**Evelyn Strang – Life Before The War**

Evelyn Strang describes her family and her early life in Germany and Poland before 1938

**Read the Transcript**

INT: Today is the 9th of April 2012 and I’m here to interview Mrs Evelyn Strang. Could you tell me please when you were born, where and what was your name at birth?

E.S: I was born in Leipzig in 1933 and my name was Frischer with a C.

INT: My goodness. What was your life like in Leipzig before all this happened?

E.S: We had a wonderful life. I mean it was amazing. I heard all these terrible stories but we were never bothered. We had a wonderful life; we went skiing, we went swimming.

I couldn’t understand. But it didn’t last long, did it? ’38, knock on the door about 5/6 in the morning and we had to get dressed. My mother said ‘I must pack! I must pack!’

‘No. Nothing. Take nothing. Not allowed to take anything’

But the money that my father had got when he sold a coat he brought to the house because he couldn’t put money in the bank. Jews couldn’t put money in the bank. And he put the money in a little case with all the socks on top of it, no knickers, just socks. So that was it, the little case. And they took us to this railway station and then went.

INT: And was that in November? Was that after the Kristallnacht?

E.S: It was before Kristallnacht.

INT: Before?

E.S: October.

INT: I see, oh that’s interesting.

E.S: We got away in October.

INT: And did you have brothers or sisters? Or were you an only child?

E.S: A brother. At that time I had a brother but my mother had another child in Scotland. She must have been about 40. She had a boy, so I have a brother 18 years younger than I am.

INT: Goodness me.

INT: So what age were you then? I’m sorry my maths is terrible.

E.S: I was 5 when they arrested us.

INT: Right.

INT: So you wouldn’t really have known what was happening.

E.S: I was quite…I can remember quite a lot.

INT: I suppose it was so traumatic that you would.

E.S: It was but I was with my parents so I don’t think I was very worried. But we were in that train all day and all night we had to walk. It was pouring with rain. I had to walk, my brother was 3 so he got carried. So that was the beginning.

E.S: Well it was just the Germans. I was just a little girl playing and ‘We’ll soon have you all exterminated’. I didn’t know what he meant.

INT: This was in Germany?

E.S: Yes

INT: At school or just in the street?

E.S: Just in the street.

INT: Oh

E.S: This German just said ‘We’re going to have you all exterminated’. I didn’t really know what it meant.

50INT: And you must, were you with your mother at the time?

E.S: Yes

INT: Yes

E.S: All the family were together. This was before ’38.

INT: That must have been terrifying for a child.

INT: And your older brother, did he stay in Glasgow or did he..?

E.S: He’s younger.

INT: Now you were telling me about some of these photographs. Can we start with this one please?

E.S: Yes that’s my mother aged 3, before the First World War, my grandparents crossing into Switzerland. And after the war he decided to come back to Germany which was a big mistake.

INT: That’s amazing. And these are the people who rescued you?

E.S: That’s me

INT: That’s you, oh you were beautiful!

INT: Very glamorous.

INT : Oh very glamorous

And that’s my grandmother.

INT: What an elegant dress.

INT: What a beautiful dress.

INT: So when was that one taken?

E.S: That must have been… my grandmother… by the style of the dress it must have been ’15/’16 round about that era because of the dress.

INT: It’s beautiful, absolutely stunning.

E.S: Oh that was my hair I think, the colour.

INT: Your beautiful red hair, auburn hair. It’s gorgeous.

E.S: And this, these are all the people who died in Auschwitz. My grandparents.

INT: Your grandparents.

E.S: Yes.

INT: Who else? All these people?

E.S: My father fought for Maccabi

INT: Oh that’s him in his boxing shorts!

INT: With the .Magen David on it, and that’s in Germany as well?

E.S: Yes Maccabi.

INT: A very handsome man your father actually.

E.S: He was. That’s my first birthday. Now this is Germany, my grandparents, and you can see swastikas. Can you see?

INT: A lot of flags.

E.S: Can you see? You need to really enlarge it.

INT: Yes to see them.

E.S: That was in Berlin.

