**Dorrith M. Sim – Life Before The War**

Dorrit describes the events surrounding Kristallnacht and the Kindertransport.

**Read the Transcript.**

INT: Good afternoon Dorrith. It’s the 26th of September 2010 and I’m here to talk to Dorrith Sim. Dorrith, could you begin by telling us when and where you were born and what was your name at birth?

D.S: I was born in Kassel in Germany in 1931, December ’31 and my name was Oppenheim. Dorrith Marianne Oppenheim – it’s a mouthful.

INT: Dorrith I haven’t asked you about your family life before you came to the UK.

D.S: It was very happy.

INT: You found out why your parents never made it – do you want to tell us a wee bit about that?

D.S: That’s all I know. Mummy Gallimore (Dorrith’s foster mother, Sophie Gallimore) had told (her own daughter) Rosalind that the reason that they never got over here, was because the Nazis said that my father had bronchitis and they wouldn’t let him travel over. And my mother wouldn’t have gone on her own, you know.

INT: And you were an only child?

D.S: I was an only child but I had a happy childhood there. I mean when I hear about other people, you know, and when it was Kristallnacht.

INT: What job had your father had before?

D.S: He was in the same firm for twenty-six years and it was in a foundry. He was a ‘Kaufmann’ and that’s sort of the German for businessman.

I don’t know what he would do. I don’t think he was working with his hands, I think he was in the office.

At Kristallnacht, I had gone to school on my own that day and it was awful. They were vandalising the school and this man had said to me “You’d better go home because it’ll be a long time until you’re back at school again.” And I ran to my grandparents’ house which was quite a distance. My grandmother, she must have had a phone I think, phoned and my father and mother came. My father said, “I think we’re in for a lot of trouble.” I think that would be the day before Kristallnacht. And then he said, “We’ve got to go to the Waisenhaus.” That was the Jewish orphanage.

The kids there had had a bad time but I hadn’t, I was lucky.

INT: And why were you sent to the Jewish orphanage?

D.S: I wasn’t sent, I just visited with my father. It was my father who said, “We’ll need to go to the Jewish orphanage” and he took the children home with him. He took about four children home with him when he found out what had happened at the Jewish school. Then Nazis came. They wrecked our house and the children’s orphanage where many of the children had parents who were in camps by that time. They threw Molotov cocktails through the windows, and the children there had to put the fires out themselves. They didn’t take my mother away but they took my father away but he got back.

INT: It was brave of your parents to send you off as well. As an only child it must have taken a lot of courage.

D.S: I know. There’s a story about this man and he didn’t want his daughter to go in the Kindertransport. He wanted to keep her and he actually pulled that child out of the train window. I think the doors were shut. And that kid went through all these concentration camps – it was terrible.

D.S: Korolla Regent and her sister went away on the Kindertransport and their father jumped onto the footplate on the back of the train and hung on until he saw his children safely into Holland. And then he went back to Germany.

**Dorrith M. Sim – Life During The War**

Dorrith describes leaving school and her early working life. She explains what happened to other members of her family.

**Read the Transcript**

INT: During the war, you would still be at school and after the war ended what happened?

D.S: Well, what happened was I actually left school when I was fifteen for which I was very sorry. I could never pass an English exam. And at that time, you know if you were doing your Highers you had to pass English or else you could just forget it. So I didn’t sit my Highers. I did two years of O levels and the second time they gave me my English but I don’t think I had passed it. And then my foster sister was born – the youngest, Elizabeth, and I stayed at home for a wee while, helping Mummy Gallimore and then I went to work for the Bakery Engineers; they produced mixing machines etc.

My Oma and Opa, my Gran and Grandpa, they had got out and so had my Uncle Ernst and my Auntie Alice had come out from Frankfurt to Edinburgh. She lived in New York and my uncle lived in Canada and he had managed to get my Oma and Opa out.

After the war I think they had wanted me to come over, or at least I think my aunt did, and see all the family again. Uncle Ernst wrote to Auntie Alice and said, “For God’s sake don’t let Dorrith come over just now. Everyone is mental over here”; that was, when they had heard what happened in the camps and all. My Opa was trying to find out what happened to my mother and father.

