes and any that we'd had before were certainly out-grown. So, there were some enormous shopping trips, and of course with a war coming it was determined to buy as much of everything as we possibly could, that would sustain us for a while. And, Father didn't join us until much later because he had to finish his tour. There, the family has a house in London, right behind Selfridges, on Oxford Street. And, the house isn't on Oxford Street, but that's where Selfridges is.

MS: Yes.

LF: It's a, the house is actually just off Baker Street, two blocks north of Oxford Street. And I remember endless trips to the dentist, to go shopping, to go to the opera with Grandfather. And, it was at that time--in answer to your question--that I began to notice what a tremendous number of accents there were and different languages being spoken. And I began listening, and asking questions. And principally asking questions of my grandfather and of my Uncle Tim, my father's brother, who was an Episcopal Rector, a Church of England Rector, which is of course the same thing as Episcopalianism. And he said, "Oh England's full of refugees, and there are more every day. They are leaving Germany..."

MS: In hordes.

LF: And he said, "Some of them come and stay only a while and if they have money or friends, go on to Canada or to America or somewhere else. But many of them who do not have much money or anywhere else to go are staying here." And I said, "Germany was horrid. Are they all coming from Germany?" And he said, "Germany and the countries close to it." He said, "You know what happened that brought you home." And I said, "Well, I kept on hearing things about crisis, and war, about Hitler and the Prime Minister. And I'm not sure why the Prime Minister went kowtowing to Hitler.

MS: That was Chamberlain.

LF: It was Chamberlain, who was of course absolutely the supreme avoider. You don't get anywhere by pandering, and obeying bullies.

MS: As history tells us.

LF: And, we already knew that anyway, but no one had listened. Absolutely no one politically had listened in England. I was too young to realize that at that time. But it only took that experience, and reading daily English language newspapers, and hearing the commentary around the family for me to begin to realize that we were indeed very much in danger of all those fat, overstuffed, doll-like people that I had seen in Germany. And there was a big steel juggernaut behind all those red flags that we had seen. And then, of course, we went quite regularly to the cinema. And in those days, there were newsreels, very up-to-date newsreels, that were changed about twice a week. And...

MS: Of what was happening in central Europe and...

LF: We began to see the Nazi rallies, Hitler ranting and raving from various balconies and podiums. We began to get translations of Goebbels and his propaganda. And it became tremendously obvious from the noises our own government was making that they no longer had any faith in Hitler's promises, and that in effect, Chamberlain saying, "Peace in our time," was just empty gabble. And the man in the street in England was beginning to say that, "That stupid so-and-so's got to go!" And they weren't complimentary about him at all.

MS: And at this time I think Czechoslovakia had already been overrun?

LF: There had been the Austrian *Anschluss* and Hitler had made some promises and then of course he just completely marched into the Sudetenland. And it just seemed that all of Europe was being swallowed up in this enormous cancer-like thing that was spreading out from Germany. It seemed that there was a mouth here that gobbled up this country, and a mouth there that gobbled up that country.

MS: And it didn't, and it must have sent shock waves through England obviously?

LF: Oh, terribly, terribly. And it's true that we're an island, but we're only 21 miles from the coast of France. And despite all the noise and the bombast, and the British lion’s roar, we weren't ready for war. We had been sticking to the terms of the Washington Naval Treaty, the London Treaty of 1930. We hadn't been rearming. There wasn't going to be a war! There were a lot of people who had been crying there was going to be a war, in Parliament, and publicly, in other places. And they were all being called scaremongers. And Britain had its own fascist group too, under Sir Oswald Moseley, with his Black Shirts, which was exactly modeled on the European stuff. They were later interned, and Lord Reedsdale's daughters, the Mitfords, and I know that Americans have heard of Nancy Mitford. They were a very well-educated family. Nancy Mitford was an author. Unity absolutely fell in love with Hitler. She visited Germany. I mean, they were just vocally upper-class fascists. And one of the Mitford girls married Sir Oswald Moseley, and these blithering idiots used to parade up and down behind Nazi flags, jack boots and bands and *sieg Heils*.

MS: Right there in, in...

LF: Right in London.

MS: London?

LF: And there are some intensely Jewish quarters in London, notably in the East End...

MS: Right.

LF: Just outside the city is Whitechapel. And the area where Petticoat Lane is, the famous open-air market. That's all extremely Jewish. Bethnal Green, Stepney, those were the areas where Britain's Jews lived. Not because they were forced into them, not because it was a ghetto, but it was very convenient for trains into London to work. There was antisemitism in Britain, yes, ugly remarks, stupid things, but very seldom did it escalate into any kind of violence. It was not condoned by the government, and if anyone was caught committing any overt, punishable act, then they usually got pulled away to the courts, and the courts nearly always came down on the side of the complainant, rather than on the side of the defendant. It's a pretty orderly country. And there was, I will say, yes, I've heard antisemitic remarks, but I've also seen Jews occupy places of...

MS: Very high.

LF: Great prominence.

MS: Yes, very high places.

LF: And I might remind you that there was a great precedent set for that back as far as Queen Victoria, because Benjamin Disraeli...

MS: Yes.

LF: Of course, was her Prime Minister.

MS: Right.

LF: It's true that people occasionally shunned Jews socially, but they certainly didn't after a few prominent marriages were made. Lord Mountbatten's wife, Edwina Ashley, was the niece of a converted Jewish banker. He did convert to Christianity, but...

MS: That’s interesting.

LF: She had a great fortune from her uncle, who was one of King Edward's friends. And there was much less remark on an antisemitic basis after that...

MS: Right.

LF: Because she had married into the Royal Family. And it was quite well-known that many of the Royal Family were friendly with politically and banking prominent Jews, the Rothschilds, for example, and they were always treated with respect. And so was the average Jewish waiter who worked at Lyon's Corner House, or who sold you your sandwiches when you went to the race course, or who drove the London taxi in which you rode. You didn't see swastikas and hate things. And no shop windows got smashed. And when Moseley started his stuff, the police turned out in force. And he could strut the street and yell all his slogans, but there weren't any Crystal Nights in London.

MS: No.

LF: Thank God.

MS: Thank God is right.

LF: However, that didn't stop what was going on in Europe. And Hitler was very definitely intent on taking over as much of Europe as he possibly could. And as events later proved, and all the things that we had seen on our trip that promised to be a total nightmare were becoming so.

MS: It's an amazing thing that you had this experience just prior to everything coming into full bloom, so to speak.

LF: I think that it's largely due to the fact that my grandfather thought that it was an experience I should have. And it later stood me in very good stead. I didn't realize how much a part that trip was going to play.

MS: In your life.

LF: In what was going to happen to me later, but it did. And in actual fact, it played a part in me being selected to go on the trip to the camps.

MS: Well we'll get to that, which should be a very interesting thing to hear...

LF: And of course--you know, to skip a little bit over what was going on, you know, war came to England, because of the inv-, Hitler's invasion of Poland, and because we stood by the Polish-French Treaty. And war came to Britain on the 3rd of September, 1939. And for the, my father was back in Britain by that time, thank God. I was going to a very nice girls' public, which is private school, of course.

MS: Yes, right.

LF: And we were nicely set in the country. Father was the Third Sea Lord, responsible for naval supply, naval repair, and ship building programs. And he was in London, but he came home weekends until after the outbreak of war, and then he usually came home about every third weekend after that. We went to live with my grandfather--my father's father--and my grandmother, on the family farm, where there was plenty of room and an enormous old house.

MS: Was your mother's grandfather with you?

LF: My mother's father was with us, yes.

MS: Well, yes, I'm sorry.

LF: And...

MS: I meant your grandfather.

LF: And life was fairly normal, I think, for, you know, a good part of 1939, until, of course, war was declared. And then, Father explained to me that he wasn't going to be home very much, that Grandfather Fraser could not run the farm because of his illness, and that Grandmother wasn't strong enough to do it, and there wasn't anybody else to do it. And he couldn't leave Grandfather Romanov in charge of the farm because he just didn't understand the British workman well enough. As sympathetic a character as he was, he would have been absolutely awful as far as the British workmen was concerned because he had a very imperial attitude, and they would have told him to go fly it.

MS: [chuckles]

LF: So, it was explained to me that instead of being a weekly boarder and coming home every weekend, I was now going to become a day girl, and I was going to ride the bus to school, or go with one of the local businessmen or lawyers or doctors, you know, and catch whatever ride could be arranged for me. And my curriculum would be changed because I would have to spend more time at the farm. And I would come home every night. And, that was the end of childhood. I was now 12, pushing 13.

MS: So you...

LF: And...

MS: You were taken away from your public school [unclear]?

LF: No, I continued to go to the school, but on a, on the basis of being a day girl instead of being a boarder.

MS: Rather than, O.K., oh, I see.

LF: And...

MS: But you remained at the same school.

LF: I remained at the same school, which had been selected because I had pushed so hard for that particular school because of its academic standing. My sister was going to a much more socially prominent school, and I didn't give a hoot about it. I had tried a week there and I had run away.

MS: [chuckles]

LF: And, they had been so scared that they gave in to me and let me go to Cheltenham Ladies, which had a far better academic reputation than where my sister was going, which was more the finishing schools type of place. And I began a servitude, and I call it that, although it really wasn't, because I had tons of personal freedom, that began in September of 1939 and continued until I joined the Navy in October of 1943. I began a series of days that, where I got up at 3:30 and was over in the milking sheds before 4 o’clock. And rushed in, and grabbed something for breakfast, and changed clothes, and threw myself into school clothes, and generally fell asleep, either in the bus or whoever's car I was riding in to Cheltenham, which was where the school was. And that was a 30-mile ride.

MS: Each way?

LF: No, it was actually about 18 miles each way, so it's...

MS: 36 miles.

LF: A 36-mile round trip. And my curriculum was retailored so that I would have an earlier leaving hour in the afternoon. I was excused from daily French lessons. All I had to do was pass the exams and recite. And I was excused daily math because I was keeping the farm books. As long as I could bring them in and show that I was bringing them into trial balance I got my math grade. I still had to do algebra and geometry, to my great chagrin, because I did not like geometry at all. I kept on with all the other subjects. And I was in pre-college prep course. And, school's differently arranged in England.

MS: Yes.

LF: And you usually begin this at about 11. I was taking Latin, and I was excused another language because of the--French and the Russian proficiency in the household. And I was excused most of the daily calisthenics things and stuff like that. That's how they managed to rearrange my schedule because I was getting all of that on the farm. Heaving feed sacks around and pushing recalcitrant cows around. And I virtually married a herd of cows.

MS: [chuckles]

LF: 360 strong. And I oversaw the milking on a daily basis, twice a day, and those cows don't know whether it's Christmas, Easter, Passover...

MS: They have to be milked!

LF: Or, Ramadan! They don't care either. All they know is, "Moo!" They want to be milked twice a day. So, that was the daily routine, and then it was supper and homework and falling into exhausted sleep at 9 o’clock at night, or 9:30 at night. And sometimes getting up in the middle of the night and prowling the house to make sure that nobody had left any lights on and that we weren't contravening the blackout laws. Rushing in to see my mother, fighting my mother once a week because she wanted some supplies that weren't obtainable in war-time England, and that nobody was stocking anymore, complaining mightily to my father on the telephone, or when he came home, about the various things that were going on. And struggling to manage the invoices and all the various things. And, of course, then there are things like little pigs being born and horses that have to be curried. Now my Russian grandfather took over all the horses, both the riding horses, and the work horses. And we were very fortunate because we had four great big Shire horses, Clydesdale type horses. And, since there was going to be a petrol shortage, it was very, very urgent that we keep the horses, and keep them in good condition. And he adored horses, so he took over that whole job, which was an enormous job for one man, to feed them, to clean them, to work them, to train them, and to clean up their surroundings and make sure they got their proper care. And he gave them most of their veterinary care himself.

MS: So that was a tremendous help to you of course.

LF: That's correct.

MS: This had to have been a very large under--I'm not speaking of the undertaking, but the farm had to have been enormous.

LF: The farm was 580 acres. And it is spread over orchards which just climb up a chalky hill, which forms part of England's largest northwest to, I'm sorry, southwest to northeast escarpment. And it forms the western end of that. And it's called the Cotswolds.

MS: [chuckles]

LF: And we had apple and pear orchards that climbed the hills. We kept sheep up on the hills, later on, which was my doing. It was a way of getting more meat. It was also a way of producing wool and putting land that wasn't otherwise arable to use. We had some woodlands, so there was always wood to be cut.

MS: Was, were the products of the farm useful to, in the war effort?

LF: Oh, absolutely. We had one of the finest dairy herds in England. They were Jersey and Guernsey cows. And every time you see Double Gloucester cheese, you're seeing the milk from our farm. We had a contract with the Gloucester Dairymen's Association, and our butterfat content from that herd was enormously high, so that was food production. [beeper going off]

*Tape two, side two:*

MS: This is tape two, side two, of an interview with Leigh Fraser which we are going to continue at this time.

LF: The farm was large. It was 580 acres. We had apple and pear orchards. All of the food production during the war was very severely restricted by the Ministry of Food. And the kind of labor that we could employ and the way that we could employ people was controlled and governed by the Ministry of Labor. And I became a very good farm manager very rapidly. [phone; tape off then on] And I say that a little bit tongue-in-cheek because I had a lot of help from a lot of friends. The vet was a tremendous help. He was a family friend. The county agent. My grandfather could, both grandfathers, could give me advice while they couldn't physically do anything about it, and fortunately, those workers that were spared to us, who, because they were agricultural workers, were extremely loyal. And they worked very hard. The younger men who did go away to the war were very frequently replaced during times of great pressure by their wives. The women came, and they picked, and they, you know, when it was picking season. They came for haying. They came on other occasions. I did some things that were strictly off-the-record at that time, because I would tell the Ministry of Food that I was going to kill *a* pig, and I would kill three. And I would distribute meat around to some of our workers and to some of the elderly people in the village who were darn nearly starving to death. Because the rations were dreadful in England at the time. Nothing like the things that you're going to hear about camp diets and things like that, but they were pretty dreadful. People were limited to a purchase of six to eight ounces of fat per week. It varied in what came, what was available. Fat comprised butter, margarine, and other cooking fats, principally lard. So, when I killed a pig, it wasn't just the meat. It was the rendering. And I was able to give some of the elderly people who had only one or two ration books and therefore couldn't club their things together to make anything, I was able to give them a little tub of lard so that they could fry potatoes, or make pastry, or even spread it on bread, which some of them did, and then toast the bread. I was able to give them all sorts of awful meats from that, things that we didn't eat ourselves in the house, but they did. Just as people, you know, certain people in this country eat chitlings, well the country people ate chitlings. You didn't throw anything away.

MS: Certainly not in war time, did you?

LF: We rendered everything down. And I used to do the same thing with the cracked eggs from the farm. I would get these people to save their scant little bits of vegetable peelings. I wasn't allowed to sell the cracked eggs. I was supposed to feed them back to my pigs. But I wasn't about to do that except for the ones that were badly cracked and had gotten dirt in, when there were people in the village that didn't see an egg. So, when I went out with my pony and cart and my clean garbage cans to get the garbage, the wet garbage, you know, for the food peelings and things...

MS: Yes.

LF: For my pigs, then I also took out several boxes of cracked eggs, very carefully propped up so that they, you know, they still had the membrane whole, but they might have a crack, so I couldn't sell them. And to each person who was kind enough, according to the number of eggs that I had, and the size of their family, I would dish out two, four, six eggs to them. We all tried to help each other in this way.

MS: Were you affected by bombings?

LF: We were not directly affected at the farm. My grandmother and I came very close to death the second winter of the war because of the 1940 blitz. We went up to London for her to get some teeth taken care of, and for me to see the dentist, and the steeple of the church next to us was struck by a falling bomb, and it fell into the house, and the house next door caught fire. And it was a toss-up as to whether we were going, we had gone and taken refuge in the basement during the air-raid alert, and it was a toss-up as to whether the water that was being used to put the fire out was going to drown us, or whether we were going to be smothered by the smoke. And at one quiet moment during the rescue that I heard and the fire-fighting going on next door, I remembered all the things that I had read about communicating with rescue people. And I picked up something, the cellar was filling up with water, and I had Grandmother sitting up on top of a chest-of-drawers. And I'd made stairs out of the drawers and was standing in some of those and trying to climb higher and higher all the time, trying to keep dry. And I remembered what I'd read about the rescue manuals, and I picked up something and started to bang on the pipes. And pretty soon I heard voices hollering, "Is there anybody there?" And there were standard things, you banged one for yes, you know. And then if they said, "Did you really bang?" You banged three times, so that they knew that somebody really was and it wasn't just a falling thing.

