**Marion Camrass – Life Before The War**

Marion’s story begins in Poland in 1932 when she was born into a wealthy family in Krakow. As a child during the Second World War she fled the fighting by travelling into Soviet Russia and eventually to Siberia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. In 1946 she joined her aunt in Glasgow where she completed her school education, went to university and finally settled.

INT: So the beginning could you tell me when you were born? Where? And what was your name at birth?

M: I was born in Krakow in Poland on the 14th of January 1932. I was born at home not in hospital.

M: My father was a lawyer and I was an only child. They never had any more children because my father was in the next room when I was being born and he said to my mother I’ll never put you through that again.

M: Anyway, so yes I was an only child and I was an only grandchild, so I’m told that until the age of seven and a half I was very lucky.

I had a very privileged upbringing as I realise now, of course you don’t realise it at the time.

INT: And what was your name then?

M: Well

INT: Was it Marion?

M: My father went to register me and when he came back he was supposed to register me as Matilda because my mother’s mother was called Matilda,

unfortunately my mother’s parents were both already dead, they died in their forties, very young. And when he came back, he said he called me Matilda Maria Ludvika and my mother apparently ran a temperature [as she was so annoyed]  but he just wanted to give me these names whether they are family names or what. But when I came to Glasgow and I went to school they said because of Maria, did I want to be called Mary because I was never called Matilda or Ludvika.

It was in Poland when you have a name like Maria you are called Marisza, Marilla, Marina, I mean there are variations of the name and so I was used to being called all sorts of things and I didn’t want any of them. I said I’d like to be called Marion so I [have been] Marion ever since.

My father started Krakow University and because of all the land that my grandfather had; you know there wasn’t just land it was a mill, it was a brick factory, there were, you know there were byres full of cows and there were horses. I mean my father rode horses and so on. So he started studying agriculture but then he couldn’t stand exams. Exams were too much so after a year of agriculture he started something else.

So, he was studying law when my mother’s younger brother started law, and because the parents were dead my mother took a flat in Krakow in order to keep house for her brother, of course with a cook and a maid. And that’s how she met my father because my uncle brought him home, but when my father wanted to ask her out she said: ‘Oh you are far too young for me, no no, no.’ And he said ‘I’m not as young as you think because this is the third faculty I’m in.

M: I’ve already done this and this’. He would have never finished law if it wasn’t for my mother because he hated exams. He just couldn’t stand exams.

INT: I was going to ask at home, in before you came over, did you speak Polish at home and learnt Russian at school or..?

M: Well at home until 1939, we only spoke Polish at home but I had a governess, well my mother was in a very fortunate position,

there was a cook, there was a maid and for me a governess and the stipulation for the governess was that she had to know Hebrew because I learnt Hebrew before I went to school. In Poland, you go to school when you’re seven, well I was not quite seven because September you started school and I was seven in January.

I was only one year at school in Poland and it was a Jewish school, a little private school just three or four classes. But I had a governess who taught me Hebrew so that I could read and write Hebrew and I learned little Hebrew songs about aviron [ aeroplanes] and eh you know all sorts of little Hebrew words, and of course all the bible stories. And for all the Yomtovim [festivals], we always went to my grandparents, my father’s parents because my mother’s parents were long gone, and yes, so that I was you know very familiar with all this but it was only Polish we spoke at home.

INT: Right

M: I only learned Russian when we were taken to Siberia. I was three years in the first class.

**Marion Camrass – Life During The War**

Marion’s family fled from the German army when it attacked western Poland in September 1939. They reached the Russian Zone in eastern Poland but were sent to Siberia as suspected enemy aliens. When war between the Soviet Union and Germany began in the summer of 1941 the family were allowed to leave their Siberian camp and they made an epic voyage down river to arrive, finally, far to the south in Bukhara. Conditions there were very difficu

INT: In Russia you were three years [old]?