**Dorrith M. Sim – Immigration**

Dorrith describes coming to Scotland in 1939, settling in with a family in Edinburgh and being an evacuee in Innerleithen near Peebles.

**Read the Transcript.**

INT: And you came to Scotland when?

D.S: I arrived in England on the 26th of July 1939. My parents had managed to get guardians for me and they met me at Liverpool Street Station. And there, you know, my guardian’s brother came too, because he spoke German and we went in the car. I think we must have stopped in Birmingham and then, we would get to Scotland about the 27th I should think.

INT: So they were Scots people?

D.S: They were Scottish yes.

D.S: Not Jewish, but they were Scottish.

INT: And, how did your parents find them?

D.S: Well, this is another thing that my foster sister told me, Rosalind, told me. I call her Auntie Rosi because it’s easier. She said that they had been invited to a cocktail party run by a Doctor Turk and she spoke to them about taking a child from Germany. I didn’t know about that, but, that’s what Rosalind told me.

INT: So it’s just sheer chance?

D.S: It was chance. But my grandfather, Opa, was a Doctor and maybe he knew of Doctor Turk. Trudy Black went there every Friday night to Doctor Turk’s but I didn’t know anybody else knew her. But seemingly, Doctor Turk had, some of the refugees on a Friday night

INT: And was she a Jewish lady then?

D.S: Oh yes.

INT: Doctor Turk?

D.S: Yes

INT: I see and where did you stay?

D.S: Well, to begin with I stayed in Stevenson Terrace Edinburgh. The district was Balgreen. I stayed there to begin with. But it was a small flat, an upstairs flat and not much room. Then just after the war had begun, my Aunt Alice suddenly turned up on their doorstep together with all her cases and they took her in.

INT: And she’d also come from Germany had she?

D.S: Yes she’d come from Frankfurt and do you know they kept her until she went to America about January or February 1940. They kept her all that time which was wonderful of them.

INT: They seem to be very nice people. Were they religious?

D.S: No.

INT: No?

D.S: Not at all

INT: They just did it out of the goodness of their heart?

D.S: Yes, yes

D.S: I stayed with them until I was getting married. I stayed with them until I was almost twenty-one.

INT: So, had you always been very conscious then, even though you didn’t mix with refugees, of where you came from?

D.S Oh yes, and I mean it wasn’t that I didn’t want to mix with them I just never met any. Well Daddy Gallimore had a friend called Harry Ahrem and he had come from Poland. He had TB; I think he must have been Jewish. And I think he’d been badly beaten up as well. He used to come and visit sometimes. But if people spoke with a funny accent I would follow them down the street.

INT: Really?

D.S: Yes. I would.

INT: Do you still remember your German, Dorrith?

D.S: No. I go to German classes and I’m terrible at it. The only thing I’m really good at is my pronunciation – it’s perfect!

INT: It must lie deeply, deep in your head then, your pronunciation.

D.S: Yes my pronunciation. It’s better than my Scottish pronunciation.

INT: That’s interesting

**Dorrith M. Sim – Settling In**

Dorrith describes her experiences as an evacuee in Innerleithen and how she learned English.

**Read the Transcript**

INT: You must have been eight when you came to Scotland.

D.S: I was seven and a half.

INT: But you can’t really remember any of it?

D.S: Oh I can remember bits of it but not very much.

INT: Going back to what happened once you were here, during the wartime you must have just been at school, were you?

D.S: Well no, what happened was we lived in Stevenson Terrace and to begin with the children didn’t go to school. The children went to people’s houses and had their lessons there – the school hadn’t been opened.

