INTERVIEW BEGINS

LEAVEY: This is Jane Levy. I’m interviewing Gary Marcus on December 5, 2008. Gary, if we could start out will you just give me your name and what the relationship is. You can really start talking and tell me anything you want to tell me because we can edit it.

MARCUS: And your first name was?
LEAVEY: Jane.
MARCUS: Jane. I want to thank you and say that this is a wonderful exhibit and for me to come from out of town and see this. It’s been quite a moving experience. I’m Gary Marcus, and my father lived through the Leo Frank\(^1\) era as part of the family. Leo was his uncle. My father was Alan Marcus. This affected Dad through his whole entire life and through our life from probably when I was in the 6\(^{th}\) grade or 7\(^{th}\) grade on.

Actually, I found out about it in the 8\(^{th}\) grade. From that point, Dad shared experiences throughout his lifetime of different things. For me, it became a moving experience to see this. Dad told stories of someone knocking on the door of the house that he remembered. It was 3:00 in the morning. My father was somewhere around four or five years old. I’m

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\(^1\) Leo Frank (1884-1915) was a Jewish factory superintendent in Atlanta, Georgia. In 1913, he was accused of raping and murdering one of his employees, a 13-year-old girl named Mary Phagan, whose body was found on the premises of the National Pencil Company in Atlanta, Georgia. The trial was the catalyst for a great outburst of antisemitism led by the populist Tom Watson and the center of powerful class and political interests. Frank was sent to Milledgeville State Penitentiary to await his execution. Governor John M. Slaton, believing there had been a miscarriage of justice, commuted Frank’s sentence to life in prison. This enraged a group of men who styled themselves the “Knights of Mary Phagan.” They drove to the prison, kidnapped Frank from his cell and drove him to Marietta, Georgia where they lynched him. Many years later, the murderer was revealed to be Jim Conley, who had lied in the trial, pinning it on Frank instead. Frank was pardoned on March 11, 1986, although they stopped short of exonerating him.
not sure. But it was a frightening memory. They told him at the time that the house was going to be burned down and they needed to get out. The family relocated to Atlantic City, New Jersey, for a period of time in fear of their life. He also told how he changed schools frequently as soon as people would find out who he was. He would just change to another school often without even his mother knowing about it because he would be afraid to go back to school. People would beat him up if they found out who he was. He would tell stories of how he had to take different routes home from school. He could not even go home from school the same way because people would be waiting to beat him up. And this was years after the Leo Frank case. Because he was born in 1911, to give you some idea of time.

LEAVEY: Who were his parents? How were they related? Where did the family live?

MARCUS: Aunt Lucille² was a Selig, who was his aunt. His sister was my father’s mother, making Leo Frank my father’s uncle. That was the relationship. They were pretty close sisters at that time. So, my grandmother would’ve been a Selig. That was the tie in. She was Sarah Selig Marcus. She was married to a foreigner, an immigrant, my grandmother was. Certain things that happened back then, I mean, they were scared to even tell my brother and I about the Leo Frank incident until we were in high school. The only way I found out about it was someone came to me in school and said, “I’m reading an article about your family. Are you related to Leo Frank?” I went home and asked my parents. Later on I heard the story of what had happened, but I can vividly remember Aunt Lucille’s funeral. They had police there. It was at Patterson [Funeral Home]. I could not relate to it until later on when my mother told me that they had tried to get the [Atlanta] Journal-Constitution not to even publish anything about it to keep it quiet. There were threats on the funeral home, as I understand it. We were not allowed to go to school that day, but we weren’t given a reason. We couldn’t tell our friends any reason other than we just weren’t going to school. That was before we were told about Leo Frank. That’s how they felt about it, my parents. They were afraid for anybody to know. I can remember my father or my mother telling me that when my father was engaged to my mother he told my mother’s mother that before they agreed to get married

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² Lucille Selig Frank (1888-1957).
she needed to know that there was a blight upon the family and that this matter was out. That’s how strong it was in my father’s history and in his mind. I mean, he relived this all the time. He required my wife and my sister-in-law to read one of the books that he had about Leo. I think it was *Murder of the Young Girl*.³ Harry. I can’t remember the name. Yes, Harry Golden’s book, before they got married, so they knew a little bit about the family history. Another incident I can remember, and I’m thankful that it happened right before my father died. He was living in Florida. There was a newspaper article about the new testimony of Alonzo Mann.⁴ At first when my father flipped to the second page of the *St. Petersburg Times* and saw a picture of Leo Frank, his first words were, “Oh no.” My mother thought he had taken sick because it upset him all over again to see that in the paper. It was, at least, about the incident and that his uncle did not do this crime that my father suffered through all of his life. This is how we were affected as kids, too, because Dad was reliving this in his mind. Certain things he tried to keep very low key. They were merchants. They had a clothing store in Buckhead. They just tried to fit right in with society and not bring up this this matter.