M: No no first, in the first year of school when I was in Poland and then finished school in June and war was of course very imminent. I actually developed terrible whooping cough, and was dreadfully ill and we were in our holiday house in the country when war broke out and we never went home. We just went East because my mother’s sister was with her son, my cousin, out east where her mother-in-law had a big estate. I’m afraid these families all had big estates, my grandfather had several big estates and my great-grandfather as well. It just happened to be you know that kind of family, so that my mother inherited from  her parents, of course with her siblings, two factories, so you know they were very comfortably off. [Marion explained her family was unusual] And so we never went home from the holiday house we went east, variously by train to begin with and then by horse and cart and in various ways. And being bombed on the way by the German planes, you know coming down and finally we got to this estate where my Aunt was.

INT: That was still part of Poland?

M: That was still, well that used to be part of Poland you see. We didn’t realise that the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact had divided Poland across. So we actually had to cross the River Bug which was the boundary.

Now, at night in a rowing boat really clandestinely, because we found ourselves in Soviet Russia suddenly, but it used to be Poland yes. And, so we got there but of course it was a big estate and we stayed there about a week when the Russians came and said ‘right you are land-owners out out!’ And the peasants said ‘these people have always been good to us, let them pack up their things and take what they want’ because the Russians would have just. ..Well we were there only as visitors, but of course my Aunt’s mother-in-law, she was the owner and my uncle. Anyway, so we went to live in the town of Brody, which is now in the Ukraine and, so I went to school there to the second class. But all the schools were moved down a year because in Russia you went to school at eight years old.

So I was eight that January so I found myself second time in first class and we were taught Ukrainian. And then we had to register; the Soviet authorities wanted all these refugees that had come from Western Poland to register whether they would take Soviet citizenship or return to German occupied Poland. At that time, of course, my parents corresponded with my grandfather and my mother with her brothers and they said well, things are not easy but it’s all right. This was still the winter ’39/40, and here we were living in a little rented room in very difficult circumstances. So we registered, well there was no way we were taking Soviet citizenship that was just out of the question. So we registered to go back home so in June of 1940,

everybody who registered to return home to Poland was taken to a big cattle-truck train and we were all transported to Siberia. Thousands and thousands of families, thousands, big big trains cattle-trucks packed full of people. It was quite an experience I mean we must have been on that train about, I don’t know, maybe two weeks, I really, I mean I was eight years old I don’t really know exactly, but, I do remember one gentleman saying as we were passing through a chain of mountains that we’re passing the Ural mountains and so now we are in Asia and it seemed such a thing being in Asia.

[Marion explained that the Russians transferred them because they were Polish. It was irrelevant that they were Jewish]

INT: And were you standing during this.

M: Pardon

INT: Were you standing during this journey or did you have seats?

M: No. There were platforms a cattle-truck, hahaha how can I explain it, you know you’ve seen it on news reels.

INT: Of course

M: But no we weren’t standing, there were platforms; two platforms on one side and two platforms on the other but we were like one line beside the other, absolutely packed. I don’t know maybe 50, 60 people in the cattle-truck.

And once a day they [the Russian soldiers] would bring a sort of bucket with some soup and some bread, if you were lucky. It was just dreadful, dreadful and the sanitary arrangements were horrendous, you know if you were a child it was not so bad.

INT: Yes

M: But for my mother it must have been an absolute culture shock.

INT: Of course, absolutely horrific, and in Siberia were there, was there work for you? Was that why you were being sent?

M: We were taken by this train away to the sort of last station, I could show you on the map, last station, in Siberia in the middle of the, you know what’s known as Taiga that’s primeval forest. And this was on the River Chulym which is a tributary of the River Ob, which is the big big river which goes to the north. And we disembarked there and we had to, well luckily it was June so it was warm, because we had to wait for about a couple of days and nights till this little ship that went up and down the river came. And we were taken down about 200 kilometres or so, and then when we got there, they had transport for the luggage but we had to walk. I don’t know maybe 10 kilometres or something of that kind, to a, well, it was really like a camp for political prisoners. There were three such camps, at a distance of maybe 10 kilometres from each other.

One was on the river and the others were a bit further in and we just had to walk until we got there. There were barracks and there were the watchtowers but we were not the kind of people who were likely to run away. Where would we run to? There’s primeval forest, there is a river, there’s nowhere to run to. And we were put in these barracks which unfortunately of course it’s all logs, wood logs, timber is the principal industry, and you have bedbugs in the timber, even the trees that actually grow in the forest have bedbugs, so you can imagine.