But then when the school was opened again I went. Then I think there was a bomb or two in Edinburgh, not an awful lot. But they decided that I’d be safer in the country. A lot of children from Edinburgh went to the Borders and I remember we went to Innerleithen, which is not too far from Peebles. We went down this road and knocked people’s doors to see if they would take evacuees. I went to a door and the people were called Crozier. They invited us to come in. Mummy and Daddy Gallimore went into the front room. There was this girl called Nan Crozier and she was very nosey and she told me to come on through to her bedroom. So I went through to the bedroom -and she was a wee bit of a show off- and she said, “I can do country dancing, highland dancing.”

She brought out shoes and said, “These are my dancing shoes.” I said, “But they look just like tightrope walker’s shoes.” So we decided we would try to walk the tightrope and we went into the bathroom and Nan walked across the edge of the bath. Then I said I could do it too. So I took my shoes off and went onto the bath with my hands outstretched. And just as I was doing that there was a big bang at the door. I think it must have been the father wondering what we were doing and I put my hand up and I knocked the shelf down that was on top of the door and it was full of stone hot water bottles. So I think that’s why they didn’t take me!

INT: Oh dear, oh dear.

D.S: The people in the next house took me and I, enjoyed Innerleithen; it was nice. In fact we were there this year just going back and having a look at it. But I don’t know how long I was there; I don’t think I was there for more than a year, but I loved my time in Innerleithen – the people were nice as well.

INT: And you would have gone to the local school there?

D.S: Yes. I didn’t want anybody to know where I’d come from. The teacher was a Mrs Chisholm or Miss Chisholm, I don’t remember. It was a big composite class and I arrived and she asked me what my name was. And I said, “Dorrith Oppenheim” and she said “That is a strange name. Where do you come from?”

I said “Germany!” and she yelled out “Germany” at the top of her voice so that was that. We were going back to the house in the afternoon, and the boys threw stones down at us from a hill above Lee Pen just above where we were walking. They thought I was a German spy. One just missed the teacher and she never asked me anything else again. I knew that the boys could have got into trouble with the headmaster. I didn’t want anyone to know I was a refugee.

INT: You probably had an accent?

D.S: I must have had.

INT: It would have been hard.

D.S: All I could say when I came to this country was, “I have a handkerchief in my pocket” and every time I learnt a new word I would put it in “my pocket”. For example I said, “I have a teacher in my pocket. I have a dog in my pocket. I have a house in my pocket.” And that’s one of the ways I taught myself English.

INT: Because of course, in those days they didn’t have the learning support or anything in school to help you. You must have just had to manage on your own.

D.S: Of course there was “The Beano” comic and do you know I was in the charity shop yesterday and I saw a Beano annual and I got it for my grandson. I’m going to read it first!

INT: Absolutely.

INT: You must have learnt some very interesting expressions from Dennis the Menace and others in the stories.

D.S: I know. But that’s the way I taught myself English.

**Dorrith M. Sim – Integration**

Dorrit describes starting work and meeting her future husband. She goes on to tell about us about living in Dundee and having her family. She shares how other members of her family settled in America and Canada. Finally we learn about how she came to write her book “In My Pocket” and about her involvement with the setting up of the Scottish Annual Reunion of Kinder.

**Read the Transcript**

D.S: So when I was seventeen, that would be 1949, I went out to New York and then to Canada and met them all again. My uncle was quite concerned about my career. The Gallimores had paid for my education; it was really good of them. The school wasn’t the kind of school that you left when you were fifteen but I did. My uncle paid for me to go to Skerry’s which was a secretarial college. They had advertisements for jobs and there was an advertisement came in for a job in a lawyers’ office. Mylne & Campbell it was called. It was in Castle Street and I went there. My boss was the Secretary of the Scottish Lawn Tennis Association so that’s what I was involved in, not legal work. That’s where I met Andrew because when I rang the bell it was Andrew who came to the door.

INT: And he was training to be a lawyer at the time?

D.S: That’s right. That was my first job and I was there until I went to Brazil.

INT: And by that time were you engaged?

D.S: I was engaged just about three or four weeks before I went to Brazil. I was a very naive girl. I really was. I don’t think I could have stayed myself and people didn’t live together at that time.

INT: Oh no

INT: Absolutely not, that would be terrible.