**LEAVEY:** What was the store called?

**MARCUS:** It was called Nan’s Dress Shop. It was a little shop. Originally, Dad had opened the Buckhead Men’s Store. Then at some point he opened this ladies dress shop. Way back in the family, they had owned the Marcus Clothing Company, which was a pretty prominent business in downtown Atlanta. At the time of Leo Frank, someone else had to run that business. They had left town. There was some trusted person that ran the business for them.

**LEAVEY:** Where did they go?

**MARCUS:** They lived in Atlantic City, New Jersey, for a while. I think Aunt Lucille eventually moved to Memphis, Tennessee, and worked in a family-owned interest there for a while when she left Atlanta. So, all of our family was scattered around for a period of time. Just my father carried these memories around with him all of those years. He

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³ Harry Golden, author of *A Little Girl is Dead*, published in 1965.
⁴ Alonzo Mann (1897-1985). In 1982, Mann signed an affidavit stating Leo Frank was innocent. Mann was one of the last surviving Leo Frank defense witnesses. Mann, who had been Leo Frank’s 14-year-old office boy in 1913, stated that he had kept a secret all these years, and that he had seen the janitor Jim Conley carrying Mary Phagan’s limp body. According to Mann, he said nothing at first because Conley threatened to kill him and his parents told him not to get involved.
did not want us to suffer or people to know about it. I think they really tried to keep it from us as long as they could.

LEAVEY: How have you dealt with it? Are you still carrying that family feeling?

MARCUS: I have and I am carrying the feeling. Looking through this exhibit brought back a lot of those memories that my father had told me. Even reading the book that just came out a year or two back, quite honestly, I got three quarters through the book and I just could not finish it. My bookmark is still sitting in the book because it just started upsetting me too much, and I just did not finish it. Part of that book is about his interview with Dad and some of the things that were in it. I was not even really told exactly where Aunt Lucille’s ashes were buried. I knew about where . . . actually, I did know, but I didn’t know that any one else knew until I read the book because Dad never shared that with anyone. He constantly got letters from historical commissions. I mean, even in the later years, wanting to know about Lucille, and he would never disclose it. He just felt that strongly that someone might go out there and try to desecrate the grave. That’s how he still felt about it 80 years later.

LEAVEY: Gary, have you thought . . . I know you thought a lot about this and probably talked a lot about it. Have you thought about any kind of message that you would want people to take away, from either knowing this story, from reading the books, from talking to you?

MARCUS: I think that probably one of the things that has affected me, even in modern times, is that people, Jews in particular, Jewish people or people of any type of sect, probably need to always be aware that they might be attacked, not necessarily for <interruption in recording>

LEAVEY: I think I was asking you about, do you see any kind of, or have you gotten any sort of message from what’s happened? From what happened to your family? From what happened to Leo? From the case as a whole and the outcome?

MARCUS: Yes. I guess the thing that affected me, living at that time in the South, even as late as when I was growing up, the late ‘50s, ‘60s. After hearing this and hearing these stories, I think anybody anywhere could be subject to some type of violence like this. Not necessarily for who you are or any given reason, be it valid or not, that you can have your life subjected to something like this. It could be, actually, a major thing
against you for whatever reason. You or your race or your heritage. It has kind of made
me think a little bit different, in that, I don’t try to force my religion or any type of belief
on anyone, political or otherwise. My father was always very low key about everything.
I guess because of his background and what he had lived through. I think that filtered
down through me also. I try to just keep a very low key life. Certainly, I didn’t live
through that. In Florida most people don’t know about it anyway. But in Georgia, Dad
always lived with it, that someone might know him or something about his history. I
think, just personally, that that was one of the main reasons that he actually ended up
moving from where he grew up from his boyhood years on to Florida, just to have a
different beginning. I always feel like that that was the impact on his life, of this whole
incident that he was totally not involved in. I think that could happen to anyone.
Something that you’re not even involved in could affect you your whole life and maybe
filter down through future generations. That is something that I have always thought
about and maybe tried to keep me to a higher standard because of my kids and my family
possibly. I think we can all learn from that whole experience. I know Dad, at the point in
time when Aunt Lucille died, they really did not know where to bury her remains. One
thing we have to keep in sight is that she demanded to be cremated back in the time when
cremation was not real popular. I think it was because Aunt Lucille did not want anyone
to come to look at where her remains were. Dad and my uncle had the same thing of
where to bury these ashes and what should be done so that no one would come desecrate
the grave. There is a part in Steve Oney’s book5 about how he carried the ashes around
for a period of time. This was for the same reason that they did not want anyone to do
anything or bring it back up. I often said to Dad, “Dad, how come you don’t speak on
this Leo Frank incident and let people learn from it?” He just could not do it. It was just
such a major mark on him and his whole life that he just felt the less said the better. I can
remember when it happened, back in the confession. I wanted to have a campaign at that
time. I said, “Dad, would you support it?” He really would not support it. Publicly, it
was not something he could do.
LEAVEY: A campaign?

