**George Taylor – Life Before The War**

George describes his early years growing up near Poland and going to school there.

**Read the transcript:**

G.T: I was born on the 29th of November 1924. My name is Georg, the Germans spell it without the ‘e’ on the end, Nawratzki – N-A-W-R-A-T-Z-K-I. So either my father or grandfather was Polish. We lived near the Polish border as part of the Yiddish population in this little place about five miles or so away from Poland. Half of the Yiddish population they were Poles, you know, so they couldn’t speak German.

INT: And where were you born? What was the name of the place?

G.T: Ostpreußen – East Prussia which is now Poland. After the Second World War it became Poland. The little place is called Gilgenburg G-I-L-G-E-N-B-U-R-G.

INT: And do you have any idea how many people lived there?

G.T: Not very many. It wasn’t a big place. We didn’t have electricity only paraffin lamps. We never saw a motorcar only horses.

INT: And have you any idea how many Jewish people lived there? Was it hundreds? Or less?

G.T: A lot of families and I would say the majority of them were Polish. I would say there would be well over a hundred, well over…

INT: A hundred Jewish people?

G.T: Oh yeah, more than that. There were a lot of big families.

INT: And what were your parents’ names?

G.T: My father’s name was Nawratski.

INT: And his first name?

G.T: Nathan.

INT: Nathan Nawratski.

G.T: And my mother’s name was Alma Salomonsohn.

INT: Salomonsohn. So, how would you spell that?

G.T: S-A-L-O-M-O-N-S-O-H-N –

INT: And you grew up in this little town?

G.T: Well, I stayed with my grandparents until I was nine. My mother worked in the town with a Jewish gentleman who was really very rich; he owned a lot of property and businesses and she did the cooking and used to serve in the shop when the Poles came in on a Friday, market day.

I think. She could speak Polish which she picked it up serving the Poles. And when my grandmother died we moved from the little place where my mother lived, my grandfather and I, and we stayed there until…well Kristallnacht, and then it all started, you know.

INT: What was the other place called you moved to?

G.T: Johannisburg

INT: Johannisburg?

G.T: It’s called Piszs now, P-I-S-Z-S. I’ve got the names all here but I can’t remember them.

INT: Your grandmother died. So you moved with your grandfather.

G.T: I moved to my mother’s home town which was maybe thirty/forty miles away, something like that.

INT: Ok, and that’s where your mother had grown up?

G.T: Yes. I was there until I was twelve, well thirteen.

INT: Yes. If I could just take you back a little bit. When you were growing up in this town that your mother had come from you went to school there presumably?

G.T: Yes.

INT: Can you tell us about what life was like in the town for somebody who was Jewish? Would this be the early thirties?

G.T: When I was at school?

INT: Yes.

G.T: Well, you were put in a class and even if you passed all the exams they didn’t put you up to the next level – they kept you in the same level all the time. Also, you had to sit by yourself at the very back. And then eventually you couldn’t go to school. When my mother left, my grandfather and I went to the capital of East Prussia which is, Konigsberg. It’s called Kaliningrad now. It’s Russian now, a naval base.

INT: Yes. Again taking you back when you were at school, were there many other Jewish children at school?

G.T: Yes there were quite a lot. In fact I’ve got a photograph of the group – The Cheder group. I was the only one of the group in my class.

INT: Did you have brothers and sisters?

G.T: Well, I had a half- brother who was ten years older than me. He had to go to some big town to learn a trade. He became a ladies’ and gents’ tailor so I’ve got the name Taylor.

G.T: What happened was that eventually you couldn’t go to the normal school so you had to go to the Yiddishe schools. They only had a few so I went to the Yiddishe school. But then they shifted me to Hanover. You went to school in the morning, you worked in the fields in the afternoon. You were supposed to go to Palestine eventually.

INT: Was this through a Zionist group?

G.T: My mother got out and then she got me out on the 25th of July 1939.

INT: And how did it work? Did she plan to leave for a while?

G.T: No, she had to take a chance. As I said you couldn’t come out unless somebody would sponsor you.

INT: But how did it work? How did you get the sponsorship?

G.T: Well, I came with the children’s transport.

INT: You came on the Kindertransport?

G.T: Yes.

G.T: Britain took ten thousand children.

INT: How did that work? Did the Jewish community publicise this scheme amongst the community? How did people know who could leave for instance? Who was making up the list of people to leave? Do you remember? Were you too young?

G.T: No I don’t remember that.

INT: And I also wanted to ask you – you mentioned your mother, was your father not living at that time?