INT: Your reputation would have been tarnished.

D.S: Absolutely. So, I got engaged and then about a month later I was on the road to Brazil. They [the Gallimores]Gallimores emigrated to Brazil when I was nineteen and I went with them and stayed there for a year and a half until Andrew graduated and then I came home and got married.

We went to Dundee where I had the twins in Maryfield Hospital. We had managed to get a couple of rooms. I used to spend all my lunchtimes going around the house agents because we couldn’t afford to buy a house. Andrew was earning £7.50 a week, you know. The house was up two flights of stairs and next door was a rag and bone merchants in the Seagate. It was like something out of the Sunday Post. Andrew had to climb up the pole and hang the rope out and hang my washing out the window.

And then from the Seagate, we went to Kirkton and I was expecting again. And Susan was born seventeen months after my twins.

INT: You had your work cut out

INT: That’s quite a lot!

D.S: She was born in the house. I had to get my family allowance at the post office. At that time people just left their prams outside; they never took the prams into shops. A woman came rushing into the post office and said, “Come out at once! – your twins are throwing your baby out the pram!” It was a big Marmet pram; at one time there were four children in the pram.

INT: So you said you’ve got a son as well?

D.S: He was born ten years after Ruth was born. Ruthie was born I think it was twenty-two months after Suse. I think she must have been one of the last children to be born at home in Prestwick you know, because the doctors always had women going to the hospital. I think nowadays it’s changed. Ruthie was born in ’58 and David was born in ’68 and they were both born in April.

[We returned to discussing what happened to Dorrith, just after the war, when she visited New York and Toronto]

INT: But you never considered before that, going to live with your remaining relatives in Canada?

D.S: Do you know something, I was homesick when I was there..

INT: For Scotland?

D.S: I was homesick for Scotland. My aunt was lucky because when she got to New York the people she had worked for in the leather industry were also living there. They had got out and they were living in New York. Her boss’s sister, Mina Balin used to take me out with her son and girlfriend, Claude and Inge. Claude and Inge have just had their sixtieth wedding anniversary. When, Auntie Alice was working, she went to the boss’s house and introduced me there and there were two things that really, really impressed me. One was chocolate ice cream and the other one was the toilet paper.

INT: Was it soft?

D.S: Oh it was quite different from ours.

INT: Yes ours is rather hard.

D.S: Yes.

INT: Bronco, we had Bronco here I remember.

D.S: Well all those years ago, you were too young to know, but all these years ago it was Izal toilet roll.

And Izal toilet roll had poems on every second or third leaf and that was one of the reasons I learnt English was off these poems.

They were about Izal but it was like nursery rhymes by Izal incorporated. So anyway, I was lucky to even get staying in New York because I was on the Queen Elizabeth (that was the boat) and when I got to New York they wouldn’t let me off because I was too young – you had to be eighteen before you were allowed to go yourself. So I had to stay in the boat overnight, everybody else had left and then the next day my aunt had managed to get a bond for me, to allow me to stay. I thought I was on my way Ellis Island but she’d got this bond for me to stay but I had to be back in two months. I went over to Canada and there was my Oma and Opa whom I hadn’t seen all these years. Do you know, it was ridiculous, I was so homesick. I was just homesick for Scotland and I never slept at night and I didn’t know what to do.

INT: And were they thinking they were bringing you to keep you there?

D.S: No, no

INT: No? But you must have suspected they thought that?

D.S: No, they talked about that in 1939 and then there were these boats that were sunk and that was the end of it. I never did get over. But I was homesick and they didn’t know what to do and my Uncle Ernst took me to a Scottish night at the theatre and Robert Wilson was singing and I was fine after that. [View video of Robert Wilson on Youtube]

INT: So tell us a wee bit about the book that you’ve written.

D.S: It’s just my journey.

INT: But it’s not just a journey.

INT: It’s a lovely children’s book, a lovely book.

D.S: I’ll let you see it.

INT: And did you write that for your children or your grandchildren?