INT That was the summer where you made the logs, you put the logs together.

[Marion explained that the paths through the forest were lined with logs as in the summer the ground became a swamp.Then Marion described what happened after they had arrived in Siberia in June 1940. They spent the winter there. The men were put to work cutting down timber and there was a small school of three classes with a nice young Russian teacher who had to teach us the alphabet and who taught all enemy aliens – Jews and non-Jews – alike.

In June 1941 Germany attacked Russia and, instead of being enemies, the Polish prisoners became friends and allies and so were allowed to leave. Marion’s family, and some others, however, decided to stay because they felt as Jews they might be safer there. They believed Hitler would never get as far as Siberia. But as autumn approached they decided they had to go – they did not think they would survive another winter.

Unfortunately by this time there were no boats and the river was about to freeze so the only way out would be to build a raft.]

M: Ah the men, well when we, people actually decided that another winter in Siberia would be just too much. They went to the river where the logs were, because logging was the industry and they tied the logs together making rafts and then they tied the rafts together and eh, the rest of us who were still left in the camp all embarked on this but it was October so there was sleet and rain and cold and we had no shelter and, our family personally we really had no food. It was quite a horrible, horrible journey.

INT: Hmm

M: Well we were just floating down the river with the current ’til we got to the station Asino. I can show it to you on the map. Now I’m trying to see the River Chulym I’m looking for. Now Tomsk, that’s right and the River Chulym must be somewhere here. Kuznetski? It’s Asino! There you are Asino. So Tomsk was like, the nearest big town, there is Asino and that’s the River Chulym you see.

INT: And that’s the river you went down?

M: And then we had to go down this River Chulym

M: My cousin in America, the one who was just a baby, he actually got this on his computer. He knows all about it. He is a professor of geology and he actually got the whole thing, you know was able to pin point the camp and last he got in correspondence with a professor in Tomsk.

INT: Hm hm

M: And arranged to go there and then he actually went to the camp where he had been as a child.

INT: I just think absolutely incredible that he survived as you know as at such a young age.

INT: Well he was on the raft as well?

M: Oh yes, in fact he remembers that someone tried to cook on the raft and so they made a fire.

INT: Oh dear.

M: And of course the logs took fire.

INT: Oh no.

M: And he remembers being passed from hand to hand away from this fire.

INT: That’s remarkable, and how long was your journey without food?

M: Well we must have been a good few days, I mean 200 kilometres sort of going with. just floating down the river.

INT: With no food.

M: Must have been about a week. Well my mother managed to get some oats but they were not like porridge oats.

INT: No, no.

M: That we have here for porridge. They were really oats that you feed to horses.

INT: Hmmm.

M: And she made sort of with water, sort of cakes with it and I personally could not swallow it. It was very rough.

INT: Very coarse.

M: Very rough.

INT: But you must have had to take water with you as well.

INT: Fresh water, fresh water.

M: I think must have been the water from the river that was boiled. This is how there was a fire on the raft.

INT: My goodness.

M: And we got to Asino, when they took us to Siberia we didn’t have to buy a ticket but when we were leaving Siberia, we got to Asino and had to get on a train, also cattle trucks not a passenger train. We had to buy a ticket.

INT: And you had no money?

M: And we had no money and my mother still had her navy blue suit, and she took it into town on a sort of bazaar and she sold it in order to have money to buy tickets.

And we got onto this train, and we were going to the Asian Republics because of course by this time, you know the Germans were advancing into Russia so we couldn’t go into Russia proper, it had to be the Asian Republics, and that was a very long journey and again we had really no food. It was quite a difficult journey. And we got to Kazakhstan.

[INT: I don’t suppose there were many people from Poland there?]

M: Thousands. I mean Stalin transported hundreds of thousands of Poles to Siberia.

INT: Right and they ended up in?