5 Steve Oney (1954– ) author of And the Dead Shall Rise: The Murder of Mary Phagan and the Lynching
MARCUS: Back when, at first, as I remember, something when they did the original confession, the state could not go back and issue a pardon or they couldn’t retry it. There was a bunch of issues there, and I felt we should try to do a letter campaign or something. Whereas, Dad would not not support it. He could not publicly get involved in it. I don’t remember what the whole thing was or even . . . I mean, this is going back years, but that was just the way Dad felt. Let’s let it just die. That was his . . .

LEAVEY: There were two attempts to get the state to pardon Leo after Mann’s testimony.

MARCUS: But he just wanted the whole issue to be . . . it was just a bad memory for him . . . to be forgotten about.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Do you have any other stories that your father told maybe about how his family dealt with it? Or how he knew as a four or five year old what his impressions were at the time and what his parents might have talked to him about? As he got older, did people talk about it to him? How was his personal interaction with his family?

MARCUS: I never really received too many stories of that. Aunt Lucille, of course, all those years, we weren’t really told what her circumstance was. I mean, I just knew Aunt Lucille, but I was young, and I really did not appreciate her because I did not know until I started reading the books later on after I found the family involvement. That was one of the things that was enlightening to me was Aunt Lucille and what she really had been through. And why I felt, you know, she was a quiet individual at that time. I really couldn’t appreciate it being a young kid. She was just a quiet person that really was not outgoing. Once I started reading the books and saw her true personality and what she went through, it was an emotional experience in itself.

LEAVEY: It’s quite something that she was able to muster the forces to really try to write letters herself and get other people involved for her personality was kind of quiet and demur. She really had fought fairly publicly in Leo’s defense.

MARCUS: Oh it was. I mean, to me, I saw when I started reading the books about her, a different type of person. Of course, I would have liked to been able to talk to her now that I know what I know. But I would never get that opportunity. The case itself
was never brought up during my time until I found out about it. I believe I was in the 8th grade when somebody told me they were reading this book.

LEAVEY: When did you tell your own children? How have . . .

MARCUS: We tried to give it to them. My son has a legal background somewhat. I tried to tell him a little bit about the involvement, but he really could not appreciate it. My father tried to when my father realized he was near the end. I can remember he tried to sit my son down and explain to him a little bit about the family background. My son, at that time, really was not interested in it until someone . . . I brought up the case to my son, and he happened to mention someone working in the Public Defender’s Department or somewhere he was up in Washington. Somebody there knew all of the case. Then he became impressed. Now he has become more involved in it. I guess each person has to learn about their family involvement and this at their own time and their own pace. This is just something we’ve never been able to really get them to read the history. I think when the Temple bombing happened, for my parents, it just brought all this right back up again that had been laying down for so many years. For my father, it’s a bad dream that would never go away. I think in the bombing in 1958, it just started that memory all over again.

LEAVEY: So he really lived with a lot of fear?

MARCUS: He lived with fear that that could happen again, that people might know who he is and do something to him. He just never could outlive that. I mean, it’s just a shame when I realize what all he went through all his life. My mother was not from Atlanta. She was from, partly raised in Jacksonville [Florida] and some in Montgomery [Alabama], so she really did not have the involvement or the background that Dad did.

LEAVEY: Did you say that your father made her read something as well before?

MARCUS: No. He made my wife and my sister-in-law read read something before we all got married, before marriage.

LEAVEY: She went through with it and married him anyway?

MARCUS: Yes.

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6 The Temple on Peachtree Street in Atlanta, Georgia was bombed in the early morning hours of October 12, 1958. About 50 sticks of dynamite were planted near the building and tore a huge hole in the wall. No one was injured in the bombing as it was during the night. Rabbi Jacob Rothschild was an outspoken advocate of civil rights and integration and friend of Martin Luther King Jr. Five men associated with the National States’ Rights Party, a white separatist group, were tried and acquitted in the bombing.
WIFE: I think he wanted me to know what was going on in the family before I married into it. I said, “Why?” “You have to read A Little Girl is Dead by Harry Golden.” He said, “Then, we’re going to sit down and discuss it.” I said, “Okay.” And we did.

LEAVEY: Gary is there anything else you can think of?

MARCUS: No. I’m sure later on I’ll think of a million things but these are just some of the experiences that people would need to know. You know, afraid to go to school. Afraid to be anywhere that someone would beat you up, and all of this. I mean, to live through a life like that, and it could happen again. I think we all just need to know that this is life.

LEAVEY: I just have one more thing to ask. Do you think, I mean in the case of your family, it seems like with every generation, there is a little more separation from this thing.

MARCUS: Right. I think that. Yes. With my son and my daughter, for one, I think that probably their connection to this after them will probably be no one in our family. When it gets to that generation below them, [they] would probably [not] ever identify unless someone comes along, of which, I will explain the history to them. If I could keep it in the family, I would like to do that just so they know some of their own heritage. But as far as this type of thing and the way society is now, I don’t think that anyone would really have any feeling from the next generation on.

LEAVEY: We appreciate it so much. Thank you so much.

MARCUS: Thank you.

<End Tape 1, Side 1>

INTERVIEW ENDS