G.T: Yes but I never saw my father. My father actually died in Dachau in the camp.

INT: Ok. But he was living with you in these towns you mentioned?

G.T: As I say, I never met my father.

INT: Do you know what kind of work that your father did?

G.T: My mother mentioned that he had a little sort of grocery shop somewhere in Germany. Later some friends did some research and they found out that, that Nathan Nawratski was in Berlin. I always understood he was in Southern East Prussia.

INT: And so do you know when your mother came out? Roughly?

G.T: I don’t know but it must have been shortly after Kristallnacht in the November/December. Probably at the beginning of the following year I would think, you know in 1939, maybe even the end of ’38.

INT: Can I ask if you had a Bar Mitzvah?

G.T: Oh, I had a Bar Mitzvah in Germany? Yes.

INT: Can you remember it?

G.T: Yes, absolutely. Well I’ve still got my tallis (prayer shawl). No, not my tallis, my tefillin (phylactery) with the date on it.

G.T: I’ll need to hunt for that, I don’t know where I hid it.

INT: What, so what year was your Bar Mitzvah?

G.T: Well, when I was fourteen…

INT: Thirteen

G.T: Thirteen, aye, well that was ’38. I don’t know the date, but I’ve even still got my speech and everything.

INT: Have you?

INT: That’s amazing. So did you say that was in Hanover, your Bar Mitzvah?

G.T: No my Bar Mitzvah was in, in Johannisburg.

INT: In Johannisburg when I was still thirteen.

INT: That’s right.

G.T: And then, and then Kristallnacht started.

INT: Was your Bar Mitzvah in the Jewish Institute.

GT: Yes.

G.T: It was an annex to the schul.

G.T: I remember they used to have a snooker table, then they had shows, they had theatre, lots of things, you know.

**George Taylor – Life During The War**

George gives an account of the events in Germany which lead to him and his brother coming to Glasgow to settle.

**Read the transcript:**

INT: So you were here during the war years and thankfully you had a different experience from most of the Jews in Europe. What was it like being in Glasgow during the war?

G.T: My mother got my brother out. He came over the day the war started. He was twenty four and had just got married in Hanover. He too was supposed to have gone to Israel. His wife came from the same town where we had stayed. He was on a boat crossing the English Channel when war was declared. But it was a Dutch boat so it managed to cross; if it had been a German boat it would have gone back. So he came to Glasgow and got a job.

INT: What was his name?

G.T: He was Walter and he was my half- brother; his surname was Salomonsohn, my mother’s maiden name.

G.T: I never found out any details. You didn’t ask and they never spoke about it; neither my mother nor my brother said anything. In later years I didn’t ask what happened. My father couldn’t have been that far away in Germany and I often wonder why did he not come and see us. My brother was, by that time, a trained ladies’ and gents’ tailor. People like my brother and my friends who came over, were interned when the war started because the Germans sent through a lot of spies with the Yiddishe people. They were interned on the Isle of Man. My brother had been working at Levi in Queen Street, making British Army coats and they interned him.

Once you were in the camp on the Isle of Man you would be interrogated. But they decided, “Ok his grandfather, his uncle, his nephews and his cousins – they are all still over there. He’s not going to sabotage the British war effort.” They asked Walter to join the Pioneer Corps and he was in it all during the war. He was back in Germany during the war.

INT: So when you look back you’ve lived in two different countries and you must reflect a lot about how life has changed for you. You were fortunate weren’t you?

G.T: Very because … going back to Kristallnacht. Now, as I said on the 9th of November 1938 it was just my mother, my grandfather and I when she worked with the Jewish businessman.

And the Nazis came, around one o’clock or three o’clock whatever time it was, in the morning. There were about three or four in their brown uniforms. Now, my grandfather had an ulcer on his leg and it was an open wound; the man was in agony, there was nothing he could do about it. We didn’t have treatment; all he was getting was powder to put on his open wound. He was in his seventies. They took every Jewish man including my grandfather away. They were going to take me and my mother grabbed me and put me behind her back and she said, “You can’t take him; he’s going to school in the morning.” I was thirteen. The Nazis left me. If they had taken me away I would never have come back but my grandfather came back; he was no use to them. But none of the other Yiddishe men returned home again. That’s when they started moving them out.

G.T: Now the person my mother worked for in the big town was very religious. He had no family – I called him ‘uncle’. He owned property. We had rooms with him. She worked, doing the cooking and helped on a Friday when the Poles came to the shop on Friday, market day. The Poles used to come over on their horses and their wagons and sell their fruit and they used to go to my mother who bought the fruit for the next week. In the winter, instead of the Poles coming in their wagons round the water they used to come across the ice with their sledges.