INT: ‘Berlin 1936, mother and 8 grandparents’ No ‘Mother, 8, and grandparents’ That’s what it is.

E.S: This is Alwernia which I’ll show you the map.

INT: Where is that? Is that in Germany?

E.S: No, Poland.

INT: Ah, so did your grandparents originate in Poland?

E.S: No they, well my great-grandparents did.

INT: Ah.

E.S: But they actually had a lovely butcher’s shop in Leipzig but the Germans said if you sell pig we will let you keep the shop open and my grandfather was too orthodox and they had to leave and go to Poland and live in this cottage. It was very poor, no sanitation. It says on the back ‘Alwernia’.

INT: ‘Alwernia 1935’ And that’s why they’d have been sent to Auschwitz from Poland.

E.S: Well that’s me in the pram in Germany.

INT: It’s a lovely big pram.

E.S: My mother modelling a coat in Leipzig.

INT: Ah.

E.S: That’s the factory in Leipzig.

E.S: Yes. Oh that’s just a wee picture. That’s me in Almutz outside Prague.

INT: I see

E.S: Well this was Alwernia.Katowice. My father in a fur coat.

INT: That’s right.

E.S: I could have it. This with the family again. And I’ve got, that’s great, great, great uncle Isaac. That was, quite a lot of these people were on that picture but they were much younger.

INT: Right.

E.S: They were much younger. And this is also Alwernia.

INT: In April 1935.

E.S: Me hanging out the window, my grandmother.

INT: You were extremely cute.

INT: Yes very cute. It looks as if you’ve got a kite or something. No you’re holding the door, the window

INT: The window cord.

INT: The window cord.

E.S: And this is a picture of Alwernia now this church is on the computer. And this was written for my first birthday but the stamps say Alwernia.

INT: Oh yes.

E.S: And that was right beside Auschwitz.

INT: Is that right?

E.S: I’ve got the map, I can show you the map.

INT: Alwernia is near Auschwitz. Goodness.

140E.S: But on the computer if you look up Alwernia. But because it’s still got… the stamp, it was 1934.

INT: And Auschwitz would just have been in another little village that had no significance.

E.S: 600 people of which 100 were Jewish.

INT: Is that right? That’s interesting.

E.S: It’s in my uncle’s little booklet which is very funny. This is just my first birthday. That’s a German stamp.

INT: Yes.

INT: That’s Bismarck on it.

E.S: I got a lot of letters for my first birthday.

INT: That’s lovely, celebrating your

E.S : birthday.

**Evelyn Strang – Life During The War**

Evelyn describes how her family was arrested in Germany in 1938 and transported to Poland. She explains how they reached Britain and talks of their life in London and Glasgow.

**Read the Transcript**

NT: And how did you come to Scotland?

E.S: Well we were arrested in 1938 and put on a train to we didn’t know where, but ended up in a forest. And it was obviously outside Poland and we were told to get off the train and start walking in the night, in the rain. And all of a sudden the Poles started shooting and everybody started screaming and the Germans went forward and said

‘We’re not starting a war; we’re just bringing a load of refugees’.

And they let us in to Poland. And my father went to his uncle and said could he come and pick us up and he…We had nothing with us. When we were arrested we’d absolutely nothing, just what we stood in. They gave us food everything and then we had to move on to Krakow. My father got a little flat and we lived there but my father said, this is 1938, ‘We’re not going to survive here.’ and he got some friends in London to write a letter saying he must come to London very urgently, which he did. And his friends (he couldn’t speak any English), his friends said you must go to the Home Office and try and get your family out.

So the first letter was ‘No.’, the second letter was ‘No.’. So my father had a lot of furrier friends, they were all furriers, all good friends and they said ‘Why don’t you start a factory?’ He had a big factory in Leipzig with about 17 employees. So he started a factory and he wrote to the Home Office and, I’ve got the papers, ‘Tell your wife to go to the British Consul in Warsaw and you will get papers to enter Britain’ which immediately she did. And we had to go through Germany and we wanted to say goodbye to my grandparents but they wouldn’t let us stop, we had to move on. So we went to Hook of Holland and then to Harwich where we met up with my father again. That was the start.

