

INTERVIEW WITH ERNA - 9TH FEBRUARY 2022

Before the War

INTERVIEWER

Good afternoon Erna. Today is the 9th February 2022 and I'm here with Myrna to have a wee chat with you this afternoon. Thank you very much for having us in your lovely, lovely flat. So first of all, I was going to ask you Erna, what was your name at birth? and when were you born and where were you born?

ERNA

My name was always, always has been Erna, but I've had a middle name Estereisl. I was born in Dortmund, Germany unfortunately.

INTERVIEWER

And when were you born?

ERNA

91 years ago, 27.06.1930.

INTERVIEWER

And what was your last name?

ERNA

Well, there was a wee bit of a carry on. My father's name was Czulavitz, but my mother's name was Rabner, and they couldn't get married in the land, the law of the land. They had to get married in Yiddish law, so I was known as Rabner, not Czulavitz, which was my father's name.

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INTERVIEWER

And so, was your father born in Dortmund as well?

ERNA

No, he was Polish actually, don't know where abouts. I just knew he was Polish.

INTERVIEWER

And your mother?

ERNA

She was German.

INTERVIEWER

And so how did they, how did they meet?

ERNA

Well, there was a lot of trouble in Poland for the Jews, and the Jewish people came to Germany. I think it was a Shidduch

INTERVIEWER

And a Shidduch is an arranged marriage? Which is actually, nowadays, I think is quite a nice idea.

ERNA

There's still plenty I think.

INTERVIEWER

And so, you were born, and was your father working as well?

ERNA

My father was a shoemaker really to trade, but he did travel, he travelled. I don't know exactly what he sold but he was a traveller really.

INTERVIEWER

And your mother did she work?

ERNA

No, she didn't work. Sorry, that's not true. My mother and her two sisters had what they call 'gown shops'. I never saw them but that's what they had.

INTERVIEWER

And did you have brothers and sisters?

ERNA

I had a sister. Unfortunately, she died recently. She was a lawyer. She was six years younger than I. She came, when she came alone with some Yiddishe lady, and we never could find out who it was. My sister tried. I tried, and my husband Olov haSholem also tried. We never found out who this lady was that brought her, it was a Jewish lady that came.

INTERVIEWER

So, what was life like for you as a little girl?

ERNA

Well, it wasn't very bad at all. I was in this lady's house. They looked for a nurse, Nurse Livingstone because I had Diphtheria.

INTERVIEWER

Before you met Nurse Livingstone, when you were with your mum and dad...

ERNA

I can't remember an awful lot, my father used to drag me to Shul that I remember, and I was at a Jewish school. I had some non-Jewish friends, but I wasn't allowed to play with them after a certain time. I was kind of frightened because I used to see the Black Shirts or whatever they had on. I was very frightened of them, and I always used to say, I wanted to go away. So, they asked me if I wanted to go away.

INTERVIEWER

Which is quite a traumatic thing, absolutely. But I was going to also say you said before that your parents were religious, as well, so I presume you kept a Kosher home?

ERNA

A very Kosher home.

INTERVIEWER

And so, did you mix with other members of the family? Were they as religious?

ERNA

Yes, My grandma, I don't remember my grandfather so much, but the aunts and the uncles, they all lived down the street on the opposite side also in a flat. I remember that.

INTERVIEWER

So, you would probably get together for Friday nights, I would think and for Shabbat for lunch. Yes. So, I am stirring it here, so who do you think was a better cook then?

ERNA

Well, I don't know.

INTERVIEWER

So, were they all good cooks? Do you remember? Was there any that were your favourite meals?

ERNA

I don't know. I remember my grandma was blind we lived in my grandma's flat. But she was blind, and I just could see her sitting in the corner with her grey hair in a bun, with a black dress on. I remember that.

INTERVIEWER

I'm being told actually, I would imagine that you were to be quiet, and to go and speak to Grandma.

ERNA

No, I wasn't told that, I always just sat quietly. I just knew that I had to be quiet.

INTERVIEWER

So, life must have changed as well when your sister came along?