D.S: No I didn’t. I was a member of Ayr Writers’ Club and they were looking for people who would write stories for children who weren’t good at learning; there was a name for that.

INT: Learning difficulties?

D.S: With learning difficulties. So I wrote this story and I just would do little sentences. I wasn’t getting anywhere with it. I was treasurer of the Club and they asked Alison Prince who lives in Arran to come and talk to the club.

I had her staying with me and I told her about my story. She said, “Could I send that to my agent?” So it was Alison Prince that started it all. Before that I had been at a conference and I had got commended or highly commended by Anne Fine.

INT: Oh, she’s a great writer

D.S: We got on very well with her. Between her and then Alison Prince coming over, they got it all started. Alison sent the story to the agent in London and it went from there. It took a long time.

INT: It’s beautifully illustrated.

D.S: That’s Gerald Fitzgerald. He’s super.

INT: Did he just read the story and choose how to illustrate it?

D.S: No it was the publishers who got him. He lived in Arran too funnily enough. I had to cut the story right down and it came out well as a picture book.

INT: It’s very good. It’s a very moving story about a child. It’s called “In My Pocket” isn’t it?’

D.S: Yes that’s what it is.

D.S: It’s been quite a success you know; it’s been good. There was the English version and then I had to write the American version. Their ending was different from our ending.

INT: Bizarre.

INT: It’s been translated into a number of languages hasn’t it?

D.S: It’s also published in German. I try to keep it light because when speaking to children I think that’s the bits they’re going to remember.

[We then we talked about Dorrith’s relationship with the Jewish Community].

INT: Talking of the Synagogue…

D.S: I go once a year or so.

INT: Do you?

D.S: I do. I go to the, to Mendel’s [Jacobs]

INT: Do you?

INT: For the Shul in the Park?

INT: The Shul in the park?

D.S: The Shul in the Park

INT: So Judaism still is part of your life?

D.S: I was part of the Jewish Community! I’m proud of my background

INT: But how did you end up being Church of England and your husband Church of Scotland?

INT: You’re very ecumenical certainly.

D.S: I know, absolutely. When I came over the granny got a hold of me, that was Granny Gallimore and within a week, I was going to the Sunday school.

INT: Ah right. But would that not have been Scottish?

D.S: No she was an Episcopalian.

INT: I see.

D.S: It wasn’t the Church of England I went to I think it was just the local Sunday school. But I never really got mixing with Jewish people and actually the Jewish community, when they knew I was going to get baptised wrote to my grandfather – I didn’t even know the Jewish community knew about me. But they wrote to my grandfather and said, “Do you know that Dorrith is going to be baptised.” And he wrote back and said, ‘Well, you know, you never were there for Dorrith when she needed you.’ And that was that.

INT: Which is a fair comment.

D.S: It was, it was really. But I call myself a Jewish-Christian

INT: Fair enough

D.S: Yes

INT: I think that’s fair enough

D.S: Or something like that

INT: And from the time that you were with the Gallimores, did you have anything to do with the Jewish community?

D.S: Do you know, it’s funny. I remember once going to some party. There must have been a Jewish community in Edinburgh. I took a friend and she’s never forgotten it and neither have I. I don’t know, would it be Sukkot or something? Maybe that’s what it was. I think Rosa was at that party too.

INT: Really? Rosa Sacharin?

D.S: Yeah. I think so. She was in Edinburgh at that time. But, but now and again Mummy Gallimore would take me down to meet Doctor Turk and I’ve got pictures of Doctor Turk’s garden.

INT: And when did you meet other refugees? Not till you were quite grown up then?

D.S: Well, yes. I’ll tell you, the only one I knew was Rita McNeil; her husband worked in Ear Nose and Throat in Ayr. I don’t know how they heard about me. It’s funny because Rita McNeil was at school with Billy McCulloch who was Mummy Gallimore’s nephew. I think he must have told us about her.

We had to go to a big office in Edinburgh and see about something to do with compensation, something like that. And Rita McNeil was there along with her foster mum. But that’s the only one I knew and I didn’t know I was part of Kindertransport; I’d never heard the name.