INT: And how did you end up here in Scotland?

E.S: Well we went to London and we had money because my father had sent money over and we had started another factory, we had all our friends, all the furriers and then the bombing started. And for 9 weeks we had to live in the shelter at night, every night in the shelter; I’ve got a picture here. And somebody said ‘Come to Glasgow’ so we thought that’s better because it was bombed out. We lost everything, everything was bombed out. So we came to Glasgow and Paul Fields, (I don’t know if you know him, I’ve got a picture of him) he was the one who said come to Glasgow and the night we came to Glasgow was the Clydebank Blitz.

INT: Oh dear! That was 1941?

E.S: Yes. So my father said we must find somewhere to live and we bought a, no we rented a bungalow in Kilpatrick Gardens and the neighbours all came round. Refugees are here and the non-Jewish people were too wonderful; they were absolutely wonderful. My mother never knew how to light a fire with a damper – ‘what’s a damper?’ We had central heating. We lived, you know, very well. We had no trouble until that ’38.

INT: That was very fortunate. And what did you do? You were still very young – did you immediately go to school here in Glasgow?

E.S: No I went to school in London and the teacher said well just bring your little brother as well. The Belair school and they were very nice and I had lunch there and we got something called jelly. I said ‘What is this jelly?’ I’d never heard of it. It was in a little container and it was lovely. I enjoyed my jelly, it was lovely! So I came home and I told my mother ‘We had jelly’.

INT: And you must have quite quickly picked up English?

E.S: Oh yes. I don’t know how but I did… So mother spoke to me in German, I spoke to her in English. So she learned English and my father learned very quickly. Quite amazing. Then when we came to Glasgow, I went to school here and made a lot of nice non-Jewish friends.

It wasn’t until I went to Maccabi that I really got into the Jewish way of life again.

INT: Oh, your younger brother sorry. Is your younger brother in Glasgow?

E.S: Yes we all came to Glasgow. And I must say my father met so many people in the fur trade and in London. I mean the furriers, in the fur trade people seem to cling together and help each other. If somebody had a coat that they didn’t have and somebody said they wanted this coat they would phone round – ‘Have you got such and such? Send it over.’ You know they always helped each other.

INT: And during the war he must have been getting the pelts from Germany or somewhere?

E.S: I don’t know

INT: Do you know where he was getting them?

E.S: The pelts came from Russia.

INT: I see. They were able to get them even during the war?

E.S: Yes. I don’t know how. But they came, what they called, they weren’t finished and they had to go to a chemical plant because they were raw and when they came back I had to slit them, the backs and the front. And I worked in the factory, I quite enjoyed it actually. But I don’t know where my father got the pelts.

INT: And did your mother live in Glasgow with you afterwards, after your father had died?

E.S: Yes, yes. My young brother was 3 and it’s amazing, she has written a little booklet; everything is in there.

INT: And that’s Mr?

E.S: Fields.

INT: That’s Mr Fields, Paul Fields.

E.S: Pauldy

INT: Is that what you called him? Pauldy?

E.S: Paul Fields.

E.S: Well Roland got away, went to… it’s in my mothers book but I think the others all died.

INT: That’s terrible.

E.S: This is my father.

INT: He was very handsome too.

E.S: And my uncle Benno; he wrote a very funny story, very funny.

INT: And Benno perished in Auschwitz too?

E.S: He went to USA.

INT: Right.

E.S: I’ve got the pictures.

INT: So they must have been taken from Germany once the war began? Is that right?

E.S: I really don’t know. That’s Weißensee; my grandparents were buried there.

That’s my mother’s head there. They were buried in Weißensee in Berlin. But they lived throughout the war in Germany and that’s in my mother’s book.

INT: So that’s, so one set of grandparents survived the war. [There is an article about Evelyn’s Grandmother in the newspaper resources section of the site].

E.S: Yes

INT: And the ones in Poland didn’t.

E.S: No.

INT: Is that how it worked?

E.S: Yes.

INT: Ah. That’s interesting. So they managed to live through the war in Germany?

E.S: Well they were hidden.

INT: Ah.

