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In Memory of Doris Lurie

16 Aug 2022

On 17 July 2022, Austrian-born Holocaust survivor Doris Lurie passed away in South Africa at the age of 94.



Doris Lurie, née Ehrenstein, was born in Vienna on 26 February 1928. A few days before the "*Anschluss*" in March 1938, she was forbidden to attend school because she was Jewish.

"When Jewish shops were ransacked, when Jews were picked up off the street and forced to scrub away referendum slogans written in waterproof paint, when it suddenly became dangerous to use public transport, that's when my mother decided to leave Vienna."

Because of the anti-Jewish riots and the fact that their passports were only valid for two days, Doris and her mother initially fled to Switzerland on 16 March 1938. On the train they were accosted by young Nazis with swastikas emblazoned on their shirtsleeves who demanded they hand over their money. They were able to fend off the assault by tricking their tormentors: "Although we were both travelling with Austrian passports," Doris Lurie recalled, "my mother also showed her British passport, which had become invalid due to her marriage to an Austrian citizen. This confused the Nazis who were harassing us."

Her daring escape took Doris Lurie onward to France, where her father worked. After the outbreak of war in 1939, Doris Lurie and her mother fled again, this time to Great Britain, from where they emigrated to South Africa in 1940.

Doris Lurie's life story entitled "Her passport expired in two days" was one of the first to be published by the National Fund in its book series "Lives Remembered. Life Stories of Victims of National Socialism"; first in German in volume 2 of the book series and then in English in volume 3, which was dedicated to the subject "Exile in Africa". The cover features Doris Lurie standing beside two zebras.

Excerpts from her life story – read by Katharina Stemberger – were also included in the National Fund's audio book *Erinnerungen* in 2020.

Austrian filmmaker Tom Matzek (ORF, Universum History) visited Doris Lurie in South Africa and documented her life in 2013 in his documentary film *Flucht ins Ungewisse* ("Flight into the Unknown") in the ORF series *Menschen und Mächte* ("People and Powers").

According to Peter Lurie, Doris' son, the publication of her autobiographical memoirs as well as the compensation payments she received were of great emotional significance to his mother and caused her to rethink her attitude to her former homeland Austria.

Doris Lurie was in contact with staff of the National Fund for many years, and she always enjoyed being able to correspond in German.

On 4 August a memorial service, "Celebrating the Life of Doris 'Dee' Lurie née Ehrenstein", was held at the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre with 150 invited guests. It was streamed live and can be viewed on YouTube:

Memorial celebration for Doris Lurie in Johannesburg

As a survivor, Doris Lurie gave many talks in Johannesburg and other South African locations, including to groups from America and Germany and schoolchildren. As a surviving eyewitness, she passed on her memories, leaving an important "treasure trove" for future generations. **We would like to thank her for this! Her story will live on as part of Austria's collective memory.**

Doris Lurie's life story can be read here: Her passport was due to expire in two days ...

Photos: Doris Lurie, National Fund, Tom Matzek (ORF)
Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre