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Higaki, Asuko

Interview

1981

2 of 2

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Higaki

11/17/81

Asako Higaki Nakamura.

do not type

Dr. Rosalie Wax

Interview starts at # 135

Lillian Noma

Born: 1922

L.N.: Hello.

R.W.: Hello, could I speak to Lillian Noma please, if she's home?

: Oh, just a minute.

L.N.: Hello.

R.W.: Hello, just brace yourself, this is the lady you knew as Rosalie Hankey in Tule Lake.

L.N. Oh, Miss Hankey, yes.

R.W.: Miss Hankey, and what has happened is that ~~I thought~~... Well, Rockefeller Foundation has asked me to do this.. if I would talk to the people.. kind of interview them who I had known in Tule Lake.

L.N.: Yes.

R.W.: ~~and I got your~~.. It was a friend of yours, Mr. _____ if I got it right, let me see.. (laughs)

L.N. _____ ?

R.W.: _____ who told me where you lived and I know this is Sunday morning and it may not be convenient, but if you would like to make another date..why.. if you would like to talk.. or tell me ~~sort~~ of your experiences since then and how you felt there.

L.N. Yes.

R.W.: And all of this would go under a different name, you see, it will all be typed for history, you know.

L.N.: Yes, because in a way I thought it was an invasion of privacy.

R.W.: Oh yes.

LN: And that's the reason ^{why} Tony sent me a note.. the newspaper clipping, ^B but I've been hesitant writing to you, because of after all these years, it sort of stirs up some very unhappy memories plus some nice memories, and of course, I remember you very well, and you always had a cook book. (laughs.)

R.W.: (laughs)

L.N.: I remember that portion and I remember that for reasons other than my own I could not be as frank with you as I wanted to in camp, because of parental pressure, you know, not to say too much, so forth. And I felt guilty that way, because you were most friendly, but that was the reason ~~that~~ ^{why} I hesitated to write to you, and the letter just came end of last week; and I've had a very bad cold I've been doctoring, but the weather has been so nice today, I thought I'd get some fresh air and I was out raking leaves when you called. (laughs)

R.W.: Well, it has been nice here in St. Louis too.

L.N. Oh is that right?

R.W.: We have had wonderful weather, you know in the 60's and I take a nice long walk every morning. I'm 70 years old now.

LN: Are you really?

RW: I can really understand how you feel because this happened to me. I've talked now to about 5 of my friends..

LN: Oh, have you..

RW: and other Japanese-Americans, and it it..the privacy you don't have to worry about, because I won't put your name on it.

LN: Yes.

RW: But what happened ^{was,} as they talked they remembered sad things that they had forgotten, and then when I had finished talking, I did too, after all these 40 years, And I went to my office and I cried. You know, it was..so I can see how you feel, But if you had time sometime why we could talk over at least the happy parts, so I could ask you questions and you..

LN: What would you like to know? What Happened ^{after...} When did you leave camp?

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RW: I left about May, 1945.

LN: Oh, I see.

RW: And what they really wanted..the Rockefeller.. is longitudinal history.. like what you were doing beforehand, how you felt before the war, and then how you felt when you heard that they were going to evacuate the Japanese, and anything you wanted to tell me about your feelings in Tule Lake, and then sort of a long life story, life history thing is what they want.

LN: Oh, I see. Well, I tell you. I was just out of school. I had just gotten my job.

RW: How old were you then?

LN: At evacuation time?

RW: Yes..

LN: Would that have been '42?

RW: Yes, early '42..

LN: I must have been ~~about~~ 20.

RW: Twenty..

LN: Right. I was out of high school, had gotten some other jobs and meanwhile I had passed my state examination, I was hired by the State of California. I was working in the state capitol.

RW: Oh, my goodness..

LN: And I enjoyed it very much and I hadn't been working there too long, of course when war broke out.. and I found that out coming home from a movie someone told me, "Did you know Pearl Harbor has been bombed?" Well, we thought maybe they were joking, maybe .. we thought it was just a radio story. We didn't believe it. Well, I went to work and shortly thereafter I received a letter saying that my

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presence was very upsetting to my co-workers..