M: And then we were allowed to leave so people came to the train when we stopped at Alma Ata which is now called Almaty

but was used to be called Alma-Ata which means father of apples because the apples apparently from Kazakhstan are wonderful. And remember them saying why don’t we get off there because it’s very nice there, but we stayed on the train and then it went through Tashkent, Samarkand and Bukhara was the last stop. The train didn’t go any further so we got off and of course the weather was wonderful, because end of October in Bukhara is just beautiful. The summer is very, very hot instead of being minus 50 like in Siberia you can get up to plus 50.

INT: My goodness.

M: Which is a bit too much. But it was you know it was a lovely place, with lots of trees and you know Mulberry trees and all kinds of things.

INT: And did they choose to go to the end of the line because it was the furthest away from..

M: Well we got off..

INT : …The Germans?…..

M: .. There and each one of, you know my mother’s brother and my mother’s sister and we, we each rented a little room, a tiny little room, and then my father started looking for work but he, he was so afraid of the communist Russians, because he was the son of a big landowner and if there was anybody they had their knife into, it was big landowners. They really didn’t like them and he was just scared so he just went to work in the kolkhoz, you know like communal farm, as just a worker so unfortunately because he only came home for Sunday, which was his day off. You know the sanitary conditions were very poor to say the least. Water was very scarce as in a hot country it always is and lice were everywhere, I mean even the people who have always lived there the Uzbeks because this was Uzbekistan. They all had lice so you couldn’t get away from them, and typhus is carried by lice and my father got typhus. He was taken to hospital and then my mother got typhus and the night she was taken to hospital he died.

INT: Oh dear.

M: And I was ten years old by this time.

I was just ten in January and this was beginning of February and my uncle came, and packed up the bedding and the few things that we had, we had very, very little by this time and took me to where he and his wife and baby son who by now it was 1942 so my cousin was just 4.

M: His mother had also had typhus but she had come back from hospital she survived. Now my father died and nobody told me my father died.

M: My mother was in hospital and on a Sunday when my uncle wasn’t working, he would take me to go to hospital to see my mother and I said ‘and I want to see my father’, ‘oh no you can’t see him.

He’s so, he’s there behind this window but you can’t see him’. He never told me, I didn’t find out that my father was dead ’til my mother came out of hospital.

INT: Really.

M: And of course she was so ill, they couldn’t tell her until she got better.

INT: Hmm they probably thought they were being kind to you, but they weren’t.

M: So I stayed with this aunt and uncle and baby son and my, my aunt, my mother’s brother’s wife. I remember their wedding, in Tarnow which was a beautiful wedding.

M: And I remember when my cousin was born, I was six when he was born and, she of course being after a severe illness was mostly in bed resting, and I was sent to the bazaar shopping before I went to school. I did the cooking, and I did cleaning.

INT: You were only ten.

M: My cousin had to be washed but you just had a basin, you put water in the basin and you stood the child in and you washed him. You know at ten years old I was a maid of all work.

M: Unfortunately my aunt did not behave too well to me. Well I was an orphan, to all intents and purposes, my mother might not survive.

INT: And she was.

M: I’m totally dependent, totally. So finally I couldn’t stand it anymore and I told my uncle that the way she was behaving to me, I couldn’t stand it and I’d like to go to my other aunt, my mother’s sister so..

INT: Your mother was still in hospital?

M: My mother was in hospital, it was touch and go.

INT: Right.

M: So I had to carry all the stuff across town because my aunt lived at the other end of town, but my aunt was ok she treated me the way she treated her son. You know when she was annoyed she shouted, and otherwise she was ok. It was quite different to the way my uncle’s wife treated me. And then finally my mother came out of hospital now she was a very small woman.

The joke, way back before my aunt and my mother were married was that the Miss Ecksteins can walk with an umbrella under the table.

ALL: (laugh).

M: Because they were about four foot ten, they were very small.

M: And their mother obviously was small as well judging by that photograph you know. But she was quite a strong personality, very strong personality and, so my mother when she came out of hospital she looked like a child because she was so thin there was absolutely nothing of her, and of course her hair had all been cut completely, very very short, and she was just, not worth tuppence.

And we went, she went to stay with her sister where I was already and not long after that she took ill with dysentery.

INT: Oh

M: Now on top of what she had just been through, she nearly died, again.

INT: Again.

M: She was really dying and this doctor came. He was a Jewish doctor from Poland and she said to him ‘my child has already lost her father, if I die what will happen to her?’ and he got me to go with him and he gave me a little bottle of opium drops and she took these opium drops and that seemed to help her, because otherwise she was just going to die.

So she managed to survive that.

INT: Amazing.

INT: She must have had an incredibly strong will, I mean as you said she lived ’til 104.

M: 104 and a half.

INT: Fantastic.

M: This is a donation I gave to Wizo [Women’s International Zionist Organization] in her name, in her memory.

INT: She must have been a very strong person to get through this.

M: Well you see she had such a privileged upbringing, as a, you know it was a very wealthy family.

M: Very wealthy family, they, you know when she was born in 1904 that part of Poland, Krakow, Tarnow that was called Galicia? And it belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

M: So they travelled to Vienna like we would travel to London you know. My uncles were educated in Vienna, in fact the First World War the whole family spent in Vienna. They were brought up speaking German as well as Polish. They had a governess teaching them French. Only my grandmother Matilda, when it was the cook’s day off she would make the girls come into the kitchen and make them cook and bake, and my mother’s sister especially, she rebelled ‘why should I have to do this’ and she said ‘ you never know when it may come in useful’.

INT: And indeed she was right.

M: She was absolutely right because the fact that my mother could cook is what saved us because then she got well, when she recovered from the typhus and the dysentery. The, the Polish, sort of, by this time there was a sort of Polish government in Moscow, sort of government in exile. There was one in London and there was one in Moscow and they were called Delegatura which was a sort of people in charge.

M: And people from abroad would send things for us poor people. You know clothes and shoes and all sorts of things, but I’m sorry to say that not everybody who was in charge was honest.

So by this time my mother had no shoes, her feet were wrapped in rags, I ran around barefoot and she was really in a very poor state, and they were looking for a cook for the nursery school that they opened for the small children, because in Russia you go to school at eight years old so between say four and eight they opened a sort of nursery. So my mother got a job as a cook because it was just a day nursery but you gave them lunch, which consisted of soup, that’s all she could cook because there was nothing else. But she did the best she could with the products that they gave her, and the children all loved Mrs Schoental’s soup and I was by this time in an orphanage.

INT: Oh.

M: Which I hated.

INT: Because your mother couldn’t afford to look after you?

M: My mother couldn’t feed me, she couldn’t feed me, she put me in an orphanage.

INT: What what ..?

M: And I hated the orphanage.

INT: I’m sure you did.

M: I really did hate the orphanage and my dream was that one-day my mother would knock on the gate and come and say ‘I’m taking you away from here’.

INT: Did she have time to visit you; did she visit you in the orphanage?

M: Well we were actually brought into Bukhara to attend school. The orphanage was out of town a bit so we were brought into town to attend school And I’m sorry to say I was very bad because I would run away, and go to this little nursery school where I knew my mother was cooking, and she would give me a plate of soup and I would cry into the soup and say ‘I don’t want to go back, I don’t want to go back’ but you know I had to go back, I had to go back.

INT: It must have been very hard for her as well, awful.

M: Because I didn’t hear what was going on, I didn’t know what was going on, I was away whatever book I was reading, I was away.

INT: It’s quite amazing to think that someone so small, so tiny and fragile could go through such awful experiences, terrible illnesses, life threatening illnesses and yet it’s fantastic that she sort of decided that I will go and live there and that’s what I’m going to do and ..

M: Well I mean.

M: In Bukhara because of the heat, of course we were plagued with mosquitoes.

INT: Hm.

M: And my mother had malaria very badly. She used to get dreadful bouts of malaria. I only had one bout of malaria and I tell you it was pretty awful because you’re running such a high temperature that although there is tremendous heat outside.

You know at 35 degrees, 40 degrees, you’re shaking, you’re shaking with cold, and she piled quilts on top of me to you know .But I was given quinine a large you know sort of course of quinine and that seem to.. I didn’t get it again but she kept get recurring bouts of malaria. How she survived so long is a mystery and why didn’t I get typhus and dysentery and all these things that people got and died of. I mean we lived in such close proximity. It wasn’t like you could keep away from people you couldn’t.