ERNA

Well, she only came along, well I was eight when I left Germany, and she was six years younger than me. So, she hardly said much. She was just two years old or so.

INTERVIEWER

So, when you said when you left Germany, was it on the Kindertransport?

ERNA

Yes, the Kindertransport. My father put me on the train, but he put me in an empty compartment, and I don't know if it was the next station or the station after that after the two girls came on. But they were older than me. They were called Yutta and Ursula. I don't remember their second name you know they're gone now, unfortunately, they died recently, and I see their daughter still, one of their daughters quite often.

INTERVIEWER

I am going to ask Myrna if she remembers who Yutta and Ursula were.

MYRNA

Yes Yutta was Yutta Silverstone, which was her married name and Ursula married an Italian ... Ursula Maung.

ERNA

They looked after me on the train.

INTERVIEWER

How wonderful.

ERNA

Because I must have been spoiled I could hardly wash my own face, you know, I was the only grandchild and I think I was very spoiled.

INTERVIEWER

And quite right too.

ERNA

And my sister came later, she came here the day before War was declared, with this lady whom I did not know, I could never find out who she was.

INTERVIEWER

So, when you came with Yutta and Ursula, and so you arrived in England?

ERNA

Yes, we went to the Hook of Holland, and then we went to a big camp in Harwich, and there, people came along and chose children to take,to adopt sort of style. But, I was, unfortunately, my eyes were very bad, I had a turn in my eye and nobody kind of looked at me and I was a wee skinny thing.

INTERVIEWER

You are still a very slender lady, I think.

ERNA

That is only since recently, you know. And they sent me they looked for a nurse or someone to send me to because I had been so ill, and she was a Jewish lady, there was two nurses in Glasgow, and they sent me to the married one. She had two sons of her own.

INTERVIEWER

So, you went all the way from the camp in Harwich up to Glasgow?

ERNA

So, we went to London then to Glasgow, but we didn't stay in London, we went from London in a train.

INTERVIEWER

So how did you get from the camp?

ERNA

We went in a train to Glasgow, with these two ladies who I was always friendly with. They came to Glasgow and for a wee while they sort of disappeared. I didn't know them and then the lady that I went to, Nurse Livingstone, she went out to a lady called Mrs. Butler who was a relation of these two girls, and 'my mother' said one day would I like to go and see this lady? I called her 'my mother', and we went there and Yutta was there, she was kind of like a maid almost to them, and I got in touch with Yutta then.

INTERVIEWER

So, you're eight when you came over. That's a long journey to make as a little girl. I think.

ERNA

You just had to do it, or I don't know, I just did it. Well, we didn't go straight away, I think I stayed in the camp for about three months.

INTERVIEWER

Do you remember what life was like? Did you go to school in camp?

ERNA

No, not in the camp no. I think we got a few lessons but not a school at all. There's so many people so many children.

INTERVIEWER

And were you in dormitories?

ERNA

Yes, like that. They tried to teach us English a bit. You know, I think what I remember most is I got tea with milk in it, and I've never had that I always used to have lemon tea. I don't know why that's stuck in my head.....

INTERVIEWER

No, actually it's funny you say that because one of the other ladies we interviewed that was one of her first memories and she said she remembers that going back to her, her mother had managed to come over and she said to her mother 'they served tea in a very strange way'.

ERNA

And they took us to see films and the King, I think was still alive. We had to stand up for the anthem. You know, I remember that bit it is funny you remember small things like that.

INTERVIEWER

Because it makes a big impression, and I have to say although I'm a little bit younger, even as a child it was frowned upon if you left the pictures before the anthem had finished playing.

ERNA

That's right we were taught the anthem. Suzanne (Erna's daughter) is saying that she doesn't remember that at all, but that's because she was much younger!

DURING THE WAR

INTERVIEWER

So, you came up to Glasgow, and so where did you live in Glasgow?

ERNA

That's when they took me straight to Nurse Livingstone then.

INTERVIEWER

And where about did Nurse Livingston stay.