MS: Yes.

LF: So I began to do this series of bangs and then they asked how many people were in there, and I banged hard twice. And they said, "Repeat." And I banged hard twice. "Where are you? Are you in the basement? Bang once, for yes." And I banged again. "Repeat." So I banged again. And after about five hours they got us out. We were freezing. It's cold. England's very far north, you know, it's on the same latitude as Labrador, and it was darn cold. But they got us out. And the most awful night of all, which didn't directly affect us, but affected me profoundly in a spiritual sense. The year that we went home, I was confirmed in the English Church. And of course that's very similar to the Bat Mitzvah rite. It's the same rite of passage.

MS: At approximately the same age.

LF: At approximately the same age. I did that in the Fall of 1938, when we went home. And, I did it where my uncle at that time was the assistant at the Cathedral Church of St. Michael in Coventry, which of course, is the Cathedral that was destroyed by the German bombs on the night of November the 14th, 1940. And we could see fire and smoke. Coventry isn't that far from home. It's less than 50 miles.

MS: From the farm.

LF: And from the hills on top of the farm, hundreds of people came up out of the valleys and the villages. And we stood up on the Old Wool Way, which is where the wool used to be trekked on donkeys during Medieval times, and which goes along the crest of the hills. And we stood up there on that ancient road that goes, really goes back to Roman times, and watched the glow and the smoke. And of course it wasn't just the Cathedral. The whole city was burning.

MS: This is Coventry.

LF: Coventry was England's Detroit. The motor center. That's where the trucks and the tanks were being built. And they couldn't stop the raid, even though they knew it was coming, because it would have given away what was subsequently revealed as the Ultra secret. They had no other warning. And nobody was ever warned of anything they learned on Ultra, which was the German cipher machine, unless they had a second way of confirming it. When we finally broke the German codes, we broke it through a captured machine. A machine was captured in a raid on France, at great cost of people's lives.

MS: Now this is a part of history that I really know nothing about.

LF: So, they literally had to sacrifice Coventry because if they hadn't, they would have given away that they had an Ultra, and the Germans didn't know that we'd broken it. They didn't know that we knew, they knew we had the machine, but they didn't think it could be broken, because it was a series of wheels, very intricate code system, that...

MS: How did the English obtain this?

LF: It was obtained in a raid on Bruniquel, in France.

MS: And that it...

LF: One of the cross-Channel raids that, at the cost of several French resistance people's lives, and several British commando soldiers' lives because it was vital that we get this.

MS: And this was the mechanism...

LF: By which they encrypted everything. And it was such an intricate thing that when you set one wheel, it set the other five in the machine. The machine was a series of wheels within wheels, and that's what did the actual encryption. And it was not the kind of code that you could break by mathematical probability. And of course, there weren't any computers in those days. And the people at Bletchley Heath, which was the computer, I mean, the code-breaking center, were absolutely at their wit's end when that was captured. It was a very, very carefully planned raid. And I didn't learn about it until I was on Overlord staff. And then I knew very little about it.

MS: Because it was a top military secret.

LF: Absolutely. So, that's how Coventry came to be the sacrificial city, was because they couldn't give it away. If they had another form of intelligence, that would have obviated the Germans suspecting that we had that code, then they could warn people. But, it was never used unless they had another confirmation. And it was Coventry's bad luck. And I don't mean that to sound as lightly as it does.

MS: No, no.

LF: I was very affected. Because I could see myself walking down the aisle in that cathedral, with about 70 other kids, and kneeling in turn in front of the bishop, and reciting our Catechism vows, and then being blessed, and admitted to the congregation. And, you know, as a formal member, rather than just a child...

MS: Right.

LF: Of a family. And you literally knelt there and said, "I declare myself a child of God."

MS: Hmm.

LF: And to see that gorgeous, gorgeous place destroyed, to know that all the voices that had worshiped in there...

MS: Cry and laugh and...

LF: Was, and cried and celebrated weddings...

MS: Yes.

LF: And buried their dead...

MS: All that history.

LF: It was pretty terrible. The wonderful thing about the new cathedral is that when they built it, they built it right next door and they left the old one standing, after they made the walls safe. They left the ruins standing as a perpetual memory. And...

MS: Really. And it's still [unclear].

LF: They, and they, and the old high altar is still there and across the front of it, it has in gold, "Father forgive." And then there is a glass screen that links the two. And on the glass screen are spectral figures incised, monks and nuns and kings and queens and little people, cobblers and workers and drivers and, you know, all the people that go to make up a great congregation. People that have served there, bishops and priests, and they're all in a very stylized fashion. It's quite chilling to see it. But it's a great reminder, that, you know, that it's still a place of worship. And people stroll on the grass. They floored it with grass. And after the war, to raise the money for the roof, the children of the Church of England went on a nation-wide Hegira. The roof nails from the old leaded roof were all welded together. And people cut some of them apart and formed a huge cross which was then placed on a wooden platform. And that was then carried by the young people. And those of us that were in the service after the war were given a few days leave to go and participate. And it was carried into every village and hamlet in England. And people went round with baskets, collecting money to, you know, as it was carried through. It was met, and people prayed and sang hymns and psalms and then it rested in the village churches overnight. And then went on to the next village. And it was just an endless three-year long progression.

MS: But you had joined it obviously for just a few days, yes.

LF: And we, yes, each of us joined it for just a few days. And took part in the carrying of the cross. And all the other nails were cut apart and they were formed into crosses and sold. And we had baskets of those to sell. And of course people bought them, and sometimes that's all they did, and sometimes they just gave us two or three times the amount that we were asking. And people wrote checks. And that's how the money was raised for the new roof.

MS: Very...

LF: And that was great to be a part of it, because that was after all the awful stuff that came in between, you know, losing family members. And there was hardly a family that we knew that didn't lose somebody. And, after all the awful experiences of the camps and seeing Europe devastated, and half of Europe on the hoof looking for the other half...

MS: Right.

LF: That sometimes didn't exist any more.

MS: That's right. That's right.

LF: There were no homes to go to. There were no families to go home. And you needed a spiritual event like that.

MS: To restore some faith into your life, yeah.

LF: And so something good came out of something bad, too.

MS: Yes, yes, correct.

LF: And it was a very tough time. And that went on, of course the, the bombing and we were not directly bombed. We had a few stray bombs. We had a bit of excitement once when one of the German planes came down on a neighboring farm. It had been shot down, and the villagers took the pilot and the crew prisoner with pitchforks. [both laugh] Kind of funny, but they [chuckling] marched them through the village in classic fashion, with pitchforks, and with their hands tied behind them with horse ropes and things.

MS: And turned them over to the...

LF: And turned them over to the police.

MS: Police.

LF: And one or two lone policemen who said, "Well, we don't know what to do with this. Let you boys better stick around!" And somebody, you know, somebody said, "Well, it's time for dinner." And I remember the policeman saying, "It's probably time for dinner for them too. So if you get something for yourself, you'd better get something for them."

MS: Such good feelings towards an enemy...

LF: But...

MS: Is pretty amazing.

LF: You know, more than they showed towards some of our guys, and more than they showed to the people in the camps. But they did, they got fed. And you know, we had German prisoners on the farm. I spoke about that earlier and you asked me to...

MS: Yes.

LF: Remember to mention it.

MS: Yes, please do.

LF: And, we'd had Italian prisoners and then, of course, when the Italians came out of the war, you know, after Mussolini was executed, we began to get German prisoners. And the Italian prisoners were taken somewhere else and interned, but not as prisoners. I think they were taken to Canada for safety, because there was a promise that they would not be used in any way in the war or endangered anymore. And we began to get Germans. And I wouldn't like to have anyone believe that I thought they were marvelous, but by and large, they were pretty ordinary lads. And I had virtually no trouble with them. We had elderly men who were veterans of the First World War, homeguardsmen, as they were called, guarding them. Sometimes with only three bullets [chuckling] in their rifle.

MS: But the Germans didn't know that.

LF: The Germans didn't know that, of course, because they had a whole load of dummy cartridges. But they were pretty content. They were getting fed. They were getting fed better than they were.

MS: As German prisoners.

LF: As Germans.

MS: Yes.

LF: They were not being told a pack of lies. They slept in fairly primitive conditions in a Nissen Hut, you know, with wooden bunks, but they had British Army thin, what we call biscuit mattresses, and a couple of blankets, and a place to bathe. And, they could do their wash in the stream, because we had a big stream that ran through the property and they could drag buckets of water up and they could wash their clothes and then they could hang them on the trees and the bushes to dry. So they were clean. They were never louse-infested and typhus-ridden and starved to death. They were looked after. And when mine came up to help with the milking, as they did every night, they didn't come up in the dark. They were not allowed up in the mornings. The homeguardsmen didn't want them trotting around the place in the dark, in the early morning.

MS: Oh, I see.

LF: So my people did the milking in the morning and then they came to work a bit later, the Germans.

MS: How many prisoners of war did you...

LF: We had ten at one time, but the average was about six or seven. They came, and they worked. They ran the machinery. They drove the tractor. They did all sorts of things. They felled wood and cut wood, you know, which we used for heat at home, and which we used to run the dairy boiler. And they were given wood to take down to put in their stove to keep their hut warm. They were locked in the hut at night, and the home guards patrolled all night. Only one or two men, but, you know, and they were not.

MS: I think they realized how well they had it, how...

LF: But they did realize how well they had it, and at the end of evening milking, I always gave them their cans of milk and told them to help themselves to the cracked eggs because they cooked their own meals down there. And they drew their rations on a daily basis from us, and we always gave them a scrupulous amount. And if I killed a pig, they got meat. Or if I decided that it was a holiday, and you know, if there were going to be some chickens, or I was killing off chickens because winter was coming and I didn't want to use the grain on them, they usually got a chicken or two. And they knew it. And they would politely thank you. And you could tell by the way they looked and behaved, because they were always polite, always. I never had trouble until we got the one *Luftwaffe* *Leutnant*. And, the officers were not compelled to work, by reason of the Geneva Convention. But this one had volunteered. And then he began to be a rabble-rouser, and he began to be a nuisance. And by this time when we got him, I was in the service. I don't think I would have allowed it. But, somebody made the decision that it was reasonably harmless.

MS: Who ran the farm once you went into the service?

LF: A young man from a neighboring farm. A young man called Llewellyn Gilbert, who, whose family owned a farm down the road. As a matter of fact, his father was a nobleman and they had a big place similar to ours. And Gilbert had been an officer in one of the guard's regiments and had been wounded in the western desert, in north Africa, and had been invalided out because his wounds were so bad. He lost part of a leg, and he walked with the aid of a cane. And he had, the sight of one eye was destroyed. And his shoulder was very badly injured. And he just simply was not in condition to go on as a fighting man. And, I had taken him on during the summer that I was 16. I was leaving school. I wanted to go to college that summer. I was tired of the farm. I was really, truly tired. And I don't want that to sound like a complaint, but I was. I was frequently running 14 and 16-hour days. And in the summer, sometimes 18-hour days.

MS: A tremendous undertaking for a young person.

LF: And there were sick people, sick grandparents in the house, and my mother, who was mentally unstable. And, of course, I hadn't said anything about it earlier, but in May of 1941, the most awful things befell my family. My two oldest brothers were killed on subsequent days. One during the German invasion of Crete, while the British were trying to withdraw from Crete. He was on the Destroyer *Kelly*, which was Admiral Mountbatten's ship, then Captain Mountbatten. And he was killed on the 23rd of May, and my oldest brother was an assistant navigator on *HMS Hood*. *Hood* was sunk by the *Bismark*, in the Denmark Strait, between Iceland and the Canadian coastline.

MS: A submarine?

LF: No, no, *Bismark* was German's mightiest warship, and *HMS Hood* was the pride of the Royal Navy.

MS: Oh, [unclear].

LF: She was a battle cruiser. No, they were blown apart. 1400 men were killed with one salvo. There were only three survivors. And, that happened in the early hours of the morning on May the 24th. And on May the 29th, my sister was killed at St. Thomas' Hospital in London where she was a nursing student by this time. And she was decapitated, throwing herself across a stretcher, on which two children who had been injured in the previous night's raid were lying. She couldn't make it to the basement with them. They'd been evacuating the children. This was a stray bomb. This was not, the Blitz, in effect, was over, but this was one of those hit-and-run raids. And, I didn't tell my mother about my brothers. My father and I discussed it. And we decided since there were no bodies and my mother was pretty unstable anyway that we wouldn't tell her. My mother had a heart condition too, which was brought on by some of the privations of she had suffered in Russia, and then having too many children too quickly, which nobody realized was so detrimental to her. And she was so wild about my father, I guess, you know.

MS: Right.

LF: Children come when those things happen.

MS: That's right.

LF: But anyway, when my sister was killed, we had to tell her, and we decided with the help of the doctor and my Uncle Tim, the one that was the priest, to tell her the whole lot. We decided if we were gonna have a scene, we might as well have a major scene. And, those things take their toll. They take their toll on everybody. Everybody in the house was oppressed by my mother's instability. I frequently had to cope with things thrown, and stupid requests, I mean, really, truly inane requests. Stupid is a terrible word, but it, but they were so ineffably stupid that there was nothing else to call them. Demands that we get her things that couldn't be found in all of England, and you certainly weren't going to cross the Atlantic for them, or, ask anyone to send them to you. And just overwork, and too long a war, and too much responsibility. And I was by that time sick of it. And I hated, hated, hated Germans. I was ready to go to Germany and take on Hitler, Göring, and Ribbentrop with my bare hands. If I could have gone, I would have. And that summer, I browbeat and bribed my father into getting me an age waiver. I would have been eligible to go into the Wrens, or go into any of the services the following year, when I was 18. But I knew he could get me an age waiver, at 17. And I had some romantic idea that I was going to go down and run little boats around the harbor. And he beat me over the head and shoulders and said he'd get the age waiver for me, if I acceded to doing what he wanted me to do in the Wrens, and that was to become an interpreter, because I had language skills, and any fool could run a boat. And I saw the sense of what he was saying, so I went in as what they call a Marked Cadet, which meant that I was entering basic training, which was cut to nine weeks as I went in, fortunately. And I entered on my 17th birthday, on October the 25th, 1943. I did nine weeks of basic training, came home for about three days and then went straight off to Officer Training School. And that was the magnificent number of ten weeks. Fortunately, I knew my way through the Navy, so they didn't have to teach me about the Navy. And I came out and was immediately assigned to Combined Operations staff as an interpreter because there were so many Norwegians and free French, and there was just always chaos. And there was always somebody yelling for an interpreter, to iron out something.

MS: And at this time you were fluent in.

LF: French and Russian. I began to pick up smatterings of other people's languages because apparently I've got that kind of an ear. I began to pick up smatterings of Danish and Norwegian, enough to intervene when people were coming to an argument because they really didn't understand each other because their command of English, which was sometimes reasonable, just didn't extend to understanding the other person's accent.

MS: Yes.

LF: And so I would jump in, and I would find out if they spoke one of the other languages that I spoke. Or, I would listen very carefully to them, in their version of English, and then turn to the other person and say, "This is what he is saying. He's saying it differently to what you do, but this is what he is saying." And it...

MS: So it worked for you.

LF: It worked. And that led me to the next job, which was to go onto Admiral Bertram Ramsey's staff. Admiral Ramsey was the operational naval planner for Operation Overlord, the liberation of France.

MS: And you were a commissioned officer at this time.

LF: By that time I was a commissioned officer.

MS: At what rank?

LF: Well, it would have been the equivalent of a...

MS: First Lieutenant?

LF: No, it would have been the equivalent...

MS: Oh, “ensign.”

*Tape three, side one:*

MS: This is tape three, side one, of an interview with Leigh Fraser, which we are continuing this evening. And I'm going to let Leigh take over at this point.

LF: When we left off before, I hadn't quite answered the question about what my rank was. The Wrens use a different nomenclature to the majority of the other forces, and I was officially a Third Officer. That would equate with an Ensign in the United States Navy, but we don't have Ensigns in the Royal Navy. We have sub-lieutenants and so that would have been my equivalent rank. And I had just joined Admiral Ramsey's staff. Admiral Ramsey was the Channel Commander in Neptune, which was the seaborne portion of Operation Overlord, the liberation of Normandy, or the invasion into Normandy. I spent two days at sea, highly unusual for a woman officer, and that was directly at Admiral Ramsey's urging, because he said that since I'd been part of the bucket brigade, the dirty work, then I should be there to see some of the scrubbing done. And so I thoroughly enjoyed it. It was, I say enjoyed it, but it was awe-inspiring. I've never seen so many ships, so many planes, so many people intent on one purpose. And, of course, it was a very stress-filled period, because there were hours, literally long hours where things hung in the balance, where we didn't really know whether we had a foothold.

MS: Did you, were you sort of stationed, well, not stationed, but, just sitting out there and watching all these invading forces come through, or were you moving right along with them? Or...

LF: I was on the flagship, *HMS Belfast*, and my official job was telephone-talker with the French fleet, the French elements of the fleet. We had a secondary code which was based on some of the inside jokes that I knew from the French officers. There was an official code, but there was also this secondary code in case the Germans started to interrupt and cross our communication lines. They weren't prepared, and they didn't, as it happened, but the set-up was there, and that's really why I was along because I have a fairly distinctive voice, I knew these inside jokes, and if we had to move to secondary communication, then that was going to be the key to this being an official communication rather than someone else faking it. Anyway, I got through those couple of days. And, of course, as everyone knows, the landings were successful, and very shortly after that all the Overlord planning staff were disbanded, with the exception of those people who continued with their operational units. I wasn't one of them. And people decided that for a youngster, and a fresh-called officer, I'd had enough excitement. And I should go and do something much more orthodox for a change. So they packed me off to Burfield, which is in the country, outside of London, near the city of Reading. And I became a staff officer at the Women's Royal Naval Service Training Establishment. And that's where I stayed until a rather momentous phone call, which now has much more to do with the main subject. I was relieved on an emergency basis from my normal duties, which were just simply training and administrative duties, on the morning of April the 16th, 1945. Someone came yelling and got me off a parade ground, and told me that I was to get down to headquarters right away. And when I got down there, they said, "What have you done now, Fraser? They want you in London." And I said, "I don't know what I've done now. But, what do you mean *they* want me in London?" And I was told, "You're going to get a set of orders. You are to pack warm clothing. You are to take your medical records, and you are to do it right now. And we'll have a car waiting for you. You've got 45 minutes to pack." So, I called a couple of friends of mine and asked them to take care of the rest of my gear, grabbed all the warm clothing that I could find, and all the chocolate and other things that I could grab from other people, because I knew that I was going somewhere, didn't know where I was going, didn't know what they were gonna do about supplying food, and didn't trust it either [chuckling]. And the chocolate stood me in very good stead in other ways, too, because I rounded up about four pounds of chocolate, which was very scarce in those days. But I talked everybody else out of it. And I arrived in London, very curious, wanting to know what was going on, and they told me at Women's Royal Naval Service Headquarters to stop asking silly questions. They reviewed my medical records. They insisted that I get a typhus anti-toxin, and then they said to me, "Now, you get yourself over to War Office." And I said, "War Office?" And they said, "Well, by way of the Navy, because there are gonna be a couple of Marines and a couple of other people going with you, and a couple of other Naval officers. And then you'll go down to the War Office." So they dumped me off with my bag, and all my goodies, and I started asking tons and tons of questions, and I had more temerity than most people because it's a fact that I had a fairly prominent father. My father was an Admiral and I really wasn't very reticent about asking questions where a green or junior officer would have been. I must have been a pretty holy terror, I think. We went down to Horse Guard's Parade, which was the big arch, and most people have seen this, where the Trooping of the Color takes place. And in the offices behind that big square we were greeted and told to sort of hurry up and wait. More reviews of stuff, and people started arriving, and they started giving us coffee and sandwiches, and as we kept on pressing the staff officers, we were told, "You'll find out very shortly." And, in the late afternoon they began to brief us on what our mission was. That was when I learned for the very first time that we were going to go to a concentration camp, that Bergen-Belsen had been overrun, that the combat unit had requested assistance, that they needed interpreters, that the Royal Army Medical Corps was being alerted and sending some people in another team, that the Royal Army Service Corps, which does all the catering and supplies all the food, was also going to be alerted, that there would be Red Cross people there. And after a lot of rather hideous preparation, and a lot of routine stuff, we were then sent out to Northholt, which is an airdrome on the outskirts of London. And, that's where we were loaded into a plane and we set off for Germany. I didn't know much about where I was going.

MS: Leigh, I would like to ask you a question. Well, you almost answered it. At this point in time, when they mentioned that you were going to a concentration camp, did you have any inkling of an idea of what a concentration camp was? Had you heard anything about the incarceration of Jews during the time that you were in the service?

LF: Actually, yes, but not so much from in the service. I knew it before. I knew it in about 1942, and I knew it mostly from my father. Not this particular concentration camp, I just knew about concentration camps in general. My father had done some talking with his friends in front of me. The British press had reported that there were some centers where people were deported to. We were hearing rather hideous stories from refugees and escapees from Europe. And some of them had some pretty terrible stories. I've got to tell you that officially, there were some really strange remarks made about not believing these, and I quote, "rather wild stories" coming out of Europe. When I questioned my father about that, he said, "I think they've got their heads in the wrong place, that these are not such wild stories. They're going to turn out to be all too terribly true." And I began to watch the press fairly carefully. I'd heard about mass shootings too, in this same time frame, but not about any gassings. What I'd heard were that truckloads of Jews were being taken out into the countryside, and forced into ditches, and shot in the ditches. And I learned about the gas chambers during the afternoon briefings on April the 16th. That's when I got official confirmation that there were gas chambers. I wasn't the only one who was absolutely aghast. There were men who were experienced combat people. There were lots of staff people. There were people who had seen some pretty terrible things during the course of their life in the service. Some of them had been at war in the western desert, and others had been working with refugee organizations, debriefing refugees. And some of us, and I was one of them, had driven people to air-fields in the middle of the night, people who were actually resistance people. And we were always told never to ask them any questions. But we inevitably heard things from them, and heard things from other people that we picked up at those same airports in the middle of the night. So it wasn't exactly a total surprise that the Germans were doing some pretty terrible things. I don't know whether I mentioned this earlier, but I absolutely hated Germans at this stage. This was the pressure for me to get into the service. I had lost one brother on the 23rd of May, 1941, when the *HMS Kelly* went down during the German paratroop invasion of Crete. I lost another brother on the 24th of May, 1941. He was on *HMS Hood*, which was sunk by the *Bismarck*, in *Bismarck's* only foray, before the British fleet caught up with *Bismarck* and in turn sank her. And on the 29th of May, my sister was decapitated by a German bomb while serving as a student nurse in London. All of that unhinged my mother, who was not terribly stable anyway, because of the fact that she had been a refugee from the terror, the Red Terror, in Russia, during the Czarist deposition. And, my feeling, quite frankly, in all of that time, was that I could have taken on half the German army singlehandedly. Just give me a good machine gun. So, that was my motivation in joining. Hate's not always the best motivation, but it was mine at that time. We arrived in Germany late at night, on the 16th of April, and we were bussed to Bergen-Belsen, which was a really infamous, and very large camp. It lies between Bremen and Celle, in northwest Germany. I didn't know it at that point, but I was going to spend most of the next eight months in Germany. I spent about two weeks at Bergen-Belsen. And later on, on various assignments, I was loaned to the Americans, and I went to Nordhausen. I went to Buchenwald. I went, finally, to Dachau and then to Ravensbrück. And I went to Ravensbrück at the request of the Russians, who wanted Allied Forces in there so that they knew, that we knew in the West, that they were not making up these things. And, I'll talk later about those. But the point at hand now, of course, is arriving in Bergen-Belsen. We were all on a bus. We had asked some of the soldiers various things, and they had told us some pretty horrifying things. And the bus was being driven by a soldier. What happened absolutely defies description. There was a feeling when we went through the gate, which had the standard *Arbeit Macht Frei* over it, a feeling of absolute and utter evil. There was evidence of bodies outside the gate. There were trains on sidings all over the place. There were sentries. Most of it was blacked out. But the bus was being driven by headlights, and I'd come from a blacked-out country, so when I saw full headlights, I knew that the Germans had to be absolutely on the run, which we understood to be the case in England. It was like a vision of hell when we went through that gate. Just the enormity was absolutely stunning. The bus made a right-hand turn, shortly after we went through the gate, and the light swept over what looked like a wall. And I caught a couple of things that really--I was sitting right behind the driver. I caught a couple of things, and I literally demanded of the bus driver that he stop. And I turned and said to the Brigadier General, who was in charge of us, who was sitting across the aisle from me, "Sir, I think we ought to have him back up. I don't know if you saw that, but I think everybody ought to see that." And he said, "What?" And I said, "I think those are bodies." So, the Brigadier said to the driver, "Back up into a position. Put your lights full on that wall and stay steady." It wasn't a wall. It was a city block long. I mean it. A city block long! And there were bodies, 15 to 20 feet high, arms, legs, heads, feet sticking out. They were all naked, all emaciated, stacked like some sort of an inhuman mural. It was just awful. And I really think that the authorities wanted us shocked. They wanted us shocked so that the next day we would start acting accordingly. We did tramp through some barracks that night. I've never seen such filth, never, ever seen such filth. There were the most grotesque, emaciated figures walking around, shuffling around, I should say, because some of them could barely move. There were moans, and groans. It was like walking through a nightmare. There were people dying. There were people incapable of walking. There were people crawling.

MS: I want to ask you, when you came in, were you the first to arrive at the, on that scene, or had other soldiers, English soldiers, gotten there prior to your arrival? Do you know...

LF: The combat units had gone in, and we were there at their request because it was beyond them to cope with this.

MS: But how far behind the combat units would you say...

LF: We were about 24 hours behind them. The combat units really couldn't do much. They started yelling for help, and...

MS: Yes, [unclear]...

LF: I gather that they gave people bread, that they gave people some of their rations and they gave them cigarettes. But the filth, they couldn't cope with. The officers, quite rightly, would not risk their men, because they couldn't afford to have a combat unit decimated by illness. And it was quite obvious from the word go that lots of these people were in the throes of typhus, that they were very, very ill. The stench had to be smelled to believe it. It was like the Aegean stables. You expected these people to topple over. It was like moving among the living dead. I don't think I've ever seen anything quite so awful in my life. One of the questions that was posed to me in preparation for this was could I estimate the number of prisoners and the number of dead, and any near-death that were saved. The answers to those are just terrible. There were approximately ten to eleven thousand living males. There were about 28,000 plus living females, if you can call some of those people living. And I don't mean this to sound as bland as it does. I've gone through some diaries and some records that I had. There were about 13,000 plus unburied corpses lying around. We learned that typhus had broken out in February of 1945. This was now mid-April. You can just imagine the ghastly, ghastly scene. About 40,000 plus had been cremated since the outbreak of typhus. The, we were told that the furnaces couldn't keep up. And even the *Kapos*, who were usually better treated by the Germans, and who mistreated prisoners themselves, were sickening, and dying. And they were much better fed than the average prisoner. The living were in that awfully emaciated state that's called cachexia, where they can't absorb any nutriment at all. They are right at the door of death. Typhus was still rampant. There was a lot of tuberculosis. We lost between thirteen and thirteen-and-a-half thousand people in the next eight to ten days, who were so far gone--this is out of nearly forty thousand living--from these causes. The British Red Cross came in to help. The Royal Army Medical Corps came in. The medics worked terribly hard. They deloused people because, of course, typhus is spread by lice. They were puffing DDT down people's clothing, and the people who were in the worst rags that we could get any clothes for, we were forcing them to strip off and delousing them and taking their clothes away. It was just an endless nightmare, and the death rate finally dropped, if you can call it dropped, to 150 to 200 a day. That lasted for about three weeks, and it dropped again. When I came back, in late May, from the other camps that I went on to, it was about 100 to 125 a day.

MS: Did they set up a hospital...

LF: Yes, I'll get to that arrangement in a minute. The, by June they had the death rate down to about 50 to 75 a day. And again, that sounds terribly callous to talk about it like that, but if you can just imagine what was going on in that camp, they would have all been dead within very short order.

MS: Had you not been there.

LF: Had the camp not been overrun and had help not arrived. The camp wasn't exclusively Jewish. Most, the majority of the people were Jewish. There were no children there. There were lots and lots of anti-Nazis and dissenters against the regime. There were some male teenagers. I saw no family groups whatsoever, and later learned that there were no family groups. The, what was going on there was just absolutely so awful, it really does defy description. The jobs that were given to the team I was with were not directly concerned with either transportation of these former prisoners, or their care. And by the way, they had to be held as prisoners, because of the illness. The camp was still locked at night, and I gathered from the combat troops that the Germans that were inside the camp with them had gone on killing people during the 24 hours that they were outside. Our troops killed a lot of Germans when they got in. My direct duties weren't really involved with transportation or immediate care in providing food or medical care. That's not really my job. It, inevitably we got involved. And I don't mean that to sound as callous either, but I was there for a specific reason. I was there to interview, to obtain vital data, to fill out and assist with questionnaires, their names, their date and place of birth, their nationality, the point at which they were seized by the Germans, how they were seized, which other camps they'd been in, whether they had been tortured or beaten, who did it, did they know what had happened to their families, did they know where their families were, if they were still alive, who else was transported with them, any other information that we could obtain from them. Because we knew we had a ghastly mess to deal with. And someone had to begin with that somewhere. And we, our team was ordered, of course, to cooperate in every respect with the medics, and not to really try to plague people who were too sick to answer, but to get those who could to cooperate with us. When we went in...

MS: Excuse me, did you find that the prisoners were willing to talk, those that were able to?

LF: There were some strange reactions. We actually began to work with them the next morning. We drove into camp about seven o’clock in the morning on the 17th of April, in the bus, and the building which was our headquarters had been the former S.S. officers'. We were all wearing battle-dress, not dress uniforms, and after dumping, you know, various things, and set-, spending a few minutes setting up a place to return to, you walked out with a clipboard, and a whole supply of pens and pencils. And we had been warned to take plenty of handkerchiefs with us, because we were, one, possibly going to have to tie some around our faces, because of the disgusting smells, and two, that they pretty well warned us that no human being could look at this and not weep.

MS: Mmm.

LF: When we walked out into the camp area, I was with with other women officers, and we were escorted by four armed male enlisted soldiers, British soldiers. We walked through the male section of the camp. And, the camp was segregated by male and female. We went across the camp. The camp is pretty big. It's about a mile long by about a quarter of a mile wide, total area. We walked most of that quarter of a mile across the camp, and then another quarter of a mile up the camp, I would say, to get to the women's section. The male inmates were absolutely gaping when they saw good, strong, healthy women walking through the camp. And I might add, we were all wearing side-arms too. We'd been ordered to continue to wear pistols. Because you just simply didn't know what you were going to encounter somewhere. You know, whether there would be Germans hiding among them, whether there would be an attempt to murder us, or to murder other prisoners, and so we were not deprived of our arms, any more than the combat troops had been. The prisoners were obv-, the male prisoners were obviously absolutely amazed. They gaped, they pointed, and then they acted frightened. They were very subdued and very warily curious about us. And they began to follow our little group at a distance and were only stopped from doing that by the men who were going to come out and question them, coming out and starting to work in the same fashion that we were going to work when we got into the women's section. We walked in with bull-horns and great big printed signs that we'd made on big pieces of cardboard, poster-size pieces of cardboard, in several languages. We announced that we were British. The cardboard sign said the same thing. "We will help you. Please come to me if you speak this language." And we settled into some tents that were set up for us by the combat people that had wood floors and were equipped with a table and chairs and a wood stove because it was still pretty chilly. And the inmates, the women inmates were quite frightened, but they did start edging toward us. And they started asking if it was true that we weren't German, that they really were going to be rid of the Germans. [beeper]

*Tape three, side two:*

MS: This is side two of tape three of an interview with Leigh Fraser, and we will contin-, and Leigh will continue with her story at this time.