RW: Oh my goodness..

LN: ..because of my Japanese descent and that hereby they were terminating my employment; that is was most, what is it.. my co-workers felt uneasy because I was of Japanese descent, etc. and I was hereby being terminated. So that's what happened. Of course, I wanted to go to college, but my mother wanted me to work and thought ~~that~~ the boys should go first. You know, I had a brother right behind me. So, she wanted me to work for about a year and help put the money aside to enter him into college first, which I was happy to do. But then my brother was in junior college at the time and shortly thereafter we were relocated into camps. That was the most depressing incident, you know..

RW. For you to be fired like that?

LN. Yes.

RW. That's what hurt you the ~~most~~ most. I can understand that, My God... Which of the assembly centers did they send you to?

LN: I was in Wall~~e~~nga.

RW: Wall~~e~~nga. Do you recall any experiences from there strongly?

LN: Oh yes.

RW: How you felt, if you want to tell me.

LN: Well, my sister had just given birth to a child.

RW: Oh, God!

LN: It wasn't quite a week, in fact, she had given birth during the hours when we..during curfew hours.. and she preferred to have^{it} with a midwife..she thought it would be more economical. It was her first baby; it was a big baby, and the baby won't come out. So here, we had to wait until morning until curfew ended before we could rush her to the hospital. And she gave birth to her first child. So that was most traumatic.

RW: This was in Wall~~e~~nga?

LN: No, this was back home just before evacuation.

RW: Just before evacuation.

LN: Right. So here she has this new born baby.

RW: New born baby.

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LN: We didn't know if she'd have enough milk, ^{we} didn't know what kind of food we had..

RW: And you only took 2 suitcases, you know..

✓ LN: Oh yes.. and then from then [']we heard we were going to be sent to a desolate area, so we brought, we were told that we would need our tin plates and tin cups, you know, the rumors abounded plentiful at the time.

RW: Yes.

LN: So, mother had equipped all of us with tin plates ~~and~~ ^{and with} tin cups and we all had boots because we heard that there were snakes.

RW: Oh my gosh, was this in Walle~~rga~~ or in Tule Lake?

LN: No, this was in Sacramento before we were evacuated to Walle~~rga~~.

RW: ..to Walle~~rga~~.

LN: And here sister had just given birth to a baby and people were coming around buying up our furniture and bicycles for a song. You should have seen the trucks going down the street loaded to the hilt with bicycles they were buying from people, because people didn't know what they could take into the camp.

RW: Gosh..

LN: So that was very traumatic.

RW: Oh that was very..

LN: And people coming in and trying to buy your furniture for nothing..

RW: ..for nothing.

LN: Right.

RW: That happened..I know that happened. Gee, I..oh excuse me, did you want to say something?

LN; ^{and we} ~~we~~ didn't own our home - we rented. So were stored our furniture with our friend who lived around the corner and while we were..from Walle~~rga~~ we went to Tule, our friends said they would be glad to send us some of our things. When they went to the place it was ransacked and taken.

RW: Oh, so you lost everything.

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LN: Yes, almost everything, except for what we took in to the camp. Right.

RW: Oh.. I've got a question ^{here that} ~~here~~ which now sounds a little stupid, but I'm..or kind of insulting. How did you manage to cope with all of these awful things?

LN: How else.. what else could you do? You had no alternative, Of course, the family was together and rumors abounded and we did not know what was going to happen. Of course, we were herded like cattle by train to Waller~~ga~~ga and then it was hastily put up barrack affair. When it rained the dirt was red dirt, ^{your} leg sank almost to your knees, and they had put up a washroom..latrine, which was more or less ~~the~~ ^a barrack type with the holes punched in to a plank, back to back - no privacy. And ^{the} ~~at~~ first we ^{ek} people had diarrhea because of the change in water perhaps or the food and we were right by the latrine you could hear the doors flap back and forth like a V ~~shuttlecock~~ ^{shuttlecock} all night long.

RW: Oh gosh..