ERNA

She stayed in Stamperland, Stamperland Hill, and she had bought this house. There wasn't much room. I slept in the same bedroom as her sons we slept in bunks. I slept in the bottom, and they slept in the top, there was two of them, I don't know how these boys, they were slim at the time. And that's it, then they went away to America, the children from Britain were going to America. I don't remember at the time, but the boats were being torpedoed and Nurse Livingstone asked me if I wanted to go. But I said no, I didn't want to go. So, she kept me, and the boys went.

INTERVIEWER

So, you would have gone to the local primary school?

ERNA

Yes. And then there was two girls I met there one was called Myra Gaskovtich and one was called Myra Shulman. They have gone now one went to South Africa. One went to Canada. I know they both died unfortunately, and they used to take me down the road to the school. But I was in a class with children of five because I couldn't speak the language. And it was the headmistress actually, it was Netherlee School, it was the headmistress that taught us. I just tried to make out the best I could, you see. There was a German teacher there. She was German, she married a British guy and when other children left at lunchtime because they were five-year-olds, I went on to a class with this German teacher. She just taught sewing. She taught me English at the same time. So that helped me and then later on Nurse Livingstone sent me to elocution. She wanted me to lose my...my German accent,...which I don't have as you can hear.

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INTERVIEWER

Absolutely.

ERNA

That's yes, my English got better, I think.

INTERVIEWER

And did you hear from your parents while you were here.

ERNA

Well we did, and Nurse Livingstone tried to get them jobs. She even said she wanted a gardener. I mean these gardens how small they are, and a cook. She did not need a cook; she was a very good cook herself. But she couldn't get them. She tried different things.

So, I never saw them again. But I saw two of her sisters and her brother.

INTERVIEWER

That's your mother's sisters?

Erna

Yes. I've only met a sister of my father's once; she was in Poland. I remember she was a tall redhead and I looked very like her only she was tall, and my father was small as well.

INTERVIEWER

And where did your aunts go? The two aunts that you met.

ERNA

Oh, they were in the Camps. They were in Belsen, and they were in Auschwitz, but they got out. Whereas my mother and my grandmother died there. Whatever happened to them we didn't exactly know, and we never found out what happened to my father. We never found out where he went. I believe he was taken to the Camps. But we could never find out.

My sister tried and my husband tried as well, but we could never find out what happened to them at all.

So that was that you know, and Nurse Livingston used to say to me put it all to your back don't forget it, but don't dwell on it. You've got a life now.

INTERVIEWER

And so, did your sister come to Glasgow as well?

ERNA

Yes

INTERVIEWER

Oh that's nice!

ERNA

Yes. They sent her to a lady called Minnie Shear he was a Fogel. Did you ever hear of Fogels, they had a shop at the Gorbals, and Minnie was the youngest one. She couldn't have children or something and she took my sister in. I lived in Stamperland Hill, and she lived in Randolph Drive round the corner.

INTERVIEWER

Oh, that was great.

ERNA

We were very lucky we could do that. Nurse Livingstone couldn't take her she was too young. She was still working; it was very difficult for her husband he also worked. He made the guns that shot the planes down you know. So, I was left on my own overnight very often, as her sons were away.

I remember one night, I locked all the doors, and she came home. We had a phone, and I didn't hear the phone. They tried on the phone. They tried throwing stones at the window. No, I slept on - they could not get in.

INTERVIEWER

Oh dear, So, what happened? Did they come in?

ERNA

The next day I let them in. There was a big row.

INTERVIEWER

And did your sister also come in the Kindertransport?

ERNA

No, no she came with this woman. She arrived in Glasgow the day before the war was declared. And we don't know who the woman was. My parents must have sent her with this woman.

INTERVIEWER

Suzanne (Erna's daughter also attended the interview) thinks she maybe came via France. Suzanne added *that she remembered her aunt showing her papers that suggested she came through France. She had the correct paperwork and arrived in September.*

INTERVIEWER

And how did you find living in Glasgow?

ERNA

I did not know much better.

INTERVIEWER

Once you had got over the shock of the tea being served incorrectly?