LF: We began to try to talk to the inmates. We had a lot of difficulty with them, getting them to look directly at us. They were very suspicious of the hot drinks which were brought in immediately by the British Red Cross. We had urns of tea and urns of hot milk, and packets of chocolate, and cocoa, and small sandwiches and cookies and rolls and that sort of thing brought in. And they looked at those things, and you could see them salivating, but they wouldn't take them. And we kept on urging them on them, and they would only take them after they saw us reach out. It dawned on a couple of us that they were afraid, that they thought maybe it was poisoned food. And we said, "No, no, no, this is fine-look." And we started taking things and biting into them, and going and pouring ourselves drinks. And while we were doing it, asking them, "Will you have tea? Will you have chocolate? We need to talk to you. We're going to talk to you in groups at first. And we're going to ask you a few questions. And those of you who are willing to write, we'll help you with the papers, but we want you to help us. Because otherwise it's going to take forever." And they were quite fearful. They went on doing this for weeks, I might tell you. They got into the rooms, and they sort of shrank back against the wall and made themselves as small as possible, and fidgeted, and they all hung their heads. They absolutely didn't want to look people in the face. They were made so often to stand with their heads bowed and yelled at so frequently that this was ingrained now to behave like this. The first group of women that I still started talking to, were all French and French-German-mixed. They were from the Alsace-Lorraine area. And I had a few Belgians in that group. They, I think I had about 18 or 19 in the first group. It wasn't quite 20, I know. And they all helped with their questionnaires. They were absolutely amazed of it later on, in the middle of the day. The food trucks rolled in with Royal Army Service Corps people with them. They had, they came rumbling into the camp at noon and they had great big pots of hot soup. They had bread, and milk, and more hot drinks. And this is just a measure of how these people didn't know, you know, the inmates didn't know what they were allowed to do and how to behave with us because, while we'd gotten them a little bit loose, and gotten them to answer a few questions and fill out their papers, they still weren't sure how much they could get away with, how they were going to be allowed to behave. And one of the women looked at me, and she said, "*Mademoiselle, est-ce-que permitez de manger devant vous*? (Is it allowed to eat in front of you?)" And, I laughed a little bit, and I said, "*C’est en man*. *Je mange aussi*. *C’est il vous permitez.*" You know, "If you'll allow me to, I'll eat with you." And this one woman giggled, and then there were a couple of little weak laughs from the others, and then, and only then, would they start dipping their spoons into their bowls and eating. And they ate like wolves. The food disappeared, and we noticed over the following weeks, that whenever it was time for food, boy, they weren't very far from the Mess. They were right there with bowl and tray in hand.

MS: There was a, it was noted that amongst the liberators that many times the prisoners were given food, of course, in all good meaning, and because they were so emaciated, that it created terrible pro-, digestive problems. And some of them even died, as a result of being given chocolates and fats and things that their bodies couldn't absorb.

LF: That's absolutely correct, and that's exactly why our group had gone in there with soup for them. We gave them very plain cookies, things like graham crackers and plain wheat cookies and didn't give them a lot of sweet stuff. And the soup was basically, the first day, it was bread and hot broth, rather than soup, or a pureed soup, which doesn't require so much digesting. There was a lot of effort made to gradually feed. There were, the first few days there was very little really truly solid food supplied. Oatmeal was one of the favorite things at breakfast, and, of course, these people took a lot of comfort in hot, comfort-type foods because what they'd been fed was absolutely ghastly. They'd been living on about six or seven hundred calories a day.

MS: If that much.

LF: If that. And the food that we were giving them was basically designed to be nourishing but not to overload them.

MS: So it was definitely monitored then.

LF: That had been pretty carefully thought out, I think. One of the other things that amazed all of the prisoners was that we always asked them, "Will you please do this? Will you please sit down? Thank you very much." You know, to, "We'll talk to you again. We'll talk some more about this. I have the information I need for now, which I have to get into data, but I will talk to you again." And there were some remarks about, "Oh, well, will it do any good?" And, to which we could only answer, "We don't know. We are trying. We are, you're going to have to be kept here for a while, because the war isn't really over yet." And it wasn't, of course. "They're still fighting. You can't go wandering out there. And some of you aren't well. You've got to get better. We've got to get those creatures off you." The lice, because they were all scratching. Oh! We lived in terror of becoming lousy ourselves, I might tell you.

MS: So, in other words, it was difficult to set up sanitary facilities for these people almost immediately. It had to...

LF: Because there really weren't any adequate sanitary facilities at the base. We brought in a lot of field toilets, and the, we forced the German guards, those of them that were left alive, to start digging latrine trenches too. And we also made the German guards start moving corpses.

MS: Where were the corpses taken? Were they buried?

LF: They were buried, in mass graves. And lots of lime spread.

MS: On this, on the site of Bergen-Belsen.

LF: That's correct. And in fairly short order, as soon as UNRRA, the United Nations Relief Organization, came in and as soon as quonset huts could be delivered, we burned the camp. But we had to have somewhere to shelter them. Northern Europe is pretty cold into the spring. And you couldn't just simply take them and put them outside. They were dying like flies anyway, and they would have died in greater numbers with no shelter whatsoever. But the, you couldn't clean those buildings up. You could not clean them up. And when we got there, there were dead in the bunks with the living. Everything was crawling with lice. We literally, the women that I was with, to help keep ourselves clean, shaved our bodies of all body hair, because we realized that that was one way of being able to keep ourselves from being contaminated with the lice that they had.

MS: Your head as well?

LF: No, we didn't shave our heads, because the lice that carry the typhus are primarily the ones that are on the body. The pediculidae that are on the head are not quite so bad. But, the body harbors both kinds. We literally shaved our underarm and pubic hair in an effort to keep ourselves from becoming contaminated. And we were extremely scrupulously clean and we examined each other minutely for bites and things like that when we cleaned up at night. And we always dumped all of our clothes that we'd been wearing, before we went into our barracks, we dumped our clothes and went straight through the showers, and then put on clean clothes. You hate to treat people as though they're poisonous to you, but, in fact, those people were dangerous to us because if we picked up those infections, we would have been subject to the same things, except that, of course, we were stronger and would have been more resistant. So we were ordered by the medics to take a lot of precautions and we just hit on a few extra ones for ourselves. The, there were guards in the camp that had been taken prisoner. They'd been held prisoner by the British troops and they were also holding the *Kapos* prisoner. They, and lots of them started trying to get among the prisoners and hide themselves among the prisoners. But it was a dead giveaway because they had such well-fed looks to them.

MS: They didn't look like the emaciated prisoners.

LF: And the prisoners were pretty darn good at picking them out, too. I mean they, there would be a sudden outcry and you'd find somebody being ousted from a group and people would be there identifying this person as either a prisoner or a particularly horrible *Kapo*. And there were some pretty notable scoundrels among this group. I don't know if the name Joseph Kramer means anything to people, but he was the Commandant of the camp. The British hung him later. The infamous Irma Grese, who was one of the S.S. women there, was also there. And she was absolutely obnoxious. Not many of the S.S. women were anything to be proud of as women.

MS: How come they didn't flee the camp?

LF: Where were they gonna go? There was a war going on outside. And, once the camp was overrun, they were pretty well held prisoner. And it didn't take very much to separate people like them because the prisoners started pointing them out. The combat troops had been through the camp, literally, had been through the camp, and had grabbed off some of the guards, but couldn't get them all. That's why some of the killings went, but they actually didn't try to get into the camp and do anything other than cursory contact with the inmates in that first 24 hours. They just weren't able to. They didn't have the facilities to take care of them. They, the worst of the whole thing is that two miles away, there were warehouses full of food that belonged to the camp. There was about 800 tons of food, all neatly inventoried with total Germanic thoroughness. And there was a bakery that was capable of putting out about 60,000 loaves a day, which the Royal Army Service Corps promptly put into operation, and which the better-conditioned of the prisoners were asked if they would like to work in there. And they were, we couldn't pay them, but we could give them extra food. And we were content if they wanted to come and work for two or three hours, because it helped to move the food supplies. And this was an enormous logistical problem.

MS: Did you get--responses from them? Did, I'm sure they were...

LF: Oh yes. When they found out that it was to bring food into the camp, and we explained this very, very carefully, they were very, very good about it. And we didn't try to say, "You have to." We simply said, "If you can help, we will transport you in trucks. You don't have to walk that distance." Because normally they were marched back and forth from their work assignments. There were no such luxuries as being transported in any way. And, they were pretty darn good about being cooperative about stuff like that. Once they found out, and it only took about 24 hours for them to realize that we absolutely meant it because they saw the Red Cross people coming. They saw us sending stretcher parties through the camp looking for the worst. They saw us setting up intravenous. They saw those of us that worked with them on the questionnaires also did a lot of volunteer work at night. We went to the hospitals. We spoon fed people. We washed people. We held hands with the dying. We tried to write down their names and assure them that we would try to get word to anyone that was looking for them. It was really heart-rending.

MS: [sighs] Oh, goodness.

LF: I mean, you could sit in a ward and in the space of an hour half a dozen people would die.

MS: Oh my.

LF: They were just beyond help.

MS: Oh my.

LF: And whatever was being done for them, it wasn't being done soon enough. And there wasn't anything you could do to help them. And, it was a feeling of utter despair some of the time. The, my, I worked, as I said, mostly with the women. And I began to get responses from the women about who had been cruel and who had done various things to them. And we took them by truck over to a building where we were holding the S.S. women, and we very carefully kept two large tables and a couple of armed guards between them and the S.S. women. We got them to sit down and made the S.S. women file in so that they could pick them out and tell, you know, point out which ones had done various things to people. And, I made up my mind at some point in the first hour or so that I was going to be as nice as I possibly could, but firm with the inmates. And that if I was going to have any contact with these questions and pointing out of the S.S. women, that I was going to use the same intimidating tactics that I was beginning to hear about, on them. And I began to yell almost as soon as the S.S. women came in. And I was probably the most aggressive of the four women officers on my initial team. I, when they filed in they were acting kind of nutty and, as if they didn't know what was expected of them and trying to cover up their faces. And I started screaming, "*Wergehen Sie*? (Where are you going? What do you think you're doing?" And, "*Raus*! *Raus*!" Which means, "Hurry up! Hurry up!" *Schnell*! *Mach schnell*! (Move it!)" And, pushing them into the place where they should stand. And, I noticed when I turned around and I did this for effect, and I noticed when I turned around that there was first of all a slight stunned look on the faces of the women prisoners, you know, the women inmates, and then there were some little giggles, and some slightly smug little smiles. And I made the comment to my French group, "A little of their own medicine will do them good." And I noticed that it had an immediate effect, and when I told the men officers that at the morning breakfast, which is where we used to get together to talk about these things, they, it turned out, that I wasn't the only one that had had this idea. It was sort of an almost simultaneous idea. The S.S. women had been absolutely unspeakably brutal. They had beaten people indiscriminately with whips and clubs and all sorts of implements. They kicked them. They'd broken people's bones. They'd force prisoners to urinate in buckets and then they'd thrown the buckets of urine over them.

MS: Oh my.

LF: And of course these people had no way to clean themselves, so they had to go around in these stinking clothes. They burned them with cigarettes. They tripped them over. They screamed at them day and night. They shot some in cold blood for no reason, that they didn't move fast enough. And, there were just, just incredible stories about some of the stuff that they did. And, as I said, Irma Grese, who was known as "The Bitch of Belsen" and that's literally what was put in the paper about her, was among these women. She was hung by the British after the trials. She was probably the most brutal of the whole bunch. And, I had another encounter with another brutal one later on at Buchenwald, Ilse Koch, Mrs. Lampshades. She was the wife of the former Commandant and she had remained in the camp after he had gone. And she had had tattooed skin removed from dead inmates and tanned and made into lampshades. And she would, we literally called her "Mrs. Lampshades". We adopted a, for psychological reasons, we adopted marching the S.S. guards around in leg irons, publicly, when we moved them from one place to another or when we were bringing them in for identifications. We denied them all but the plainest food. We would give them only cold water to drink. Some of the people who smoked would smoke deliberately in front of them and then refuse them cigarettes. Anything to torment them, without actually being as physically brutal as they had been. But we did our darndest to convey to them that they, this was not a holiday camp for them. And, we gave them one blanket each, and we kept them in unheated barracks. We frankly didn't give a darn whether they had pneumonia or not.

MS: If they died, yes.

LF: If they died, well, it was only what they'd been inflicting on other people. We isolated them for disobedience. We didn't do anything absolutely directly physical to them, but we certainly didn't make life easy for them. We found that they got a lot less arrogant in the face of this. I got the reputation for being a holy terror for being so young. And, I frankly didn't care. There's a great element of my father's ruthlessness in me. He could be pretty ruthless, and I'd learned it very well. All of this of course had a pretty darn good influence on our inmates, who were kind of glad to see them getting treated in this fashion. The food and the medical supplies, as I said, were supplied by the British Army. And some of the rations that came in later were American. We put up field kitchens, base hospitals, which were at first tent hospitals. And later were UNRRA quonset huts which the British call Nissen huts. We did what we could, I think, given the circumstances. We, the first thing was to get everybody deloused. The second was to find clothes and try to get them clean. And that was when there was another awful shock. When we said "Showers," they had fits.

MS: Oh, I can well imagine!

LF: They had fits! And we, of course, knew that we had to get them clean.

MS: Did you understand why?

LF: We understood why. Oh yeah, we understood why. And, what we were doing was taking them over in large groups, and lining them up and using the S.S. showers. And we literally went in with the first groups. One of the girls didn't want to get undressed and she went in in a swimsuit. I went in naked with them. And some of the nurses that came later and some of the Red Cross volunteers did this too. And the word got out that they really were showers. It was soap and water and people came out of there alive, and, you know, with their hair wet and were actually given towels, and that it was hot water. And, after about the first two days there wasn't much more of this, you know, that we're not going in there and...

MS: Fear, yes.

LF: The fear. But, you did have to do some pushing and shoving, and I'll tell you, we did literally have to do some pushing and shoving to get them into the showers the first couple of times. I spent [chuckling] an awful lot of time in the showers, I want to tell you! But you had to get them clean!

MS: Sure.

LF: They were incredibly dirty, incredibly dirty. They didn't look like people. I'm sorry to say that. I don't mean to insult them. It wasn't their fault. But they were pretty grim.

MS: Well, they were treated as animals...

LF: Absolutely.

MS: For so many years.

LF: Absolutely. And, so the, you know, the fresh food and the soup and the gradual feeding and the cleaning them up was all well under way within very short order. Within a week there was reasonable order there. They were still living in those horrible barracks, but the medical teams had been through and had, we'd literally on a fine day turfed everybody outside. Nobody could stay in the barracks. We'd throw everybody outside. And they would go in and fumigate. They'd close up everything with cardboard and plastic and whatever they had. And they would set off fumigating bombs and DDT all the bunks. And then again able-bodied prisoners were asked to sweep things out, and to try to get it clean. But of course, all those lice, they live in the crevices, and they get back on the people's bodies. So, the delousing process was not just a one-time process. And, when we persuaded some of them to start shaving their body hair we began to get an effect too. And the medics said that we'd had a good idea and yes we should put that into effect. And, the burial details of course went on forever and ever and ever, using the former guards and *Kapos*. No inmate was ever asked to help with the burials. We felt that that was entirely too much for them. And, the barracks were burned on the first occasion that I came back, after I'd been to Nordhausen and Buchenwald. The inmates stood around cheering when we burned those barracks. We literally had the huts put up, had them moved in, and one of the conditions was, "You go take a shower. We will now give you another delousing. We will give you clean clothes. And you will never go back into those again. You will go into a clean barracks." And they complied--even the most reluctant of the people to go to the shower--complied when we explained that at the end of that there was going to be an enormous fire. We were going to burn the camp. And we burned the whole darn camp. It was an amazing sight. And the former inmates stood around cheering. Now they were Displaced Persons. They were no longer concentration camp prisoners.

MS: Could they leave at this point in time?

LF: They could leave. We counseled them not to. Of course, VE Day came at the beginning of May, May the 8th. We counseled them not to. Some of them did. We gather that some of them died. And some turned back after a couple of days out, they found there was nowhere to go for food...

MS: They came...

LF: That there was a lot of brutality out there. The roads were full of people. There were escaped Germans. There were other refugees. There were Germans from the cities, themselves on the run. It was like a zoo. It just simply wasn't safe. But you couldn't tell them, "No, you can't go," because they were not our prisoners. We were there to help them. We did counsel them that it was tough out there, that we couldn't always continue to help them and that somebody might hurt them. And we gathered that some of them in their first attempts to get away, died.

MS: At the hands of other, of Germans, or...

LF: We don't know.

MS: Oh.

LF: We--know that people did stupid things and got themselves run over a couple of times by army vehicles, by, you know, just simply because they weren't accustomed to watching out for themselves. We believe that there were some clashes between them and Germans walking around the countryside. We really didn't know what was going on once they got away from us, and we were an Army group, but we kept explaining to them over and over and over again, "You're not our prisoners. We're here to help you. We'll do our best, but please listen to us. It's not safe out there." If they said they were going, you just had to throw up your hands and let them take a couple of loaves of bread and whatever they could carry with them, and give them a blanket and wish them well.

MS: It'd be interesting to hear the stories of some of those people that did leave, and how they progressed. I'm sure in the Archive somewhere there must be...

LF: There's got to be something, Somewhere, but--It was--pretty awful, you know, having worked with them. But you could also understand their impatience to be gone. Then you also had to explain to them that the countries they came from sometimes didn't exist any more, that there was absolute chaos. It was easier to deal with the ones who were from the West, from France, from Belgium. You know, you could tell them that there was someplace for them to go.