E.S: Behind a false wall.

INT: Really? By whom?

E.S: And the people brought them food.

INT: So non-Jewish people protected them in Germany, in Berlin?

E.S: Yes.

INT: That’s very brave.

E.S: Yes, behind a false well. It’s in the book.

INT: That’s amazing.

**Evelyn Strang – Immigration**

Evelyn’s family fits into the Jewish community in Glasgow

**Read the Transcript**

INT: And did your parents mix with other Jewish people here?

E.S: Yes. The first thing my mother did was to phone Rabbi Rubinstein.

INT: That’s the Giffnock Synagogue, that’s right?

E.S: At that time it was Clarkston.

INT: Ah I see.

E.S: And then he went to Giffnock. And became members of the Shul and made a lot of friends, all the Jewish friends through the Shul.

INT: Did you mix with other refugees?

E.S: Yes there was a big crowd of refugees at that time. We went to the refugee centre in Sauchiehall Street. I saw it on your [ the talk given the previous week]

INT: In Harvey’s photographs last week?

E.S: Yes, yes. And we met a lot of Jewish people because, you know…

INT: You felt more at home?

E.S: Yes.

**Evelyn Strang – Settling In**

Evelyn describes how her family set up a furrier’s business in Glasgow

**Read the Transcript**

INT: And after the war ended you would still have been at school.

E.S: Yes.

INT: What happened then?

E.S: After the war I, my father had a factory.

INT: He was a furrier did you say?

E.S: Yes, yes. But I went to the Art School, I went to a dress making school but my father said ‘Come to the factory, what are you wasting your time for? ‘What you doing?’

So I went to the factory and what a mess! Sorted all the furs out and then the pelts and everything, made patterns for the linings and it was good. And then I got married in ’53 and my father died in ’54. He was only 49.

INT: Oh dear.

E.S: And we had to keep the factory going. The workers were very helpful and we just kept going because we had to keep my mother, my young brother and we kept the factory going. But then I took ill and I had to leave and my brother carried on the factory and did well because everybody was helpful.

INT: That was your older brother then?

E.S: Younger.

INT: Oh the younger one?

E.S: He was barely, he would have been 19 in October, my father died in September.

INT: I see. Impressive. So you spent the rest of your life working in the factory?

E.S: Well I had to leave because I became ill.

INT: Right, right. And after that were you involved in voluntary work or were you a housewife?

E.S: Well I kept on working after… I had a child and I did help out in the factory for quite a while. When the kids were a little bit older I went back to the factory but that was because my father had died. I had to go to the factory.

INT: How did you meet your husband?

E.S: Well I went to Maccabi and that was where we met.

INT: And he wasn’t a refugee? He was a local Glasgow boy?

E.S: No he wasn’t. He was born in London (this is my first husband), born in London but he was evacuated during the war and his father came to Glasgow and they lived here. He worked in his father’s factory.

E.S: Now Benno Schotz wanted somebody to model and he did a head of my father and I filmed him working. But my brother has got all these things and I would think by now it will have all rotted.

INT: Really?

E.S: The films rot.

INT: It depends where you keep them. That’s amazing.

E.S: My brother has got the bust.

INT: Ah that’s fantastic.

INT: Fantastic.

INT: And he is in Glasgow your brother?

INT: I was just admiring the lace tablecloth as well because my grandmother used to make these beautiful tablecloths and it’s an art I think that we’ve lost.

E.S: Yes

INT: Among other arts.

INT: Among many other arts yes.

**Evelyn Strang – Reflection On Life**

Evelyn compares the welcome she experienced from Scots people and the abuse she had lived through in Germany

**Read the Transcript**

INT: If you look back now on your time in Scotland what would you say are the high points of your time here?

E.S: Just that all the Scottish people were so wonderful. I couldn’t believe it. After having lived in Germany and being, you know, abused by the Germans, I couldn’t believe the people here were so nice.

INT: And do you think they were particularly nice because they knew what you had gone through?

E.S: I don’t really know. I just thought they were wonderful.

INT: What’s the names of your children?

E.S: My children; Samantha and Charles and Lorraine.