LN: And the wood they used was green wood, so ^{as} ~~when~~ the wood dried, the cracks opened in the floor and the weeds would be growing up underneath. By the time you got to the doors sweeping, ^{while} ~~while~~ your dirt was all gone, it fell into the cracks. (laughs)

RW: Gosh..

LN: And then from Waller~~ga~~ga we were taken to Tule.

RW: Yes.

LN: And of course we weren't prepared for the winters there. We had a pot bellied stove.

RW: Yeah.

LN: But, I became very ill and I was. ^{..if} I worked in the circulating library..and they wanted to close it.. my only source of heat was ^{an} ~~the~~ electric heater. Even

when it snowed, dedicated me like a fool I went there, and I got deathly sick and for that reason I haven't been able to have any children.

RW: Oh..poor ^{Lillian} ~~(insert name)~~ well, I'm going to take that name out, but this is just my own.. I feel for you, my God. Oh, I lost a baby too and..

LN: Oh, did you?

RW: Yes, ^{and} ~~so~~ I know you never get over it.

LN: Yes.. You have any?

RW: No, I got married late and it was my only chance.

LN: Oh, dear..

RW: But, I have a nice husband and I have had very good happy works.

LN: Oh, that's good.

RW: That has been happy but, gee, I didn't know..when we would meet in Tule...gosh, if I could have done anything to make you feel ~~any~~ better, I would have done it, But because I didn't know you were having all that trouble..Did I meet you in the library or..I remember I talked with you ^{quite} a number of times.

LN: Yes. Well, I forgot just where we met. I used to help teach English. I don't know if it was there, ~~or~~ I don't think it was in the library. I think that was towards the end.

RW: Yes..You were in the library and I would see you and have little chats.

LN: Yes, that's right. And I was friend with..I think you remember the family..there were also UC graduates?[?]

RW: Yes..

LN: There were 2 brothers and a sister.

RW: Yes.

LN: The sister died.

RW: Yes. I know we talked together sometimes.

LN: One of the brother's names was James.

RW: Yes, ~~Takahashi~~ _____?

LN: No..

RW: No, well I'll look it up in my notes and check ~~this~~.

LN: Yes, I think I met you through them also. Because they were doing research work.

RW: Yes.

LN: And they were sort of ostracized for that. I felt sorry for them. The girl got married and .. do you remember her?

RW: Um., ~~no~~ Off-hand, No. I should have looked through the notes.. because, you know, the people whom I met with you.. I was going to ask.. I mean when I read my notes, I'll know because I have it down there. I can remember talking with several friends, there was ~~(insert names #342)~~ and another young lady ~~(insert name (#344))~~.

LN: No..

RW: There were about 5 or 6 young ladies who I occasionally talked to.

LN: These were 2 brothers who were university graduates. The sister also had had some university training.

RW: This wasn't ~~(insert name #348)~~.

LN: No, no, no..

RW: No.

LN: And she had a heart condition. I can't think of her name at the moment.

RW: Well, I'll find it. I was going to ask ^alittle more cheerful.. Was there anything that happened in Tule Lake that makes you feel good when you think of it today?

LN: Well, the only ~~thing~~.. The nicest ~~ex~~ experience was that our parents had a little rest from all their toil, and I got to know a lot of people. And the things that we were able to learn, you know, there. But the weather wise it was awful and water-wise it was awful, but...

RW: Were you especially bothered by this ^{awful} business of people calling folks ~~and~~ ⁱⁿ and so on?

LN: Oh yes, yes. That's the ^e reason why we hesitated to talking to you people and to this university girl. I felt badly because I thought I was more broad-minded, but our parents were quite disturbed, that anyone associated with them would be called that, and therefore, we were told to.. I was especially cautioned by my parents to hold my distance. And I felt sorry because I did like this girl, and I knew they were doing research work. She eventually got married and died, leaving one child. She was told not to have the child, because of her heart condition, but she went ahead and had this child and she died, ~~And~~ then her husband remarried and I understand his wife didn't want to have the child, so the child had to be put up for adoption was what I last heard. But James, I think, returned to California. He was a professor for a while.

RW: Gee, I must have known them, but..