INT: Yes

G.T: The gentleman who owned all the property, was taken away by the Nazis and the very same time a Nazi in his thirties got the whole caboodle. I can’t remember if it was weeks or months later, the man who was only maybe between 45 and 50 came back in a sealed lead coffin. I don’t know if he was in there or not, you know. I always remember seeing that lead coffin. I don’t understand why people didn’t realise that there was going to be a war because just shortly before all this there had been a massive German manoeuvre at the Polish border. The Germans were sussing it all out.

G.T: Nobody ever thought that that they were sussing the place out to invade Poland.

**George Taylor – Immigration**

George describes how he arrived in Glasgow and was eventually reunited with his mother.

**Read the transcript:**

INT: You came over straight to Glasgow?

G.T: Yes

INT: Was your mum there to meet you when you came?

G.T: No she wasn’t. That’s another wee story.

G.T: You were only allowed to take ten shillings (marks?, ed), no matter how much money you had and one suitcase. You packed as much as you could and you put on coats. Now you must remember I couldn’t speak a word of English – I couldn’t even say “yes or “no”.

Nothing. The gentleman who was in charge of the Kindertransport, said, “You have got ten German marks, give me it and I’ll change it for English money.” So I gave him it and I’m still waiting for the change. Got done out of a few bob but I was too shy to ask for my money back!

INT: What languages could you speak?

G.T: Only Yiddish and German and Hebrew at that time. I’ve forgotten my Hebrew now but I could translate the Hebrew into German obviously because I used to go to Cheder after every school; every afternoon you went to Cheder. So anyway I arrived at Harwich; there were 150 children with the transport and everybody was going to different places and there I was sitting, the only one left.

So the immigration officer took me home to London, put me up and sent a telegram to my mother who stayed at 28 Abbotsford Place, where she had a room – a young brother and sister owned the flat. The telegram said that I was going to arrive the following morning at Glasgow Railway Station. I got to Glasgow, with my suitcase, wearing my jackboots noch (still) and a coat down to the ground, like a Potke. I was standing on my own wondering what I was going to do. I hadn’t got a penny in my pocket, I couldn’t say “yes” or “no”. I was still sort of cowed because of my experience of having stones thrown at me and being shouted and sworn at. A man came over and he spoke Yiddish to me; he was a taxi driver! A ten million to one chance! I must have stood out obviously! I’m the only one standing with my jackboots on.

I told him my mother was supposed to meet me. He said he was going to take me in his taxi to 28 Abbotsford Place, two stairs up. When he knocked the door the lady who owned it, opened the door. Obviously she couldn’t mistake me, she knew who I was. She said to come in and took me into my mother’s room. My mother was sitting in a chair taking her shoes off. She had gone to Queen Street Station and I had come in at Central Station.

INT: That’s amazing.

G.T: Unbelievable.

G.T: But I was clever enough to have a bit of paper with my mother’s address on it.

**George Taylor – Settling In**

George describes his life in Glasgow and speaks about meeting his wife.

**Read the transcript:**

INT: Ok. So you arrive in 28 Abbotstford Place and did you stay there when you came? With your mum?

G.T: Yes, I stayed there for a bit. I was in Glasgow maybe one or two weeks and they arranged a job for me at a Jewish firm, Berman Brothers in Ritchie Street. It was only recently that they pulled the building down. It was a furniture place making hold ups and you made tables and things like that and I worked there for a wee while because I could converse with them –they spoke Yiddish. There were three brothers and I worked with them for a while.

INT: So what did you think of Scotland when you came? You were brought up in a small town.

G.T: Oh it was completely different. Tea with milk in it, was never heard of. Lemon tea yes but never milk! When you came to Britain you looked out the window on the train and I always remember a lot of green fields. It was amazing how quickly I picked up the language.

INT: So, so what about the Jewish community? Did you start to mix with the Jewish community and did you make friends with local people?

G.T: Oh yes, I joined the Maccabi. I was in the Maccabi in Germany in Konigsberg because I enjoyed my sports in the schools.

INT: Whereabouts was the Maccabi in Glasgow?

G.T: Turriff Street. I’ve still got the original badge and photographs. Norrie, my pal, has got a few photographs of the Maccabi. It was just a wooden hut.

INT: Was it next to the Talmud Torah?

G.T: Yes. Next to Talmud Torah.

INT: It was a hut?