INT: Dorrith when I first said that we were coming out, that we wanted to interview you, I thought you said something quite interesting. You said, “Why? Because I haven’t done anything” and I said, “Yes you have” and then you sort of said casually, “Well I did start it off.”

INT: Would you like to explain?

D.S: It was Joe Metzstein and myself. We actually, had our first meeting in London. I don’t know how but we managed to get quite a lot of people.

INT: Is this SAROK – which stands for what?

D.S: The Scottish Annual Reunion of Kinder. I think some people had got their names in the index of the brochure from the London meeting. I think we got some people from there. Also I talked on the wireless and I had an article in the Sunday Post. That’s how Gisela who lives in Kilmarnock had found out about it. She had got the Sunday Post and she had read the article. It was in other the papers as well.

INT: And so they all came to you.

D.S: And Joe. Joe had got Joe, Leo and Danny and Isi Metzstein – the two sisters, they live in America. That’s a wonderful story, you know the whole lot, the five of them all got over in the Kindertransport. All at different times.

INT: And their mother, and his mother as well.

D.S: And their mother got over too but that wouldn’t be a Kindertransport but she got over as well. But people wrote to me and when we had our meetings, you know, we brought all sorts of interesting books and then we had an exhibition with the pictures. And the library in Ayr helped me and we had about twelve display boards.

D.S: What happened was that I had a holiday home in Ballantrae and one day Margaret Sanderson who lived just two or three doors down came to see me and she said,

“Dorrith, there’s somebody been on Woman’s Hour and she’s looking for people like yourself and this is the phone number. I didn’t know anything about Kindertransport. Will you phone her?” So I phoned and within three weeks I was helping to publicise the reunion in London which a thousand people were at. It’s fantastic. And then Joe Metzstein and I got all these people from Scotland together and that’s where it all started. But I hadn’t known anybody before then. Leo Metzstein – he was the very first Kindertransport boy I’d ever met; he came up to the house.

**Dorrith M. Sim – Reflection On Life**

Dorrith talks about the importance of the reunions for her and her happy memories of life in Scotland.

**Read the Transcript**

INT: So, we were thinking about the dates. When do you reckon that the reunion of Kinder was?

D.S: It was fifty years after the start of the war so it must have been 1989. That would be the reunion in London. And then I think our one was the next year, it would be ’90.

INT: Did you feel that you had more in common with people who’d come from Germany like yourself? Or just generally all those people who had to escape?

D.S: I just felt like they were family. Every now and again, you know, I’ll phone Rosa or someone. It’s very much a part of my life now. Everybody has got different stories. Every now and then I just need to meet up with them. It was very exciting finding all these people.

INT: Indeed and quite a few whom you met had never sort of, come out as Kindertransport or as refugees.

D.S: No.They never knew and of course the reunion in Scotland wasn’t just Kindertransport which was good, you know. I mean it was the likes of your mum-in-law Susie Singerman and it was lovely to meet up with everybody.

INT: Do you think that you enjoyed it particularly because you had had more connections earlier on? In some way it’s surprising after all these years that you were so pleased because you lived a different life entirely.

D.S: I know. But, no I really, I never really met up with anybody else, except Rita McNeil. But I don’t think I met up with anyone else, not that I can think of.

INT: And you found a lot of people at that time?

D.S: Yes. I think there were over forty at that first reunion. Then we kept finding more people.

INT: I think you were finding people up till very recently.

D.S: That’s right. I know, it was good.

INT: Going back to you and your time here in Scotland, you obviously feel Scottish and not German – is that right?

D.S: You know when you’ve got to put down what nationality you are, I don’t, I say Scottish.

INT: I’m sure you do. What would you say are the highs of your time in Scotland? Or is that too difficult to say?

D.S: Having my family after we got married and went to live in Dundee. We were there for about three years perhaps but I really, really liked Dundee where I had my children. I lost first my baby, and then I had my twins. They were born in Dundee and Susan was born in Dundee and that was a big high.