LN: Oh, I'm sure you would remember them vividly once you check your notes. ⁴

~~RW: Check my notes, yes.~~

~~LN:~~ The older brother was named George and then there was James, and then this younger sister, who was a little odd, She ^{had} ~~was~~..because of her heart condition, she had very red cheeks and they were non-conformists, you know.

RW: These people were your closest friends in...?

LN: No, I have not contacted them at all.

RW; I meant in Tule Lake..

LN: In Tule Lake I associated with them until we heard they were doing research work and because of the association, my parents didn't want me associated with them, and for other things too, and they left camp, so I didn't get to..

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RW: They must have been working for Dr. Opler, maybe..

LN: I think so, I think James was. George was ^a veterinarian, so I don't think he was, but James, he was a sociology major,

RW: And so people who worked ~~from~~ ^{for} Dr. Opler ^{they} were called ~~encl.~~ imm.

LN: Right, right (laughs)

RW: Even talking to me..I was, you know..

LN: Yes, even talking to you..

RW: I was touched and very impressed ^{at} how many people did talk with me. Because I have got some people who talked with me..it's 41 single spaced pages today.

LN: Oh really?

^{RW:} LN: I'd visit them every 10 days or so and they just must of..I've thought about it and I think either they weren't too scared of being called ~~encl.~~ ^{imm} or they also that I visited them they liked it because no other Caucasian went in and visited people, you know.

LN: Well, in my case I had not gone out socially very much - close knit family with a very..I mean under strict discipline, especially mother. ^{and} we learned...~~and~~ outside of following family orders..I didn't have much social life and for that reason why what the parents said was the law, you know. We weren't..I hadn't really broadened my horizons and I had just worked briefly before war and that was another reason too.

RW: So you ^{could} ~~would~~ say..would it be right ^{to say} ~~in saying~~ that you had ^{kind} ~~sort~~ of a lonely life there, [?] except for your family you didn't have many friends, is that it?

LN: Well, the neighbor. But it was mostly family oriented.

RW: I have another question. Was there any person in Tule Lake whom you very much respected and whom you could really go to if you wanted advice?

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LN: Um, this was later. I respected the doctor..he is dead.. he took care of me when I became very ill.

RW: Oh yes, which was that, I knew several doctors. Dr. ~~Miramoto~~ or..

LN: Oh, Dr. ~~Miramoto~~ is a very..I still correspond with him at Christmas time. He is in Hawaii. He is eighty years old.

RW: Oh ~~good~~ wonderful. He sewed up my leg once. (laughs)

LN: He was a very dear friend. He saw me through my illness. ~~And~~ the surgeon I didn't have too much contact, but I respected him highly, but he has passed away. His first name was George. He was the one who operated on me. And Dr. ~~Miramoto~~ sort of help me through the traumas.

RW: What were you operated on in Tule Lake?

LN: Well, after that first..they decided I had had adhesion trouble from childhood and then with this library work, my ovaries were ~~damaged~~. They thought ~~that~~ the cold had damaged my ovaries, and Dr. ~~Miramoto~~ lived right next door. They thought they could save part of my ovaries, which they tried to, but by subsequent operation I had to have the rest of it removed.

RW: Gee..

LN: I had developed a cystic tumor someplace.

RW: And you were so young.

LN: Yes. I was..

RW: When were you born. ~~W~~ What is your birthdate?

LN: Oh, I'm 1922, I'm 59 going on 60 in February.

RW: Well, I'm 70 and ~~kid~~ of chipper (laughter).

LN: I'm not too far from you. (laughs)

RW: Let's see, is there anything else that you would like to tell me about Tule Lake? Did you enjoy.. was there anything at all that you really enjoyed there? doing? ~~..~~

LN: Well..

RW: Did you go to any of the classes or did your parents keep you..

LN: Well, I attended some classes. Oh, I did get married in camp and because of my operation, you know, the Japanese, the rumors abound. I had a tumor. The rumors abound that I had been 3 months pregnant or something and Dr. ~~Miramoto~~ said

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that I should not worry about it, but my future in-laws took up that rumor and they believed it, which was very unfortunate, so I had a miserable, you know, in-law situation there. Because my husband insisted on marrying me. He said he knew I was a virgin..I was a virgin when I got married. But..