*Tape four, side one:*

MS: Tape four, side one, of our interview with Leigh Fraser, and we will continue at this point.

LF: The next thing that you wanted an answer to was, did the effect of seeing the prisoners have an affect on my fighting in the war? I suppose that's a pretty standard question for all of us that were involved in things like this. At this point, this was my war. I was not a member of a fighting unit any more, I had been during the invasion. My war at this point was to do this job as humanely and as kindly as I could, to get information, to help relocate people, to find out if they had any relatives or friends left alive, to see where we could send them when they were strong enough. And I have to say that each terrible story that I heard really fueled my ability to deal with the next appalling recital. I was 19. I, in fact, I wasn't 19. I was 19 at the end of that summer. I cried. I prayed. I vomited. I lost about 15 pounds. I began to look like one of the prisoners myself at one point because my face started taking on a very gaunt look. I worked in the evenings as a volunteer at the hospital. Life got so mixed up that it took on an almost surreal quality. And I was very, very deeply affected. I was very aware of the fact that under the Nuremberg race laws, had I been there, had I been one of the people herded into those camps, I would have been either a candidate for slave labor or a candidate for the ovens because of the fact that my grandfather was half-Jewish. And so, that gives me a strong element, and it was enough under the Nuremberg race laws. And I've always had this incredible feeling that an accident of birth changes a lot of things. And of course, the accident was that my father was British, and I was a British subject and not a prisoner in Europe. [sighs] And you can't see that kind of thing and realize that, without being just deeply shaken and deeply affected by it, because there were girls that were close to my age among those women. And they'd never had the personal freedoms. They'd never had the chance to put on a lipstick, to kick up their heels, to go to a dance, to laugh at a boy, that sort of thing. It was just, just all the simple things that make living worthwhile that had been denied to them just by an accident of birth.

MS: About, amongst your interviews, were many of the inmates there for long periods of time? Or had they been shuttled from one camp to another?

LF: Some of them had been shuttled from one camp to another, particularly toward the end of the war. The Germans were just ferrying people around the countryside like mad. And I don't think it mattered too much to them whether they killed them, whether they didn't arrive whole, or where they got them, as long as they got them away from the Russians. I don't know why the urgency to get them away from the Russians, but they seemed to have that going on a lot of the time. And, then there were some other things that will come out much later that are peculiarly horrible too. You wanted also to know what the reaction of other people was. You know, did I talk with anybody else, or do I remember what their reactions were. Some of the things that come to mind are the first soldiers that we met at Bergen-Belsen, the ones that drove the luggage truck, and the bus that we were on, and took us to the billets [quarters]. I remember saying to one of them, "What gives? What's the skinny?" You know, what sort of a story is there to this? And, one of them said to me, "Well, Miss, it's like the Black Death. There's tons of bodies. It stinks." These were very ordinary working guys, just soldiers. We don't call them GIs. We call them Tommys. And they're usually about as outspoken as most men in those circumstances. And they'd say things like, "It's a bloody shame. The damn Germans never gave them a chance. The poor devils, they're dying by the heaps." These are things I remember that were literally said. One of the most pugnacious of them, a man from the north of England, with a very strong north of England accent, said to me, "We ought to do it to them, the S.S. bastards."

MS: Shame we didn’t.

LF: And, we heard them called swine, German swine, repeatedly, by the soldiers. And they made some pretty pertinent comments about where they'd put their rifles and where they'd put their bayonets [chuckling] if they caught up with them. And a lot of it had to do with the human hind end I might tell you. Every morning, the team that I was on--this was 40 people initially and we were joined by a few other people a little bit later--ate a working breakfast at 6:30 in the morning. We considered that to be the best time to have a staff meeting, because once we got started, there was no stopping. There was no saying, "We'll be here at 12 o’clock. We will be here at 1 o’clock." So we ate breakfast together every morning. That's when we compared cases, exchanged lists of things that we’d found out. Every day two or three of us took about five minutes of that time to discuss the worst stories with the entire team, to ask them what they were running across, and how they would advise us, faced with certain things. Because it was a learning experience for all of us. None of us were experienced interviewers. Nobody ever had to face this before. And it was a question of play it by ear. We were a group of rank amateurs, doing the best we could, with a real cesspool. And by that, I don't mean the prisoners. I mean the whole mess. By the end of the week, almost everybody on the team had had a turn at the breakfast meetings. I don't believe I ever saw a group of people who became quite so close-knit because we were all going through awful experiences with these people, listening to their stories. Every one of the men on the team at one point or another choked up or cried when he was trying to tell his story. All of the women, the four of us, cried, and beat our hands on the walls, sometimes pounded the table. I smashed a glass one day. I was holding a glass of orange juice while I was talking, and I banged it down on the table to give emphasis to something and cut my fingers--and still have the scars on my fingers to this day! The blatant cruelty, the stories we were hearing, made you so despondent and the death rate, of course, was appalling to us. We raved about things that we were seeing and the things that were happening. And then we were joined by some of the medical group at those breakfasts. And I remember the chief medical officer yelping at the end of about the third or fourth day that he was there and saying, "We'll lose the whole bloody lot if we don't get some more help!" Because the death rate was so horrible and he was just at his wit’s end what to do next.

MS: Could I interrupt with one question?

LF: Sure.

MS: At this point in time, how many English would you say were in the camps helping with all these enormous duties that had to be handled? And...

LF: Within a week or so, we had about 60 Red Cross volunteers. We had a couple of hundred men in the food group and the medical group combined, all that could be spared. We had a medical officer. We had trained medical personnel. The medical officer, of course, is an M.D. We got another one after a couple of days, but two doctors among all that mess? And, you know, a whole bunch of trained, what amounted to what you’d call, corps men. And...

MS: No nurses?

LF: No nurses...

MS: At this point.

LF: No nurses in the first week or so. When I went, some nurses at first had just arrived. We had some nurses from the Red Cross because the British Red Cross does have nurses working with it too. And they were volunteers. When I came back, there were more nursing personnel there. I think this medical officer had raised absolute and particular hell to get more help. He was a very outspoken Scotsman.

MS: So all in all there were just a few hundred people in there helping the prisoners.

LF: Helping thousands.

MS: Thousands.

LF: And...

MS: So that's why you were really understaffed.

LF: And then our group, and a few soldiers who had been left behind, basically walking-wounded soldiers, who had been left behind to help guard and to take care of a few things, everybody was playing this by ear. You know, this was the first camp overrun by the West; and a few days later, Buchenwald, you know, by the Americans. There were so many of these camps, and it was just an absolute nightmare for the people in the camps; it was a nightmare for all of us as we overran them because we had no experience in dealing with this degree of casualties, with people who didn't speak our language, with people, or, or, we didn't speak their language, with people who hadn't been fed, who were in such incredibly filthy conditions. It was a monumental task. It was like trying to scrub an elephant with a toothbrush. I know that that's making fun of it, but...

MS: Oh, no, no, no.

LF: It's a similar level of task in lots of ways. We all worked extra hours beyond our jobs, those of us that were the interview and intelligence team. We did all sorts of things. We worked in the hospitals. Some of us worked over in the food area. I chose to work in the hospital because I'd had some experience with helping with sick people at home and my best friend's father was a doctor. So I had a little bit of training. I could be of some use. And we bathed some of the sickest, I was bathing one woman and she died under my hands while I was bathing her. And you feel so defeated. I mean, she was terribly sick. And I had rolled her up in a sheet to roll her across the bed, and then pulled the sheet off her back so that I could bathe her back. And went to roll her back again to dry her on another sheet and put her back into the clean bed, and she expired as I did that. And I'd been as gentle as I could possibly be with her. And you don't blame yourself.

MS: Of course not.

LF: But you feel so terrible that this poor soul never got a chance to know freedom again. And that was repeated on, I saw guys come out at night, guys that were on our team come out at night crying because they'd lost ten or twelve people in the area where they'd been working. And we were--we were losing people like flies. And you felt so helpless. You know, why did they have to die now? When we'd liberated them. You know, wasn't it possible to help them to hang on somehow? And I didn't know much about this kind of starvation until then. And it was an awful lesson. We held hands with people. We spoon-fed them. You tried to get them to understand what was being done. Sometimes all you could do was explain what the doctors were saying and what needed to be done and why they had to have this needle in their arm. They didn't understand that.

MS: For intravenous.

LF: For intravenous. They were feeding them dextrose [sugar water]. They were trying to get rid of tuberculosis. They were shooting them full of a drug called M and B, which was the standard treatment for TB then. It was just, you know, really a tough situation. And they didn't know what was being done to them. And we tried to explain some of that too.

MS: I'm sure they must have been very...

LF: Because most of the medics didn't have any knowledge of their languages either.

MS: They must have been terribly frightened people.

LF: Oh, I think that they were absolutely terrified and, you know, to see them die in such terror. When you walked into the room, you'd have to, some of them, their vision was beginning to go because they were so close to death. And you'd have to get right over them and say, "Britisher. Britisher." So they'd know it wasn't the Germans coming at them again. And keep on repeating that they were in a hospital, that there was a doctor, and that they would, we were trying to care for them. And, I remember one night trying to explain this to three or four women and then another woman fell dead right beside me. Just fell off the chair. Some of them had gone through so much that their hearts just gave out under the privation. Anyway, this just kept on going on and it was about as bad as it could be, I think, and about the fifth day we were there, a group of padres came in, chaplains, eight of them. Two of them were Church of England and the other half a dozen were rabbis. And they all had assistants with them. We had put out calls. The very first day we were there, the boss started asking what else do we need, what else do we need? And we gave him just tremendous lists of things that were needed, and we said that the people were asking all kinds of questions and that people were asking about services and could they be allowed to have services again, this sort of thing. And, we needed Jewish prayer books. We needed scriptures. We needed to set up something to give them some spiritual comfort. We needed this, we needed that, we needed just everything. Imagine starting life from scratch. You're standing there naked, and you go to think about everything you need. And this is the position that these people were in. I mean this is what we were trying to tell, you know, that we need things. But we also need people that can deal with some of the things that they need. And, this group of chaplains came in, and the majority of them were comparatively young. They were forty at the most. You know, forty years old, at the most. And, they all had two or three assistants who helped them with services, who also helped them with other duties. And, they not only did their jobs as religious, they did other things. They emptied bed pans. They washed people. They sat with them. They organized services. Sometimes they'd even go among the people that were better, you know, that were not in the hospital. They spent a lot of time at the hospital, but they also went out among the other people, and they tried to organize them into singing folk songs and telling little stories and...

MS: Lift the morale...

LF: They were really pretty wonderful about this. And joking with them, and then of course, they said *Kaddish* for the dying and the dead. And they were really great. I mean, I have seen them literally two guys that were both chaplains, rolling over a man who was covered in his own excrement, who was dying, and just sponging him down, as if they were just simply, it was a routine job. And it wasn't what they were trained to do, but they'd do it. And then they'd make jokes, crazy, corny jokes. And they did a lot for us too, because we needed help.

MS: You needed your spirits lifted as well.

LF: And, you got to the point where you'd make some pretty raw jokes sometimes. Even at the expense of the inmates because it was all so tragic that if you didn't find something to laugh at...

MS: You'd probably have a nervous breakdown, yeah.

LF: I mean, I remember one woman asking me if the soup was kosher one day and I said [chuckling], "Who in the hell cares?" [laughing] You know, something to that effect. I said, "Did you ask the Germans if what they gave you was kosher?" And she said, "Oh, well they didn't give us any meat." [both laughing] And I said, "Well they were kosher cows, I'm sure!" You know, [laughing]...

MS: Poor soul.

LF: And of course they were being careful about that. They weren't bringing pork products in. I shouldn't say that entirely because there was some Spam brought in and [laughing] heaven alone knows what Spam was. But by and large, you know, what they were getting was beef broth, chicken broth, that sort of thing. And even the Spam could be blessed and made kosher at this point I think! [both laughing] You know? Anyway, this is the kind of thing that was happening, and it was just an incredible mess. I stayed at Belsen for that couple of weeks, and then I went on to Nordhausen and Buchenwald. And I was only gone about a week on that assignment, with a couple of other people, to help the U.S. forces, to help them set up some similar systems.

MS: Also for interviewing and the inmates.

LF: Mmm hmm. For the interviews, and of course they had their own field hospitals, and they were setting up things and the American Red Cross was there and you didn't really stay around long enough to find out what was going on. There didn't seem to be much difference when we went to Buchenwald. It sure didn't seem to be much different to Bergen-Belsen.

MS: Was that as large a camp do you know?

LF: I don't think it was quite as big a camp. It was still incredibly dirty, and the bad conditions were overwhelming. There wasn't typhus there, thank heaven, not at Buchenwald, not when I was there. But I couldn't, you know, there was, by no means could you call it a resort, or anything resembling it. And I went back to Bergen-Belsen at the end of that week, and stayed another four or five days, that time just compiling data. But I walked out into the camp several times and talked to the women that I'd been talking to before and told them that I was back and that we were trying to do things and that I was gonna go away again, but I'd be back again. And, asking them if the other people were taking care of them. Because you felt very responsible for them when you started asking them all these personal questions. And you could see that sometimes, when you asked them the personal questions about what had happened to their families, that it was very painful for them to answer, just nightmares. And it was nothing to hear one after another, "Gone, all gone. They kept me. They killed the others."

MS: What, how was your material being handled once you had the interviews with these people? What was the final disposition of the...

LF: Well, a lot of the stuff and particularly the barbarous stuff, was used in the War Crimes trials. But a l-, almost all of the information of, about personal data...

MS: Yes.

LF: Was supplied to the International Red Cross, which set up clearing-houses...

MS: Oh right, yes.

LF: To try to get--And later in the UNRRA camps, huge notice boards appeared. And there were places that they could go to get information. People scanned the notice boards, and we provided notice boards too, right away, and lots of scrap paper and pencils, so that people could start writing their names, and the name of the town they came from. And you'd try to get these town people into groups to support each other. And there were screams of recognition sometimes, you know, and cries and yells, and they became their own little family units.

MS: In other words, an inmate would find another inmate in the same camp who...

LF: That they didn't even know was there.

MS: Was a neighbor or friend.

LF: Because, you know...

MS: Yes.

LF: Because they were all so dirty, and they were herded and regimented but now all of a sudden there was some freedom to stroll around, and they did. They strolled up and down the streets endlessly, looking, and talking to people, and then occasionally, there'd suddenly be a hubbub and a yell and a scream and you'd know that somebody had found someone...

MS: Found someone.

LF: That they knew, or that they knew of, in some way. Anyway, I, you know, after these little trips to the other camps and then back, I went off again. And I went to Dachau, which was a nightmare all its own. I went then on loan to the Russians. I got a look at Auschwitz, and then I went to Ravensbrück. Much later I saw Theresienstadt. But Ravensbrück, Ravensbrück was disgusting.

MS: Worse so than what you had witnessed?

LF: Not so much in physical conditions, but the stories. [takes a deep breath] Oh! It chills my blood. I've got goose bumps on my arms thinking about Ravensbrück and the stories. There was a woman doctor there, a German woman doctor, had been. She was a prisoner, not a prisoner of the Germans, but by this time the Russians had made her a prisoner. Her name was Herta Oberhauser. She was a volunteer. She volunteered to go and work in the experiments. She was the most sadistic bitch I've ever run across in my entire life, and I don't apologize for using that word--it's not bad enough. She took part in the medical experiments. She took muscles out of people, parts of their limbs, vital organs. She conducted forced sterilization on women who were then put into Wehrmacht and S.S. brothels. All this without anesthesia. She infected them with tetanus and gangrene. She rubbed sawdust and dirt and ground glass into open wounds. This woman was a creature. I mean, a creature.

MS: Did she admit to this in testimony?

LF: She pled, "Not guilty." She said that she was ordered to do it. She was given 20 years at Nuremberg. I went back to the trials. It was one of the later duties that I was given. She was released. The Nuremberg trials, of course in 1946, '45, '46; after '46 they began. She was released in 1952. That means that, at a maximum, that woman served about six years, and the year that she was held prior to the trials. She was released by an American Department of the Army civilian called John McCloy, who succeeded General Lucius Clay, as the American Commander in Germany. I've got lots of stories about the things that both the Americans and British did that were inept. But this is a notable one.

MS: Was there...

LF: By 1958, she had gone back to practice in Germany. The German government had given her a pension as a returning P.O.W., and given her a grant to set up a practice. And I tracked her down, along with someone who was writing a book, because I was so appalled. And she was literally in practice, in family practice, in Germany, with the help, and she was at a place called Itzehoe, in Schleswig-Holstein. Can you imagine, after all that? That was only one. That was one woman who did things to lots of people. I saw people there, talked with people, who were so disfigured from the things that they had done. It was estimated that about 1,000 women died in those experiments.