ERNA

Yes. Yes. They were very kind to me. I mean, it was rations and the boys fought over everything. 'You got more than me but give it to Erna' I was very lucky, very nice family. There is nobody left now the only one that's left is Sylvia. I call her my cousin. She was a cousin of the family.

SETTLING IN

INTERVIEWER

So, you went to Netherlee Primary School, and what happened after Netherlee Primary School?

ERNA

Well, I left school at 14. I was a year at Eastwood, the old Eastwood and then went into hairdressing.

INTERVIEWER

Which is why your hair is always lovely.

ERNA

No, I go to the hairdresser.

INTERVIEWER

But from the time I first met you Erna I was always quite conscious that your hair was very well cut. And so where did you work as a hairdresser?

ERNA

Oh, the one I worked for the longest was Lewis's. I worked there on the third floor. There was thirty girls. They were mostly, nothing against religion, they were Catholic, and on a Friday, they would go up to the canteen and they'd say "I Christen thee 'fish', and eat meat". it was so funny. The man that brought me up, my father I called him, said to me, now you're going to work with all sorts of girls, keep quiet, don't say anything. Listen, and don't say anything. And he was right because some of them were real.....

INTERVIEWER

I think you probably had your education broadened a bit.

ERNA

Yes, yes. But he said don't open your mouth. Just listen. He was right and that's what I tried to do.

INTERVIEWER

It must have been really busy though. I mean, 30 girls, I'm just saying you must have loads of people coming in.

ERNA

We did cheap perms and all sorts of things like that. It was good working in there because if you bought anything you would get money off as well and we also got commission on our work. So, you got a good wage and got anything like that.

INTERVIEWER

And perms were very popular.

ERNA

Yes, oh yes. 17/6.

INTERVIEWER

I'm not even going to work out what that is. I remember this lady who used to work for my mother and then she went over to work for my aunt, and she had her always had her kirby grips were like crossed. She had hundreds of kirby grips to keep her perm in place.

ERNA

I didn't have that; I know they did that.

INTERVIEWER

I always thought it would feel uncomfortable and how you could sleep with all the kirby grips.

ERNA

I still sleep with them in.

INTERVIEWER

That explains your lovely hairstyle then. Absolutely. And so, did you enjoy, you sounded like you enjoyed working as a hairdresser.

INTEGRATION

ERNA

I loved that, I loved mixing with all the girls, and we went dancing to the Plaza on a Tuesday.

INTERVIEWER

And how did you meet your husband?

ERNA

There was a place called the 'Jewish Institute' in the Gorbals and everybody went on a Sunday, and he had just come out the Air Force. They were doing two years then. I met him then. His parents didn't like me by the way. I wasn't good enough. I was a German refugee.

INTERVIEWER

I think, sadly, that kind of thing happened in some families.

ERNA

It happened a lot, unfortunately, but most of the people in Glasgow are very kind and nice.

INTERVIEWER

And so, you met your husband? And you had children? I'm saying that because one of them is sitting behind you.

ERNA

Yes. My daughter. I only have one daughter. My husband wanted five daughters. I don't know why but unfortunately, but fortunately, he saw my daughter grow up.

INTERVIEWER

I think five daughters would be a bit of a handful actually.

ERNA

But I had four children.

INTERVIEWER

So, I would imagine it would be a very busy household

ERNA

Yes, yes. They bring each other you know; they bring each other up, almost....

INTERVIEWER

And so, what did your husband do?

ERNA

He had a... what do you call it Suzanne?

INTERVIEWER

Electrical business. *Suzanne added that her father was a wholesaler of electrical goods. The business was started by his father.*

ERNA

I did not work in it.

INTERVIEWER

I think if you have four children, probably you'd have been very busy anyway. Did you not spend a lot of time emptying the washing machine?

ERNA

Yeah, I did have a washing machine. One of the uncle's gave it for my wedding present. Really lucky in these days to have a machine like that.

INTERVIEWER

But you still would have to load it. And I remember that my mother, every time she did it her hair went all limp with the steam, coming up. But actually, I think the spinner was better in the old machines. And so, whereabouts did you live then?