RW: That ~~was~~ ^{is} hard for you. ...something happier..

LN: And then I got, well, I did like the scenery, let's say that way. I did enjoy teaching English to my first generation group, that I enjoyed. But weather - not much.

RW: No, the weather was terrible. I remember I'd freeze.. how cold I'd get when I'd go around walking and visiting. I was going to ask..when did you leave Tule Lake?

LN: The second operation took place in, let's see.. ah, 1945, December, the last day, December 31st. I was operated on. So I was bed-ridden for a while.

RW: That was 1945.

LN: Right, December 31st. So I couldn't be moved for a while and when I left in '46, they were closing up the camp, and I was moved by pullman. I went to..as far as New York City.

RW: Oh, you and your husband?

LN: Yes.

RW: Oh good.

✓ LN: We went to New York City, but of course, I could *find* a job but he was promised a job, which never materialized. That was ^{WRA} ~~WRA~~, they wanted you to get out of camp..

~~RW: W..~~

~~LN: What was it?~~

~~RW: You gave some initial I didn't catch.~~

~~LN: No, I forget what it was..the relocation center.~~

~~RW: W..~~

~~LN: something..I can't remember.~~

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RW: ~~WAR~~ you mean..

LN: ~~Something~~ like that.

RW: War Relocation Authority?

LN: War Relocation, WRA yes. What he was promised didn't materialized.

RW: And he was promised a job and left, and then it didn't materialized. In New York, my gosh. What did you do then?

LN: Well, I found an office job right away, but what ~~could~~ ^{did} he do with a Japanese college education - he became a bus boy. He did Capadary (#522) work for a while and that was dying out, so he did restaurant and bus boy work. And then, he checked around with the Japanese Buddhist Temple and he found ~~that~~ they wanted domestic work. I wasn't feeling well yet from my operation and the fact that I couldn't have children. You know, was a psychological.. emotional thing.

RW: ~~No one~~ ^{Nobody} can understand, who hasn't suffered it. ~~I see~~

LN: So we took domestic work and went to Fall River, Massachusetts. And the work was too heavy. I ~~got~~ ^{had} to cook for a family of 5 children and a couple and they brought home a mother from an insane asylum. And then the children were college students who would bring home guests. So since my brothers had relocated to Cleveland, we came ~~here~~ ^{here} because my parents were here.

RW: Yeah.

LN: And then my marriage didn't work out, and I was divorced.

RW: Oh, ~~I didn't hear that~~.

LN: After 7 years I remarried and I have been married for the past 20 years.

RW: So now you're married to Mr. Idemoto, for 20 years to Mr.

Idemoto. Well, that's nice. That things worked out. What does your present husband do now?

LN: He's an engineer.

RW: ~~An~~ ^{an} Engineer? Good.

LN: I have worked as a secretary all these years. This is my 35th year.

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RW: And you're still working?

LN: I'm still working.

RW: Good for you, just like me (laughs).

LN: ^{Thirty-five} ~~30~~ years I could retire, but my husband is talking about taking an early retirement and if he retires and then..I'm now the secretary to the superintendent and they're trying to relieve him of his position, so when he goes I don't know whether I'll stay or..

RW: Well, ^(pause) ~~let's see~~..I'll ask another question. Looking..

This is a wierdo. Looking back, what was the most helpful thing you learned about your fellow human beings through all this experience, ^{would} ~~what do~~ you say?

LN: Oh golly, I don't know.

RW: Well then, we'll just skip that..

LN: Because I noticed when war started my classmates stopped talking to me; on the street they didn't even see me. They saw right through me. And then trying to find a place to live, why, if you were a Japanese, the vacancy sign didn't mean anything. But on the whole, I think people have been kind. especially the ethnic groups.

RW: Yes, and this is in Cincinnati?

LN: Cleveland..

RW: Pardon me, in Cleveland.

LN: Right.

RW: And which ethnic groups especially have been..?