G.T: It was just a wooden hut. I had a great time. I used to go there about two or three times a week and we had a gym team and we used to give displays.

INT: So who was your pal?

G.T: Well there was Laurie Sless, Harry Matavski who owns the tyre place and Fieldman, Abe Fieldman, the young dentist; he died when he was only in his twenties. Ellis was the instructor who had been an instructor in the army and when he came out he took the class. He was a very fit powerful guy, went to the dancing in the Plaza and just died. Unbelievable, he was so fit.

INT: So how long did you stay in Abbotsford Place? Did your mum ever move on to get her own place?

G.T: Oh, yes

INT: And where did you stay then?

G.T: South Portland Street. We never left the Gorbals!

INT: So your mum was working in the Jewish Institute; what do you remember about the Jewish Institute? We hear so much about the Jewish Institute.

G.T: I didn’t go to it although we stayed across the road.

INT: But also during the war obviously you mixed with non-Jewish people as well. Did you feel self-conscious about speaking with a German accent and people being aware of this?

G.T: No. There was no problem.

INT: Were you still working in the same place when the war ended?

G.T: I was driving for a haulage contractor but I don’t remember details about it.

INT: When the war ended was there still family left in Europe?

G.T: Yes there was.

INT: Did you know what had happened to them?

G.T: Yes. I remember when my mother mentioned that she had got a note to say that my father had been killed in Dachau. It stuck in my mind. He had been in the German army in WW1. Any of that business I left to my mother.

INT: Where did you meet your wife? In the refugee club?

G.T: Yes.

INT: And what was your wife’s name?

G.T: Roseanne Kent. She wasn’t Jewish.

INT: Was the refugee club open to anyone?

G.T: Yes anybody. A lot of communist people used to go up there. It was a place to go to. The cafes shut at nine, half past nine. So did the pubs actually.

INT: And what time was the refugee club open until?

G.T: Well when we came out of the Locarno, it was still open at eleven o’clock. My wife’s mother was in the kitchen making the tea and that. My wife, was only fifteen (she told me a lie, she said she was eighteen) – never told me the truth since!

INT: And when did you get married?

G.T: 1951.

INT: When you were in the Territorial Army did you ever encounter [anti-Semitism](https://gatheringthevoices.com/glossary/anti-semitism/)?

G.T: Oh yes. When we were in Germany and I was driving the truck and had some boys with me. The boy said, “We need fags, c’mon in the pub.” We took bits out of the engine so they couldn’t steal the vehicle.

The boys went in, I parked the truck and I walked in and there were two young German boys sitting at the bar. I could hear them slagging the British Army. They didn’t know I heard them so I went behind them and said in German, “Look, we’ve beaten you twice in the war so shut up!” There were certain places in the town, you were not allowed to go to. They were still running about with jackboots and all that.

INT: In Germany?

G.T: In Germany!

**George Taylor – Integration**

George talks about the various jobs he had in Glasgow.

**Read the transcript:**

INT: So did anyone give you support? Did anyone help you to settle into Scotland?

G.T: No, not really.

INT: Anyone in the Jewish community?

G.T: No. I did my own thing.

G.T: When I started work my boss introduced me to this guy about six feet odds and a couple of years older than me. He said, “This is big Alec and he stays in the next street to you, Warwick Street.

You can go home with him. He’ll introduce you to the workers and take you round the factory.” There were three women there, a young girl and two other ladies who did all the French polishing of the furniture. He told me about saying hello and how do you do? I was still used to clicking my heels and bowing. I copied him. They were all laughing and smiling. I said, “That’s a nice crowd”; I wouldn’t like to tell you what he told me to tell them, a swear word.

INT: So did you continue working with that firm or did you do something else later?

G.T: I was with them for quite a while and I was earning seven shillings a week for forty-eight hours. If you worked on a Saturday morning you got an extra six pence.

So religion sort of fell away a bit, well, it fell away a lot but my mother was very religious so I had to go to Shul even just to keep in contact. Sometimes my mother was the only lady upstairs in the Shul. We used to fast all day long on Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah. A friend who had come over from Germany said he was driving a truck and was getting three pounds a week. I thought that’s for me, so I went into lorry driving you.

INT: Were you able to drive before you came here?

G.T: No.

INT: Did you learn to drive?

G.T: No. During the war you did not sit a test because there was petrol rationing and you just went and got a driving licence –that was you. Well I was about fifteen at the time when I started working in the factory, my first job. They had a little trailer where they used to put wardrobes and tables. I went out with the driver (who was only eighteen, I was fourteen) and we carried a wardrobe or something upstairs. You were getting three pence. That was excellent because a shilling a day did me. Out of the seven shillings my mother got six, I got one shilling. I went to the pictures twice a week – three pence each time, you know? Upstairs in the Palace in the Gorbals.