*Tape four, side two:*

MS: This is tape four, side two, of an interview with Leigh Fraser, and we will contin-, she will continue her story at this time.

LF: I don't know how acceptable it is to people to hear some of the stuff that they did to women in Ravensbrück. The French called it *L’enfer de femme*, hell for women. There were lots of French resistance women there. There were also some British women there, and quite a few Jewish women. Most of them had been either Resistance or they had really done something. A couple of the Jewish women that I met had literally murdered S.S. officers and were sent there as punishment and were used in these experiments as part of their punishment. Ravensbrück had a unique way of killing people. That's the first thing that comes to mind. Most of the people that were at Ravensbrück were there because they were in what was called the *Nacht und Nebel*, Night and Fog programs. They were to be disappeared and never heard from again, and nobody was to know what happened to them. And the Germans had a euphemism for killing people that was called “special treatment”. Special treatment in other camps usually meant being shot or going to the gas chamber. In Ravensbrück, if they weren't getting a whole shipment ready to send somewhere else, they stuck them in the dentist's chair. And the dentist's chair, once they got them into the chair, they could push a button, and manacles and leg irons came out and clamped around them, and a thing came around their necks. It was a very ingenious device. And they were held immobile in that chair and generally their blouse was ripped open, and they were injected into the heart to kill them. Those last few moments while all this was being done must have been absolutely terrifying for them. And it was generally cyanide directly into the heart, which is a peculiarly horrible death. I've talked to women that were survivors of Wehrmacht and S.S. brothels. They had been forcibly sterilized, usually without anesthesia, and incredible things were done to them. And I know it's not really acceptable to talk about people's sexual practices, but somebody should know what they did. They forced these women into brothels. They were literally used like animals sexually. They were tied up in peculiar positions and abused by the men who used them. Some of them had their teeth pulled and were forced into continued oral sex. And the teeth were pulled so that they couldn't bite those tender German parts. [sighs] There were girls who, two girls hung themselves while I was there. They were sisters. And three days later, their grandmother, who was also a prisoner there hung herself. These two girls had been forced to be brothel inmates. They had been so misused. And the grandmother told me the story when I was interviewing her. She was forced to be a maid in the brothels, and these poor girls were literally strapped into a chair so that they could be neatly used by the Germans. And this poor lady went along with a bucket, and something resembling a dish mop, and mopped them up so that the next German would have a nice, clean place to go. There aren't any polite expressions for this. They were just there to be used. And they were mortified. They were absolutely shamed. And that's why the girls hung themselves. And then the grandmother hung herself a couple of days later. She had been...

MS: Once they were set free.

LF: That's right.

MS: Oh God.

LF: They both hung themselves in the bathroom, and the grandmother hung herself in the barracks. She had mourned and cried, and then she just couldn't take it anymore, and that was all that was left of one family. And, I can just imagine that woman. She was in her 50s, and these girls were about 18, 16, 17, 18, somewhere in that. And she'd been forced to watch this for a couple of years. And they were pretty girls. Very pretty girls. So I imagine that they were in a great deal of demand. Other things got done to them too. Sexual torture was a favorite game with the Germans. They used electrodes, and they were very fond of putting electrodes on people and then stimulating them to find out how much pain that caused. And that was also part of the medical experiments. There were just people there who had scars, who had part of a leg muscle gone, part of an arm gone. One woman had her breast literally sliced into ribbons and left on her body to see if she'd get an infection. And there were people that were going to need all kinds of plastic surgery to look normal again because their faces had been disfigured in experiments and some of them had been burned with acid. These people were diabolical, the Germans, absolutely diabolical. There was no need for this. It, I talked a lot with the professor who gave, Professor Keith, who gave evidence at the Nuremberg trials because of the fact that I'd been an interviewer. And he said there was no earthly reason for these kinds of things to be done, that it served absolutely no medical purpose whatsoever. And that it was unconscionable. And then I had an absolutely terrible personal experience the second day that I was there. I was walking down a corridor and someone called my name. And I couldn't imagine who would be calling me by my first name because most people called you by your rank and your last name. But I kept hearing this rather thin voice. And I finally stopped and turned back and started walking back down the corridor saying, "Who's calling me? This is Leigh Fraser. Who is it that's calling me?" And a voice said, "In here." And I walked in, and I did not recognize the person sitting in there. It looked like a woman who was in her 40s, and who was so beaten up, literally beaten up. Her face was almost unrecognizable. Her nose had been broken. She had a broken arm which had been set by our people. She had, it proved later, scars on her back from where she had been burned with a poker. She was a friend's sister, and she had been dropped into France because she spoke fluent French. She had been dropped into France to work with one of the *Maquis réseau*, [Maqui’s network], the resistance groups, and had been betrayed. The whole group had been betrayed. And she...

MS: She was an English girl?

LF: Yeah. We had a lot of agents working in France, and a lot of them were women. And the Germans had taken her in France. They had beaten the living daylights out of her. They were terrible at this sort of thing. And then she had been shipped to Ravensbrück. And, in a scuffle, one of the guards there broke her arm, just to add insult to injury. She was 28 years old, and she looked much more than 40. And I happen to know that that woman survived. She didn't, she's not alive now. She didn't live a long life. She died in her 50's. I'm sure a lot of it had to do with what she suffered there. But I know that she underwent 17 operations to restore her face and her appearance. Every bone in her face had been broken at some point during the Gestapo beatings to try to get her to give more information to them. They had burned her spine with a hot poker. They had set fire to pieces of wood under her toenails.

MS: God.

LF: And it's no wonder that I didn't recognize her because what faced me was a very misshapen person. And I had been in school with her younger sister. That's how she knew me. Because I asked her, and she said, "Somehow, I knew. I'd seen you play hockey on the same team as my sister. There was something about the way you went down the corridor, and just as you got out of sight, I remembered your name."

MS: Mmm. What an amazing story.

LF: I telephoned her family and told them that we'd found her. [pause] Her father was a lawyer, and this was an incredibly brave person because she was Jewish. She didn't have to go. We didn't ask Jewish volunteers to be dropped into Europe. In fact, we discouraged them, but she wanted to go.

MS: What was her name?

LF: Lori Gorkoff. And her sister was in school with me, as I said. Her sister Sheila was in school with me. Her father was a lawyer in London, and her mother had been a university professor. Her mother had been killed in the bombing, and that was her motivation to go.

MS: Unbelievable.

LF: And I remember when Sheila's mother was killed, because it was about a week before my sister was killed. Her mother was driving an ambulance. She was a volunteer. And that had been Lori's motivation to go and fight Germans.

MS: What happened...

LF: So...

MS: What happened to her from the time that you spoke with her? Was she sent out of the camp?

LF: I raised absolute and utter Cain...

MS: Yes.

LF: About finding her in the condition that she was in. We had half a dozen other British women, and I raised absolute hell with the Soviets that night. And by sheer force of words, I made them let me communicate with my old unit and Colonel Draper, who was just an absolute whiz at doing things, and to whom I talked. I got on the telephone to London, and they exerted a lot of pressure. And two days later, an RAF plane came to Templehof. And I went with them, in the truck, down to Templehof, from Ravensbrück, which is north of Berlin. I went with them, down to Templehof , and they were flown out. There was one notable woman prisoner who is Odette Churchill. There have been books written about Odette. And it was, I had told Draper this when I called him. And...

MS: Was she in this group too?

LF: Yes, she was in this group. And he used that for leverage to get them out. Because the Germans had been led to believe that she was a relation of Winston Churchill. She wasn't. There was just a coincidence in name. But they'd been led to believe that. And, so they came and got her. And they got the others, of course, at the same time. And the man who operated on Lori was a man called Archibald Makindeau, who had been treating RAF pilots whose faces had been horribly burned. And he made a pretty good job of Lori's face. At least, you could tell it was her again.

MS: Hmm. Did you have occasion to meet her again?

LF: Oh yeah, I saw her when I went back to London. She could not tell her family about what Ravensbrück was like. I spent several hours with them, and I had an awful time explaining to her father and her sister what had been going on. If it was awful for me, imagine how awful it was for her to be there, and she had been there three years.

MS: Three years.

LF: Now, they were not worked to death at Ravensbrück. They were just very, very brutally treated. And somehow, some of them hung on. And then there were certain people like Odette Churchill that were sort of more or less held as hostages, and treated slightly better than the others. But only slightly. And, I don't know whether we're going to have time to get all of this one on, but the last question I think we're going to have time for today was, how, in my own mind, did I explain the German decision to set up the camps? The first thing is money. The Nazis needed money to finance all their plans. It's a very tough question. There's not a single answer to why they did this, but the first thing is money. And we also need to remember that Hitler was a total psychopath with a very low-life following. The people that glued themselves to him at the beginning were not intellectuals. They were essentially what we today call "white trash". And, really, thugs, bullies. Some of them were homosexual despite the fact that they prosecuted and imprisoned homosexuals, some of them were. They were frequently uneducated. They were despised by the old Prussian officer class. They needed some scapegoats. They needed objects of hatred. They also needed money, very quickly. German Jews, unlike the poor Jews from eastern Europe, had possessions. They were often intellectually brilliant. They owned property. They were industrious. They were frugal. They were accomplished people. They were also a threat to the Nazis in a very subtle way. I think in time they would have provided a very strong objection to the lack of moral and spiritual fiber to the bankrupt personalities of the Nazis. You can't adore the swastika and then bow down before the ark and the scriptures. The two just are not compatible in any way. You can't do those things in equal measure. And the German industrialists who backed Hitler, and they did, saw a chance to grab off Jewish property, to make a lot of money very quickly. And I'm speaking of some pretty well-known names. I'm talking about Thyssen, the steel magnate, Krupps, who I'll talk about later on because he was an incredible sadist, as well as being horrendously greedy. I'm talking about I. G. Farben, Bosch, they, the people who make car ignition parts, BMW. They were, none of them had clean hands. When you read into what happened in Germany and who used the slave labor, these are the people who used the slave labor. So the Jews made them rich in more than one way. Because they took their property and got it at fire sale prices, and then worked them to death, literally worked them to death. So, that's partly how I explain the camps. *Ausgerottet* is what the Germans called it. Kill them off. *Endlösung* came later, Final Solution. The evil genius behind the camps wasn't as much Hitler because Hitler didn't have a very strong stomach. It was Himmler. Heinrich Himmler. He absolutely slavishly adored Hitler. He'd do anything for him. And it was he who made it possible for the industrialists to have their wish in return for their backing. Two wonderful Aryans. Take a look at photographs of the two of them. Himmler, weak, short sighted, anything but a figure of an Aryan. Hitler the same way. If you saw him without the trappings, those awful cartoons portraying the Jew as a monster, you could have put Hitler's face into some of those very neatly if you took off the toothbrush mustache. He wasn't an attractive man at all. That's my feeling about what happened with the camps. It's possibly oversimplified. It's the only explanation I can find, after years and years of reading and thinking and reviewing in my mind. All in all, I have to say that this was one of the most horrifying experiences, other than being in it oneself. Being a member of that team was one of the most horrifying experiences I ever believe a human can go through. And there's not one single person that I know of, that was on that team, who wouldn't agree with me. Nobody felt callous about it. Everybody that I know that's still alive, and some of them were a lot older than me so some of them are gone, but everybody that I know that's still alive, feels much as I do. From different motives sometimes, but they still say it was the worst thing that ever happened to them, outside of their own personal disasters. We weren't part of a regiment, so there wasn't really any history. I don't know exactly what the army did with their histories, the British Army. So we didn't have a lasting entity as a unit. So, we didn't write any history. I've discussed the, you know, those experiences with a lot of people. And some of us later on were loaned to the War Crimes trials, tribunals, both the individual British ones, and the Nüremberg trials. I was part of both. And, I'd like to talk about the trials and my very bitter feelings about the ending of our work, and what happened after the trials, a little bit later on. I've known a lot of people who were involved with concentration camps. I didn't have any idea, until we started amassing all the evidence for the trials, just how many camps there were. Even having been involved with these few camps, I had no idea. I mean, I saw the remains of Treblinka, which, of course, was destroyed by the prisoners themselves. And I saw some of the satellite camps around Dachau, and around Auschwitz. And, the man that I referred to just now, Colonel Draper, was the man who brought Rudolf Höss, the Commandant of Auschwitz to commit himself to telling the story of what had happened, got him to admit the crimes that had been there. Jerry Draper was just tremendous. He was a lawyer, and he was very, very good at getting that sort of thing out of people, and he just tracked him and got him to tell the story. I know one or two people who are former prisoners, survivors, Holocaust survivors. And, I had a sister-in-law--she's now dead--who was at Dachau. And...

MS: As a prisoner?

LF: As a prisoner, and at Belsen. And I found her on my second trip back to Belsen. I was having problems with a group of Hungarian women. My sister-in-law was Hungarian.

MS: Married...

LF: Her father was a linguist, and an anti-Nazi. He was anti-Horthy, the dictator, Admiral Horthy. All of Zanna's family--her father was shot--all the rest of the family were shipped, and she was the only survivor. And when I was on the War Crimes Trials Commission staff, I had gotten her a job. She spoke five languages. When I first saw her, she looked like a skinned rabbit. She was a small woman, and she was very, very, painfully thin. I begged and borrowed clothes from people and got her dressed. And got people to help cut her hair, and got lipsticks and toothbrushes and things like that for her.

MS: What camp did you find her in again?

LF: I found her in Bergen-Belsen. And when I was on the War Crimes Trials, Tribunal staff, I had literally tracked her through the UNRRA camps, and then said that she would be useful to us because of her linguistic ability. She could translate anything at sight, and speak five languages. And I talked the British Commission into giving her a job. And that later led to my brother getting her her papers. Because my brother came to see me when I was working in Germany on the second trip there. And he just went nuts about her.

MS: Oh, I see. [chuckling] I was a little confused about the relationship.

LF: No, no, he...

MS: It was after...

LF: He married her afterwards.

MS: This was your third brother, right?

LF: This was, yeah, this was my brother who died three years ago. It was his wife. She was a really special person. And...

MS: Well when you met her in Bergen-Belsen, of course, she was a stranger to you and you didn't have any...

LF: Complete stranger, and I was having problems. We had a very rowdy element among some of the Hungarian women. They could fight like a bunch of cats. And I waded into a bunch of them one night. I'd been talking to some other people and it was after work hours and I was, all of a sudden this big scuffle broke out, and I waded into it and started trying to separate them. And, I'd been taught how to separate women when they scrap. And I had literally dumped a couple of them on the ground, and was yelling at the others, but not having much impact. And was on the point of drawing my revolver and firing it into the air, you know, to get some help, and all of a sudden this little "virago" [virile woman] appeared and started screaming at these women. And yelling blue and bloody murder at them, and they must have decided that she meant whatever it was that she was saying. And she got them quieted down. And then she turned to me and in perfect English said, "I don't think they'll give you any more trouble." [both laugh] So, that was a bit strange.

*Tape five, side one:*

MS: This is tape five of an interview with Leigh Fraser. The date is November the 9th, 1993, and we are continuing this very interesting interview of Leigh's experiences in Europe, and she's going to continue at this point with her work with some of the War Crimes trials.

LF: I think a lot of people don't know what happened with some of the more prominent people who were being held in the concentration camps toward the end of the war. There were groups that were known as "Honor Prisoners", and many of them were kept in rather strange environments. Some were kept at Dachau. The principal place, however, where they were kept, was Flossenbürg. And Flossenbürg had very few Jewish inmates. Flossenbürg was the place where after the July the 20th, 1944 plot on Hitler's life, Count Klaus von Stauffenberg, who placed the bomb with which they tried to kill Hitler, was executed, along with Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, and many other people. They were hung in an empty shed at Flossenbürg with piano wire. [in April 1945]. That led to a wholesale purge-type operation, and one of the things that I am privy to is what happened to Claus von Stauffenberg's family. I'm not suggesting that one should have a lot of sympathy for the Germans in general because of what they were allowing to happen. But there were people who were pretty decent and who'd had enough of Hitler, and this was one of those families. Because of Claus'--who was a Wehrmacht officer--participation in the plot, the whole von Stauffenberg family was taken. This included his wife, sisters, brothers, grandparents, the wives and children of the brothers, cousins, all sorts of innocent people, down to the babies of the family. And they were shuffled around along with a group of other people, and eventually lumped in together with people like Kurt von Schuschnigg, rather, the former German, ah, Austrian Chancellor, who together with his wife was held. There were other people: Pastor Niemöller, Stalin's nephew, various French officials. And these people, comprising a group of about 150 people, were shuffled all over the place in the last months of the war, by the Germans, classified as "Honor Prisoners", not beaten and flogged on a daily basis, but they had been tortured when they were first taken. And better fed than most of the prisoners, but they were being guarded by the S.S., the *Liebstandarte*. And they were going to be used as pawns in negotiations in German surrender. They were shuffled all over the place and were eventually liberated through the courage of a Wehrmacht officer up in the Alto Adige which is part of the high Tyrol. They were marched, trained, and marched again, all over southern Germany, into the Alpine redoubts. And they suffered horribly. Some of the survivors died from tuberculosis afterwards, from some of the privations that they suffered. And I think this is basically an illustration that the Nazi Party didn't give a damn. They felt that these people were pawns, but the S.S. who were guarding them had instructions to liquidate them during the negotiations. Sometimes in front of the negotiators if they couldn't get what they wanted. Fortunately it didn't come to that much of a head, and this particular Wehrmacht officer apparently stuck his neck out and got the S.S. to give up and disappear because they were afraid for their own skins.

MS: How did you gain this information, Leigh?

LF: I gained this information from members of the von Stauffenberg family themselves, from General Blumentritt's nephew, who was also held in a similar group. Blumentritt was one of the officers in the Normandy invasion on the German side. And I met some of these people. I met Blumentritt's nephew, for example, when I was on NATO staff after Germany entered NATO. And when you heard some of these stories from the Prussian old guard--and you have to understand, I don't really like Germans particularly anyway--and I've only got to hear their accent to go berserk. But, when you hear these stories you realize that there were some immense struggles among those people, and that they were concerned with their country and not with the Nazi Party. And, when they started telling these stories of what had happened to some of their relatives, there was very real distress. And I did meet a number of the people in the von Stauffenberg family. Both of Claus von Stauffenberg's parents died from the privations that they suffered. They, their health was just undermined in being shuffled around in inadequate clothing and in dreadful conditions. Perhaps not similar to the horror stories of the camps that we've talked about, but still, not nice by any means. And from there, I think we ought to go to the retribution that was exacted in some instances. The first example that I can give you is that I was involved in the Bergen-Belsen trials, which were held by the British and which lasted approximately two months, in the fall of 1945. The S.S. and some of the *Kapos* from Bergen-Belsen were tried, and several of us who had been on the interviewing teams gave evidence. Several prisoners, former prisoners, gave evidence, and there were some convictions. There were approximately 40 depend- defendants. There were about nine people sentenced to death.

MS: Was the Commandant of the camp...

LF: The camp Commandant was sentenced to death, Josef Kramer. And Elisabeth Volkenrath, who was one of the S.S. guards, really belligerent, extremely unpleasant woman, with whom I had a couple of shouting matches in the early days at Bergen-Belsen, was sentenced to death. And so was Irma Gries, the woman I referred to before who was known as the "Bitch of Belsen", and who thoroughly deserved it. They were hung. There were other people that were sentenced to fairly lengthy prison terms, and they served most of them, strangely enough. Because there they were sentenced early in the game, and before the War Crimes Trials Clemency Boards got into the act in the '50s, and before people felt confident enough to start applying political pressure. Among them was the chief *Kapo* at the camp. And I can't remember his name. It's documented somewhere. And, this Polish woman, who was known as Stemma the Flogger. She was one of the *Kapos*. They, you have to understand that the *Kapos* were just incredible people. They were almost like robots. They were so intent on saving themselves that they just literally numbed themselves to the suffering of their fellow prisoners. They didn't give a hang. They didn't give a hang. Periodically, in most of the camps, the *Kapos* who got too "uppity", to use that good old American folksy expression, were wiped out. But, those of them who served well, usually managed to find somebody who saved their neck. And Kramer was the kind of guy who liked to have a lot of loyalty. And he kept his *Kapos* longer than a lot of the camp Commandants did. And I must say that the evidence that I saw at Belsen, and what the inmates told me, bore out that these people lived a very privileged life for prisoners--the *Kapos* I'm talking about.

MS: Yes, yes.

LF: The trials were unbelievable because, every one of those people that were, that was on trial, lied like a bandit. In all the War Crimes trials that I saw, including the A trials at Nuremberg, only one person ever pleaded guilty, and that was Albert Speer. The rest of them didn't do it, didn't see it, weren't there, shifted the blame to somebody else. And, somebody once said, one of the prisoners sarcastically said, "This Hitler must have been some kind of guy. He ran the country, built the munitions, and fought the war, and not one damn German helped him." [chuckles] And that's really rather ironic. But that's what you got all the time. "I didn't do it. I didn't see it. I wasn't there. It was exaggerated. It's a lie."

MS: Wasn't there evidence to refute that?

LF: Oh, there was plenty of evidence to refute it. And this of course is how the sentences were obtained. But, they were so damned arrogant, the Germans and their *Kapo* henchmen, that they felt that they could "BS" their way out of these heinous charges. They were so used to having their way. Remember, that they had been ruling the roost. Remember, too, that concentration camps had been in existence since 1933. That was the first published thing, in the Munich equivalent of *The Illustrated News*. There were pictures published, as I later discovered. They thought they didn't owe anybody any explanation for what they did because they were doing it for the German Reich. And therefore, they were entitled to do any damn thing they pleased. You have to see some of the files when they sent people to their deaths. Not the numberless thousands who got off the trains and went straight to the death camps without really being any more than just a herd. But, the people they held for a while all had a file, a very carefully numbered file. And, when they were finally sent [sneezes] [excuse me], after being held, when they were finally sent to their deaths, their death sentences always read, "To Special Treatment By Order of the *Führer's* S.S." The *Führer's* the Chief of the S.S. Because that's exactly what the word *Führer* means. So, they felt that they had the right to do this.

MS: When you say that special people had files, of course not every victim.

LF: Not every victim had files, but there certainly were some very well-recorded files. And everybody that got a concentration camp number had a file. They didn't tattoo the crowds of people who had just got off the trains.

MS: It was, the crowds were too immense. The [unclear].

LF: That's correct.

MS: For, it was just too overwhelming.

LF: That's why you hear every number imaginable, between six million and nine million. I think if the truth is told, that the nine million figure, all together, is probably somewhere close to the truth. I think it has to between nine and ten million people, of whom approximately six million were Jewish. I don't believe that there is any way that one can ever reconcile those numbers because of the enormous destruction.

MS: It’s impossible.

LF: And because of the lack of documentation of some of the tribal qualities of the Gypsies, for example, and the nomadic life, and the somewhat disorderly village life of Middle Europe. There were lots of people who were so ignorant that they didn't necessarily register their children's births. So who knew whether a family went to their deaths with six or eight children?

MS: Sure.

LF: And in the German mind, who cared? Because nobody really did care. Just get rid of them, the flotsam.

MS: Absolutely tragic.

LF: To return briefly to the Belsen trials, I'm a fairly religious person most of the time. I'm not a maniac about it, but I really do believe that there is a Supreme Being. And I begged God to forgive me for my feelings, as I sat listening and giving evidence a couple of times. I took an immense glee in staring down some of the people that I knew had committed heinous things at Belsen. And, when the death sentences were passed on some of them, and the prison sentences on the others, I couldn't even find any pity at all. I couldn't even pray to God to forgive me for my feelings. I was so absolutely stunned at the enormity. That was the first time that we got all the figures together of all the things in that courtroom. And it was absolutely terrifying to listen to one story after another, and to see one pile of documents after another, brought on in little wheeled carts, and to hear one interpreter/interviewer after another get up and say, "There are 800 files in this cart. There are 1300 files in this cart. I attest to the fact that I've looked at all of them and that every one of them bears notations that I made while interviewing prisoners." And then a particular prisoner would be called up. You would be asked to name a prisoner and you would call up a prisoner who would attest to particular events. It was just terrifying to see these mountains of paper that attested to the systematic killing and torture of people. And there was no way that you could find, or at least I couldn't find, any pity at all. And I was pretty terrified by the depths of my own emotions at that time. I wa-, I still cringe, nearly 50 years later, I still cringe when I hear a German accent. And I'm very well aware of the long-buried feelings and the troubles that lots of the prisoners have carried with them, the former prisoners have carried with them, through their lives. After everything I've said about all of this, I've got some very condemnatory remarks to make about both the British and the American governments. I think that both countries did an absolutely abominable job of convicting all but a very few of the German Nazi criminals who killed almost everybody that opposed them. It was considered to be cheaper by the British not to bring some to trial. It was a lot more expedient for the Americans to use the T-squads, which they used to whisk thousands of scientists out from under the noses of the Russians. They whisked them and their families, at fifteen minutes' notice. People like Werner von Braun, who was the most famous of them, they were going to be useful to this country. And...

MS: What do you mean by T-squads?

LF: They had these squads where they had a special sign with a big red "T" on their helmet, and they had authority to find a scientist and his family who was on their list, their want-list, and no one could stop them from requisitioning transportation, facilities, feeding, and to get these people out. And some of them were packed and gone within fifteen to thirty minutes of being found, and whisked out of the country so that the Russians wouldn't get them. And many of them went on to become American citizens in particular.

MS: And these people were all part of the Nazi war machine?

LF: Lots of them were at Peenemünde, where they were developing the rockets, the V-1 and the V-2 rockets. And I can attest to the fact that those rockets and the buzz bombs devastated London, as many American servicemen who were there will tell you; the populace went around listening to those drones, which the V-1s were. And you waited until the engine cut out and you'd dive for cover. Fortunately, I was out of England during some of that time. But that started right after the invasion, in June of 1944. By mid-June they were in operation and almost the entire south coast had to be evacuated. Hospitals, schools, orphanages, so as to get loads of people away from them. The V-1s were bad enough. You could hear them coming and they terrified you, especially when the engine cut out. The V-2s were worse. A V-2 could decimate a city block. And these people that I'm talking about, who were rescued by the T-squads and whisked into this country, had been doing that. They had been...

MS: They were the scientists.

LF: Experimenting. They were the scientists. They were the people who developed these things, and they were the people who were going to be useful to this country. And apparently the plans were long and well-laid to bring them out because it was a very efficient machinery. And I personally saw that work on lots of occasions. I think it's criminal. These people killed my countrymen. They aided in the killing of others. They supervised slave labor. And then they were brought to America and given a privileged life, helped to get their citizenship outside the normal framework.

MS: What was the political reason behind this?

LF: To get them away from the Russians, because the Russians were going to be such a threat.

MS: Don’t you think the Russians would have killed them?

LF: Oh, the Russians didn't kill them. They took them and used them and they put them in servitude and used them, those that they got. This was the early part of the Space Race and the ICBM rockets. This was the foundation for all of that terror that we went through during the years of the Cold War. And, the U.S./U.S.S.R. stand-offs. So, we...

MS: So it was simply a race between the two nations to shelter these scientists.

LF: That's correct. That's correct. As I said, many of them were given U.S. citizenship. There were supposedly de-nazification programs in operation. They were an absolutely ludicrous joke. Within months, many of them were reinstated, approved by the occupying forces because they felt they needed them. They were the only people who knew how to run this or that or the other aspect of the country. There was a lot of pressure from various groups. We had an M.P., a Member of Parliament in Britain, called Victor Galance, who was totally opposed to the War Crimes trials and who made enormous fusses. Another name, that I have no hesitation in mentioning, is that of Antony Eden, who went on to become the Prime Minister in a Tory government. Antony Eden was for years a pro-Arabist. He was extremely gentlemanly, but he was also extremely gentlemanly in his antisemitism. There was absolutely no one who knew anything about government who didn't understand that very clearly. And he put an enormous amount of pressure on the coalition government that Britain had. And even though a Labor government was developed immediately after the war in Britain, when Britain became somewhat Socialist, he still exerted a lot of influence. And he and his cohorts were among the prime movers at stopping the whole process of severity in the trials. They were also very instrumental in something that doesn't even really directly relate to this, but relates to the plight of all those numberless thousands afterwards, in trying to keep people out of Palestine.

MS: Yes.

LF: And you know that there was a great deal of pressure there, which is an entirely different subject. And to go back to the whole de-nazification thing. It was such a horrible joke. The S.S. were helped to escape from Germany by the Vatican, by the Perón government in Argentina. Many of them sailed from the port of Genoa under a program which was known as the *Kameradenverein* [phonetic], which was a, an internal S.S. quasi-welfare society to look after each other. I can take you within ten miles of this house and show you where a former S.S. officer lives, who lived in Argentina, who joined the Argentine Air Force, and then came into this country. He was a doctor, a graduate of the University of Vienna. After serving with the Argentine Air Force, he came into this country and was in Los Alamos, New Mexico, in the chimpanzee program which was the pre- Man in Space program. He is retired as a U.S. Navy civilian, drawing a pension from people in this country. And he's only one. I can take you directly to that house in very short order. I know his name. He's listed in the telephone book. He's not alone. There are hundreds of people in this country who participated in similar ways. Dozens of U.S. citizens were former S.S. employees. Demjanjuk was only one of many, many *Kapos* who got away and who got into this country one way or another. Lots of them emerged in the UNRRA camps and managed to get themselves classified as victims, displaced persons, and that's how they got here. They were able to establish a new life with the connivance of this government. And there were so many pressures brought on them. Everybody thinks that McCarthy was so bad about the Communist trials in the '50s. Very few people realize that McCarthy did his best to screw up the Nuremberg trials too, and brought a hell of a lot of pressure there.

MS: I was not aware of it.

LF: He was a member of the German-American Bund! He was a Senator from Wisconsin, he was a Congressman from Wisconsin in those days. Wisconsin is heavily German. Milwaukee was almost exclusively German. I know a couple of retired U.S. Air Force officers whose mothers wrote to them all during the war in German. That didn't make these guys bad citizens, but it certainly proves that there was a very strong unity in the German community.

*Tape five, side two:*

LF: See, so many people don't know some of this stuff. To begin with, people don't read.

MS: This is tape five, side two, of an interview with, we are continuing our interview with Leigh Fraser at this moment.

LF: It's true that there were trials. And it's true that the Allies hung a few people and imprisoned a good many others. I think that a lot of people don't realize that those sentences were meddled with under political pressure, sometimes internal, McCarthism I'm talking about and also later, under international pressure. Almost everybody had their sentence commuted, and nearly all of them were free by the mid-fifties, '56, '57, '58, except people like poor, mad old Hess, who was being held as a Russian political pawn in Spandau, and Admirals Doenitz and Raeder and Albert Speer, who were being held for twenty-year sentences. And most of them served their full sentence, weren't released till '66. They were the exception rather than the rule. The horrible thing is that the same bankers ran the banks in West Germany. The same industrialists made millions of marks during the West German redevelopment period. And if you look at the names, they'd make you sick because these are the same people that employed all those millions of slave laborers that they worked to death. And the thing that I want to finally comment on is a man who I consider to be probably the prime murderer of slave laborers, *Lager* prisoners, of all time. And that is Alfred Krupp. I consider him to be the worst of the world's mass murderers. Today, all these years later, still no one's ever been able to figure out exactly how many concentration camps served his empire. We know that he failed to make a go of the big detonator factory that he built at Auschwitz. He actually complained to the camp Commandant, Rudolf Höss, that, "Höss's S.S. men gassed too many for me to be able to obtain enough labor." And that's a quotation, direct quotation from him. Krupp fed his workers one meal in their twelve-hour work day. It was known as *Bunkersuppe*, and it was a 350-calorie bowl of greasy water, with pieces of vegetable in it. It was the only meal those people got all day. They were marched five to six miles, that's approximately an hour-and-a-half for a healthy person to walk. Then they worked twelve hours. And they weren't just beaten by their guards. They were beaten by their fellow German workers because remember, that lots of these people were also Germans who happened to be Jews. But they'd been deprived of their citizenship, of course. And then they had to march back again, to their concentration camp. And dear Mr. Krupp, in his factory at Essen, stood up in his windows and watched them marched in every day and watched them marched out. The conditions were so bad in his factories that even the Nazi doctors complained about them. So that says something, because they were not notorious for being very humanitarian themselves. But they complained about the inhuman conditions. And he was such a sadist that he used to stand there and grin as they marched them in. There are photographs that were shown of him at the trials doing this. One of the secretaries that was employed at the Essen Works testified at the Nuremberg trials that he kept a cupboard-sized basement cage. It was used as a place of punishment. And almost anything could get you punishment. And in the winter weather, which gets pretty darned awful in Germany, these people were placed in this basement cage, [cupboard], and cold water was poured in. The secretary worked on the fifth floor, and she said you could hear the screams on the fifth floor. That's only one little story.