LN: Cleveland is a mixture. I've made many Irish friends, ^{Slovenian} ~~Polish~~ friends, ^e ~~S~~lovenian, and Bohemian^s.

RW: I'm glad to hear that, and by and large you say your recent life after Cleveland has been better.

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LN: Yes, in Cleveland has been better, right.

RW; Oh, ^{Lillian}~~Asako~~, I had no idea of the torment you had been going through there, and I'm sorry to have put you through the ordeal of telling me. But I think it will be useful for people to know. I feel very strongly on this, you know, some Japanese in this Redress and Reparation suit..I feel very strongly that ^{at least} the American government should apologize to the Japanese citizens like you. I don't know how you react to that.

LN: I think it is only decent.

RW; Yeah, that they never do this again to anybody. ~~Do you~~ . . . 'Have any parting words to say to me?

LN: ^(long pause) Oh, ^{As} I said, I remember you fondly.

RW; You remember me fondly? Oh that makes me feel so good.

LN: Yes, I can just picture you striding ~~by~~ with a big fat cookbook under your arm (laughs).

RW: Yeah, I worked hard in Tule Lake and when I get this report finished, if I can manage it, I'll send you a copy. Because there are very interesting things I've learned in talking to other Japanese/Americans, and all I can say is God Bless You.

LN: Oh, may God Bless You too, and I'm sorry that I didn't respond when Tony wrote to me, but as I said, I haven't been too happy with this reparation hearing. You get mixed emotions from people. No one comments anything, but you can get the feeling that ^{'the} adverse reaction ^s from people.

RW; Yes, I've noticed that myself. Reporters have called me up and asked me to talk about it and I have refused to say a word because I do not want anything used against. you know. they twist it.

LN: Yes. If you notice lately ^{two} ~~2~~ people have..? ^{two} prominent people have come out and said that these people ~~do not~~ ^{don't} deserve anything..they went through no more than what families who sent their sons to war have gone through.

RW: Oh, I noticed that.

LN: Did you read that?

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RW: I read that, it made me very angry, ^Bbut I've also read very fine statements by Japanese and I respect the Japanese for standing up for themselves, you know.

LN: Yes, and we have asked for no welfare. We have gotten by strictly on our own.

RW: And you..as a people, you are a credit to any country you live in (laughs) let's put it this way, ^{To} me. Maybe I should say you are Americans, you were born here, you know.

LN: Even now, people..just because of your oriental features you're not considered an American.

RW: Well, by me you are. (laughs)

LN: laughs. Well, that's the way it goes. That's the only reason I've hesitated because as I previously mentioned I thought it was an invasion of privacy.

RW: And what you have told me ^{is} ~~has been~~ very, very moving and helpful story and I'll see that it is typed without your name on it and then I do thank you for talking ^{to} ~~with~~ me.

LN: Oh, you are most welcomed.

RW: Good-by, and I hope your cold gets over and ^{that} when you're my age, you'll feel just as peppy as I do. (laughs)

LN: Oh, I'll look forward to that. (laughs)

RW: Good-by

LN: Thank you. Goodby

End of interview # 688

November 17, ~~1980~~ 1981

INTERVIEW WITH ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ LILLIAN NOMA IDEMOTO

Born / : 1922

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November 17, 1981.

LILLIAN NOMA

Lillian Noma was 20 years old at the time of the evacuation. She told me that she had passed the state examination and was working for the state of California. After Pearl Harbor

Lillian Noma was born in 1922 in California, and at the time of Pearl Harbor she was employed by the state of California. Immediately after Pearl Harbor she ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ "received a letter saying that my presence was very unsettling to my co-workers because of my Japanese descent and that hereby they were terminating my employment." She and her family were taken to Walerga and then to the Tule Lake Relocation Center. At Tule Lake she worked in the circulating library.

Of her life in Tule Lake she said:

In my case I had not gone out socially very much - close knit family with a very. . . I mean under strict discipline, especially ~~my~~ mother. Outside of following family orders I didn't have much social life and for that reason, ^y why, what my parents said was the law. . . I hadn't really broadened my horizons and I had just worked briefly before the war^R.