ERNA

So, we did move to a place called Bannarbay Road in the West End. *Suzanne added that Erna went with Nurse Livingstone and her family.*

INTERVIEWER

Before you married?

ERNA

Yes, that was before I married.

INTERVIEWER

And so, you mixed obviously with a lot of people in the Jewish community in Glasgow.

ERNA

Yes. Yes. Yes, I was at Shul, not all the time, but I did go quite often.

INTERVIEWER

So which Shul did you belong to?

ERNA

Well, I started off Rabbi Rubinstein used to come and stay with us for the weekend. So he stayed with us for the weekend so we were at Netherlee and Clarkston Shul. Somehow, we got to Giffnock Shul. I don't quite remember so much, then we joined Giffnock Shul later on, when I got married anyway.

INTERVIEWER

Do you remember where you got married?

ERNA

In the house. Rabbi Rubinstein married us in the house. I don't know why that was. In Nurse Livingstone's house, I think.

Interviewer. Oh how lovely, I think that was more of the custom then.

ERNA Oh wait a minute was she alive? I think she was already dead when we got married.

INTERVIEWER

So, when you said her sons went to America, did they stay in America or did they come back.

ERNA

Yes, they came back. They came back and they were both in the Forces. One was a sergeant, a gunner, and the other one was a paratrooper. The only one time I remember, he never told us, what he did in the airforce. But he came back one day, and he was smiling and laughing, and we asked him what it was all about, and he had, they had, bombed Dortmund where I came from to pieces, he just thought it was very funny.

INTERVIEWER

So, your sister did she get married as well.

ERNA

She got married in London. She met a London boy. She left when she was 18 she left. She didn't get on so well with the lady that brought her up, and she left and went to London and met this Jewish fellow in London. She got married there and then came up to Glasgow and got married again. It was just a registry wedding, and then they came up made a wedding up here.

INTERVIEWER

Which is nice actually, because you would have been able to be at it.

ERNA

Yes. He was a very nice fellow whom she married. They didn't always get on so well. He came from a very rich family. But the thing was he didn't want to take anything from his family, so they made

their own way. She stayed in London and then she became a lawyer. Afterwards she went to South Africa, the whole family.... She and her husband went,... they wanted him to take over. He was an accountant ...they had a few shops there. Strange thing it was the same shops as my husband had Here. They stayed there a long time. He was actually, um he was murdered, you might say. He came out of his office one night. There was 4 of them I think and there was three black men and one white man and one of them killed him.. Suzanne added *that her aunt eventually came back to the UK and settled in London.*

INTERVIEWER

And so, she came back after that?

ERNA

No, she stayed there it was beautiful. She stayed there a beautiful country and her family were very good to me too, and they invited me to all the weddings in South Africa. Unfortunately, she died very recently from Alzheimer's. Six years younger I was shocked I didn't think she'd go first. Her daughter now lives in Cyprus. I phone her and she phones me; she also has a son who is still in South Africa.

INTERVIEWER

So, when you look back at your life, what do you what do you say is the highlights, would you say for you?

REFLECTION

ERNA

I think when I had my children. Children are my life still. My daughter looks after me so much I am very lucky. Some children don't even want to look after their parents.

INTERVIEWER

And it's wonderful also for you that Suzanne is in the same town as well.

ERNA

Yes, yes. Oh, she never moved away. The two boys, I have a son in London, and a son in Florida, the youngest one. Yes and my oldest son's in Glasgow nearly forgot. *Suzanne added that her oldest brother lives just up the road in Newton Mearns in Glasgow. All Erna's sons are good at keeping in contact via telephone e*

INTERVIEWER

I think that that's quite understandable when you have four yup, I can understand that.

INTERVIEWER

Well, I think Erna you've had a wonderful life despite everything that has happened.

ERNA

Yes.

INTERVIEWER

And I would like to thank you for giving me the time for me to have a wee chat with you.

ERNA

Thank you for coming and taking time.

INTERVIEWER

Thank you.