MS: This was all brought out at, in the Nuremberg trials.

LF: It was brought out in the Nuremberg trials. This was actual testimony at his trial. In April of 1945, with the Allied armies banging at Germany's gates, and sometimes already in Germany, he didn't want to be caught using slave labor. So he packed up 520 women onto a train at Bochum, outside Essen, where they joined 1500 men from another one of his camps, or his factories. Five of the women escaped, and all five testified at his trial. That train went to Buchenwald, where the Commandant refused the shipment. Refused these slightly more than 2,000 people, saying, and I quote, "It's too late to murder another 2,000 people today." The train was then sent north to Bergen-Belsen. The next day Bergen-Belsen was liberated. All of the people on that train were ill-treated and starving, but none of them were gassed or shot. One of the few times that everything went right, if you could call that right. Krupp was sentenced to 12 years in Landsberg for employing slave labor. The sentence was passed on June the 30th, 1948. He didn't even blink at that sentence until the judge ordered him, in the second part of the sentence, to forfeit all his possessions. He turned absolutely white then and nearly fainted. Now you have to remember, we are talking about a man who was a billionaire. That part of his sentence was reversed when the United States wanted the Germans to join NATO in late 1949--a little bit more political expediency. They exerted a ton of pressure, the Germans did, to release him and his fellow industrialists as a price for joining NATO. They were released. So, the Germans got their way again. Krupp, along with Fritz Thyssen, from the German Steel Industry, the I. G. Farben directors, Herman Bosch, the people that make the spark plugs and car parts, some of the BMW directors, were very well-treated at Landsberg. Krupp even was given a special room to use for Krupp Directors’ Meetings, furnished luxuriously with things sent from the Krupp factories. He was released on the 3rd of February, 1951. And I followed this, because I was assigned to NATO in 1950. And I started tracking a lot of this stuff. His possessions were restored to him at that time. That order was signed by a man called John McCloy, who was a high-ranking U.S. Army civilian, who was the successor to General Lucius Clay, who'd been the Commandant, the American Commandant in Germany. John McCloy was a representative of the Secretary of the Army, the U.S. Army. I'm just about at the end. This is a dreadful epitaph. It's absolutely terrible. We didn't do anything to save them before the war when we knew what was going on. I know some of us tried to help those that were left alive when we went into those terrible camps. But I still think that our governments betrayed survivors. And they betrayed those of us who were there, who liberated them, who tried to help them. I really honestly believe that.

MS: It's an unbelievable ending to a period of history that is indescribable in its horror.

LF: It says some pretty awful things about political pressure, doesn't it? And expedincy. Look at the list of the people. Who ran the Deutsche Bank for years? Herman Obs [phonetic]. The Deutsche Bank is the biggest bank in the world. Herman Obs was the Nazi banker. Tons of those people came back to positions of power.

MS: And were never indicted for any...

LF: Well, they were tried. Some of them were tried. Some of them were denazified and let go. But Obs was never tried. I don't know how far one carries the retribution for what a nation does. I don't know whether you can say that the banker didn't know, and excuse it on those grounds. But I do know that the American administration in Germany was about the blindest, stupidest thing that you can imagine, as far as these people were concerned. And I also know that my own government, the British government, just plain didn't want to get involved in a lot of this because Britain was broke after six years of war and just couldn't stand the expense of prosecuting it. We should have passed all that on to the Germans. They've been far more prosperous than they've deserved to be. And then, damn it, we gave them Marshall Aid.

MS: It really doesn't make very much sense. And maybe it was a fear of another Versailles Treaty-type of treatment that they were trying to avoid.

LF: I think there's a very real fear of that, and I do think that the seeds for what happened in Germany in World War II were sown in the greed of the Versailles Treaty. When I first went to college, one of my first two degrees was a degree in history, and it was a pretty wide-flung history. One of the things that we studied was post-World War I Europe and its economic crisis. And I do think that there was a lot of greed exhibited in the reparations program. The French were particularly rapacious. Lots of things were brought to this country. Lots of things were also brought to this country after World War II. People don't realize that. There's a floating crane down in Philadelphia that was brought all the way across the Atlantic. A crane! An enormous crane, that was part of the Hamburg docks. Countries do strange things.

MS: What point did that serve?

LF: They wanted the crane, and it's still in use today. It is an engineering model. I don't know what's going to happen to it when they close the shipyard down there. But what's the point in doing something like that and then turning around and giving them millions of dollars in aid? We give with one hand and we take away with the other. We condemn them and then we don't punish them. Or, we partially punish them and then pat them on the head and say, "I'm sure you'll be little, good little boys in the future."

MS: It probably was a fear that they, that if they punish them too severely they'll have repercussions again in the future.

LF: In the mean...

MS: Who knows? I, it could, I could be all wrong of course.

LF: In the meantime, as far as I'm concerned, the ashes of close to 10 million people call out.

MS: [sighs] Very true.

LF: And when I think about the scenes that I described last time, in Belsen, and I think about hundreds of people dying daily in the middle of freedom, that we couldn't stop, I wonder why we did some of the things we did, what people were thinking about. And it wasn't the little people who were on the scene that were making these decisions. These decisions were coming off high-level government desks. Pressure was being exerted by Congressmen and politicians on both sides of the Atlantic. And it's another one of those, well, "Let's get on with it, that's another chapter behind us." But all of life was gone for those people. And it was, it smacks so much of, "Sweep them under the rug. Who cares?" And I'm talking about all of them, the political detainees, the Gypsies, the resistance people, the people whose only crime was in being Jewish, if that's a crime, and that's pretty sarcastic, I know. And it's not meant to be unpleasant.

MS: I understand Leigh, of course.

LF: And it could so easily have been any of us. That's the terrifying thing. I think I told you at the beginning that I was brought up in a very thinking family. And I can't help but think about Hillel again, "If not me, who? If not now, when?" And the who and the when never came for those people.

MS: And there's a big question mark for the future.

LF: And it's a big, big question mark for the future. And you'll remember, we looked at those photographs of Europe as it used to be. Dirty, muddy, poor, but showing signs of people being happy together. It might not be the way that we'd live, in the houses that we have today, and in the standards of this country, but it was life.

MS: It's true.

LF: And that's, every day something that I can't help but feel very, very grateful for. I don't like to bring these memories out very often.

MS: They're very painful.

LF: They're dreadful. After the last taping, I had real trouble sleeping for a couple of nights. And I've dragged out bits and pieces of diaries and looked at them, and every time I think about that period, I can't think about it for very long without crying. I don't bring those thoughts out very often any more. I just hope that people believe what they've heard. I hope that when people go around and talk about this, or when scholars dig into this and print things, that somehow we'll make future generations believe that this was evil. And that they'll see that it doesn't happen again. That's the whole point I think.

MS: Absolutely. Absolutely.

LF: For our grandchildren, for the generations after them, because we've lived through a pretty tense period since. The last thirty to thirty-five years have been pretty awful with the constant threat of maybe two major nations going at each others' throats again.

MS: With nuclear bombs.

LF: And the consequent price for mankind, not just for then, but for years to come.

MS: Absolutely.

LF: And I'm terribly troubled when I see some of the magazine articles, and the photographs of some of the wilder groups, the Aryan Nation and the Skinhead groups.

MS: That are resurfacing today, yes. Right.

LF: And I hear the awful stories that they don't believe that this ever happened, that it was all made up. When I hear that, I wish I could take them by the hand and whisk them back to Germany in April of 1945 and propel them forcibly through those camps. And maybe leave them there for a week or two, to be kicked and screamed at, and starved, and see if they felt so easy about it in their minds afterwards. Because I've had a couple of confrontations of that type. I have a son who lives in Oregon, and there are a couple of groups in Oregon who are absolutely out of their minds. And I've seen them at rallies. I've also worked in Skokie, Illinois, in my profession. And Skokie is loaded, loaded, with Holocaust survivors. It's hard to go into a store--I worked in Skokie in the '70's for about four months--it's really hard to go into almost any major store or even a small store in some neighborhoods, and not hear the accents of middle Europe, not to catch a glimpse of a tattooed arm. And you begin to realize that here are some of the people that we were able to get out.

MS: And you can understand their anger when the Ku Klux Klan opted to march in Skokie.

LF: I can understand that anger. I can understand why they go absolutely rampaging mad when they see the Aryan Nation pictured on the front of a paper, saying that none of this stuff ever happened, or that Hitler didn't go far enough. And it's also enough to make you sick, if you go back into Germany, and Germans still insist that it didn't happen. They didn't know. And there are lots of them that will insist that. Now I've met a number of German officers, during the time that I was in NATO, who will talk about it, and who will admit that there was a lot of wrong. But in general, that populace has put its head in the sand like ostriches. It didn't happen. Dachau didn't happen. The village is a mile from the camp! People from the camp were walked into there. They worked in the shops. They cleaned the streets. They did everything. Goebbels thundered in the Sport Palast at Nuremberg to the Germans, and asked them if they wanted total war. And they thundered back, "Yes!" They didn't have total war until the last few months, because while the rest of Europe, western Europe, including my own country, gave up its domestic help, while this country went to its "Rosie the Riveters", and we had in Britain "Call up" for women after the age of 18 to be directed into essential employment or the services, the Germans didn't give up their maids. They didn't give up their easy way of life.

MS: All through the war?

LF: All through the war. Why should they? They had slave labor. [pause] There are actually pictures around of convicts, as they referred to them in Dachau, you know, in the village...

MS: Yes.

LF: Painting people's houses as late as 1944. Painting private houses. There are documented cases of people, a school teacher, from one of the nearby schools, asking if people came to look at the castle. "We don't see many American tourists here. You came to look at our beautiful castle?" That question was asked once of a Turkish journalist called Niren Gune, [?] who lives today in New York. Gune was taken prisoner by the Germans, discredited, and was a prisoner at Dachau. And he and his American wife were actually asked that by a German school teacher about twenty years ago.

MS: Interesting.

LF: And not wanting to offend the teacher and her little girls, "Yes, of course, we came to see your beautiful castle." And it's very well-documented that Gune was a prisoner. He was about the only Turk that they held. My landlady, who was a nice lady, in Nuremberg, I don't really believe knew any of this. Her husband had been a professor. He was called up into the *Volksturm*. That was the ragtag army that the Germans pulled together at the end of World War II out of old men, university professors, little boys. And he was killed. You know, this was the last defense of Germany. And she was very suspicious of me for quite a long time. And we had a couple of conversations. She was not an ignorant woman. And she told me that she lived in terror when they had the big rallies because there were such rampages and such drunken parties among the Nazis afterwards. But she said, other than a few early articles that she had seen in the newspapers about concentration camps being established, she had no idea. And my experience with that woman leads me to believe that she may have been one of the few who didn't have any idea.

MS: Well many claim that, but it doesn't seem...

LF: It's not possible when they lived within two or three miles of a concentration camp.

MS: But you feel it...

LF: And...

MS: It could have happened if they were at greater distances?

LF: If they were at greater distances, yes, because there was such a censorship of, you know, information in Germany at that time. I believe that if you lived more than five or six miles from a concentration camp, you might not know. Unless it was a death camp, with a chimney going, and then the whole countryside knew. But there were more than 200 small concentration camps, as well as the big ones.

MS: There were over 400.

LF: I know there were over 400 all together. But, the small ones, the little satellite camps, were just everywhere. There were about 30 camps all the way around Essen.

MS: They must have seen marches between the camps, and between the slave labor factories and the camps where they were returned to each night.

LF: Yeah, because these people weren't marched down special roads. They were marched down the ordinary highways.

MS: Sure.

LF: And always under guard, and they looked ragged. They looked underfed. And surely nobody can believe that that many people are really prisoners for good reason.

*Tape six, side one:*

MS: This is tape six of an interv-, or our interview with Leigh Fraser. It will be our concluding tape, and this is being recorded on November 9th, 1993. And we'll just continue very briefly at this point. Leigh, I do want to thank you so much for your interview. It's really invaluable, because there are not many people that we have recorded in the Archive that have had the vast experience with the concentration camps, with the trials, with the war itself, and for this we are very, very appreciative. I think there's just a little more that you would want to tell us perhaps about a relative who was very helpful in harboring some children in France. And perhaps that will conclude our interview.

LF: All right. I think I told you at the beginning that my mother was Russian. And various of her relatives escaped from the early Revolution when the Reds took over. And one of the people who escaped was my mother's cousin. Her name was Irina Galitzyna. Galitzyna is a very old, noble, Russian name. She became a very well-known dress designer. She was actually Princess Irina Galitzyna. She died last year, in September of '92, and she was '93 years old when she died. She lived in the environs of Paris all during the German occupation because that's where she had gone. She had just about had it with everything by the time the Germans came to Paris, and the first thing they tried to do was dispossess her of this small chateau that she owned out at Chatou, which is on the outskirts of Paris. She told the German Colonel he could go to hell. She wasn't moving again. She'd been dispossessed by Communists. She was damned if she was gonna be dispossessed again by Fascists, and that he could either take her and shoot her or he could hang her from the trees at the entrance if he wanted to warn the rest of the population. Otherwise she was staying put. And, from what I can gather, he bowed and left.

MS: [chuckles]

LF: And she was quite a spitfire, so I can just imagine this scene. I lived with her when I was stationed in Paris, in the '50s. And I witnessed some God-awful rows about other things [chuckling] so I can imagine her doing this. Last year, she summoned several of us to Paris because of something else that happened in the family. We had a relative that emerged from the Soviet Union and, with his family, and she wanted us all to talk. And in that period of time, I was helping her sort some things, and we were talking about my mother and various things. And we were looking for something she wanted to give me. And in a drawer in which we were looking, I found what was obviously a metal box. And I popped it open and there was a medal of the *Legion d'Honneur*, [Legion of Honor], from France. And I said, "Oh look! What's this?" And she looked at it and grabbed it out of my hand, and said, "Oh, the government gave me that several years ago." And I said, "What for?" And she said, "Oh, a little scheme I had during the war which worked very well." She said, "You know, the Nazis were deporting the Jews in great numbers, and we had a lot of children around that we were trying to save." And she said, "It came to my attention that they had masses of people down in the *Velôdrome d’Hiver*, which is a big skating rink in Paris, and that they were transporting the children to Germany. And we knew that they were trying to do another shipment." And she said, "I still have a lot of staff coming and going here because I'd moved most of my sewing operations out here, my dress-designing business. So, I had people bring their children and bring an extra child, and for months, I had about 60 Jewish children in the attics and in the barns. I grew vegetables in the barns under lamp light. I kept them until we could get them safely away somewhere else. And that's what that has to do with."

MS: And she was honored by the...

LF: And she was honored...

MS: By...

LF: By the French government for it.

MS: But did she give you any other information other than that?

LF: No.

MS: No, not really.

LF: Not really. And when she wanted to tell you something, she told you. And if she didn't want to say any more, then she usually shut up. And even her daughter didn't know very much about this. Her daughter said she remembered kids being there, but she didn't remember what for. And her daughter is a little bit younger than me, about five years younger than me, so she may not really have taken much notice of it.

MS: That's very interesting. I wish that there was more...

LF: Well...

MS: That we knew of the story, but that will...

LF: She died shortly after I came back from the trip, so there's very little more that I can find out. I doubt very much if her daughter really knows any more to add to it. But, I did ask her why she did it. And, she gave one of her eloquent shrugs and said, "Who else was going to do it? And I hate damn Germans anyway." And I said to her, you know, "Weren't you afraid when you told them they couldn't have your house?" And she said, "Yes, but they didn't know it!"

MS: [chuckles]

LF: And, I think that was probably her attitude with the children too. They're too stupid to count the number that come in and go out.

MS: And this was right on the, in, on the outskirts of Paris.

LF: On the outskirts of Paris, about fifteen miles from the center of Paris, in the village or suburb of Chatou.

MS: Well, Leigh, thank you very, very much for everything that you've contributed to the Archive.

LF: I hope it isn't in vain.

MS: Oh, I...

LF: I hope somebody pays attention, not just to what I've said, but to what happened.

MS: Well...

LF: And if any one word, make sure that people carry the message, and that these sorts of things never happen again. If we can do one thing by passing the word around about this to eliminate that kind of racial hate, then it will have served its purpose.

MS: Well, it was very eloquently said, and thank you again.

LF: Thank you.

A song about women who worked in U.S. munitions factories.

*LEIGH FRASER [1-1-]*

*LEIGH FRASER [1-1-]*

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*LEIGH FRASER [2-1-]*

*From the collection of the Gratz College Holocaust Oral History Archive*

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