You went upstairs; downstairs was four pence, upstairs was three pence but you were better upstairs because if you were sitting downstairs people were finished smoking your cigarettes they just flicked them over!

INT: So, so after the war did you eventually change jobs?

G.T: Yeah.

INT: What did you do?

G.T I went to the army recruitment office with some of the friends from the Maccabi but I was too young.

G.T: Well I worked for Fred Wiseman for eleven years.

G.T: That’s us. It’s a couple of years since I saw Fred, he’s not well at all now

G.T: As I was saying, they wouldn’t have me in the army so I went to Govan to the Navy and passed my medical. I’ve still got my medical card and I’m still waiting on them to call me up! But I was working with Fred actually. He had his own business by then but I was always interested in becoming a motor mechanic. I was fascinated.

G.T: I could drive but didn’t know a thing. As I was saying, when I was out with that guy delivering, I watched him and he gave me a shot up and down Abbotsford Place!

G.T: So I went to Jesner’s garage in Tantallon Road. Two brothers owned it. I was about sixteen or seventeen and asked for a job as an apprentice. He said ok but you had to get permission from the Labour Exchange. So when that was solved he said, “You can have the job if a Scottish boy doesn’t get it.”

INT: Ah!

G.T: If a Scottish boy applied for the job, he would get it. Understandable really. Never heard from them. Nobody ever got a job. So I was working in Fred’s and it was lunchtime and two of the guys who were working beside me said, “We joined the Royal Engineers in Argyle Street.” By that time I was in my thirties, you know. They said they’re looking for mechanics. So I went up to Berkeley Street. It was a funny thing. Working in the bedding place was dirty. Not now I suppose, it’ll be all machinery but it was hand-stitched and hand-made.

**George Taylor – Reflection On Life**

George explains how members of the family were traced in later years and how he made contact with some of them.

**Read the transcript:**

INT: And you have family?

G.T: Five children.

G.T: My oldest son died at 42 about 12 years ago. We had twin girls, another daughter and a son now in London.

INT: And when did you move to Hamilton?

G.T: 1986 when my wife died I moved to my daughter’s.

INT: Before that where did you live?

G.T: Before that I stayed in Kelvindale in Great Western Road.

INT: So you’re one of the examples of the Jews who came to Scotland and there’s a bit of your story on the wall in The Scottish Jewish Archives Centre and also there’s a little bit, I think, about you in the Kindertransport book, “The Book of Memories”.

G.T: Yes that’s the one.

INT: “The Book of Memories” that Rosa Sacharin put together.

G.T: And years later I tried to trace the family. I’ve got a son in London so I went to there to the Red Cross and I gave them all the information because during the war you got correspondence through the Red Cross.

You got an official Red Cross sheet of paper. My mother wrote to my uncle; she still had a brother, an older brother living in Germany. And my grandfather was still there and ended up in an old age home. Then the letter was sent, sent to whoever and it came back maybe weeks, months later with a reply on the other side. I could recognise my grandfather’s handwriting, and then things stopped obviously. Then my mother mentioned that, she had got word from her oldest brother (who also was in the German army); we don’t know what happened to the rest of the family except the oldest brother. He had three children; the oldest boy was two years older than me and he ended up in Argentina. They had lived only maybe an hour or so away on the train when we were in Germany. So my mother used to put me on the train up to the big town to see my uncle.

The boy was two years older than me, the girl was two years younger than me and their wee boy, wasn’t even at school. And they used to come over to my mother and visit as well on holidays. So I went to the Red Cross in London and gave them the dates, the ages roughly and the address and for two years they couldn’t trace anything. So I went to one of the meetings and a week later I saw a lady at the shopping centre in Giffnock and said, “I’m trying to trace some people” and she said, “Well go and speak to Mr So-and-so in the Maccabi.” So I did that and gave the old address. Within a month I got a letter from Argentina! They’d traced the oldest boy.

INT: Your cousin?

G.T: Yes. What happened was that he got married over there and he had twin girls and a son. The son got killed in a car accident. The twin girls, at that time were in their forties. The last time I was there was ten years ago. The reason they had been traced was that one of the twin girls never got married, she still had the maiden name Salomonsohn. So off I went to Argentina. My cousin died twenty odd years ago now but I met the two girls and a lot of friends and still correspond with them, you know.

INT: That’s good