**Marion Camrass – Settling In**

Marion describes her new life in Glasgow after the end of the war. She learned English and attended Laurel Bank School

INT: And they [the school] gave you special support did they at the time?

MC: And they were very kind and very good so that after three years at school, well I arrived in November in 15, I ….on 14th of January I was 15 and I left school when I was 18 and a half so in that time I managed to get all my Highers.

INT: Fantastic, look I mean that’s really quite,

INT: Really impressive isn’t it,

INT: Quite amazing.

MC: Well the most amazing part is that my school friends, with whom I still keep in touch, some of them have not forgiven me to this day.

INT: Why?

MC: Because when it, well you were not given at that time and you know you had to take you Highers all in one lot. You couldn’t take two subjects here, three subjects there, you had to do it in the one lot and you weren’t told what marks you had. The only thing was that the headmistress Miss Glover would ask the inspector who came top, so she could award a prize, and when it came to English I got the prize.

ALL: (Laugh)

INT: Marvellous.

MC: Which was terrible after three years in this country.

INT: But it shows how determined you were as well, I think, to learn

MC: Well I was always a voracious reader so I always always read an awful lot, and I think this was it and I was a very naughty girl because during break when you were supposed to be outside in the fresh air, mostly it was cold and wet, so I hated it. I sneaked into the library and I read and funnily enough a lot of the books that I read obviously nobody else ever took them out because they were always there for me to read whenever I came.

INT: That’s amazing .. and with your aunt did you speak in English or what did you speak in?

MC: No we spoke Polish but very fortunately because she had spent time in Paris she knew French as well, and eh so I took English, I took French, I took Chemistry, Physics,

Mathematics and History and the most difficult subject of all was Arithmetic, because of course, I was used to the decimal system and the British system of weights and measures and coins was just dreadful.

MC: Was very good at Geometry, Algebra, Trigonometry, no trouble, but Pence you know Ha’pennies, Farthings and Shillings, oh that was so difficult.

INT: And your mother by that time was over.

MC: My mother had remained in Poland…

INT: Oh right.

MC: …because she had remarried that’s why she was called Sabina Hammer because her second husband was Isaac Hammer but in 1951 my mother had always wanted to go to Israel, always, and she married, we came back to Poland. We were repatriated in May of 1946, after many many vicissitudes. My step-father became Director of a Polish orphanage, and my mother by that time was with him, and out of the horrible orphanage that it used to be, my step-father made really something that people used to come and admire because there was such a change. He completely transformed it, with my mother’s help I must say, the power behind the throne! My mother was really, very very good about telling him what he should do. She was quite a remarkable person she really was and eh. So we were repatriated in actually, passenger trains this time, not cattle trucks, back to Poland in May of 46.

And of course, the shock of coming back and finding that the whole family has perished, and the Communist government had nationalised everything; nationalised the factories, distributed the land that was my grandfather’s among the peasants. And the danger was that if we showed our face in the town where my grandfather lived, we would be murdered, because the peasants would say ‘oh these Jews have come to reclaim their property, right’.

Because 26 Jews were killed not far away from there, in July of 46, it was known as the “Kielce Pogrom” They had survived the war, came back and the Poles killed them. So my mother, it was really that that decided my mother to send me to Britain to my aunt. Meantime, you know I was sent to school in September.

I went to school in Krakow but only for a couple of months because then in November, that was that, I was sent over here. It was quite traumatic because I was very attached to my mother, and I hadn’t seen my aunt since I was six years old and of course for my aunt to be saddled with a teenager was not easy.

MC: 1950/51 Stalin unleashed an anti-Semitic campaign; you know there was the Doctors’ so called plot and so on. It got worse and worse being Jewish and Poland was totally under Russian domination, completely. And it was difficult even to get away to Israel, it wasn’t easy at all, but my mother was determined to emigrate and he [my stepfather] didn’t, so they got divorced.

I remember being quite upset about it because he was a very nice man, but she got divorced and at that time when you were leaving Poland, they literally counted how many pairs of knickers, how many blouses, how many skirts. You were so restricted as to what you were able to take away, it was quite ridiculous I mean your personal clothes and things, it was dreadful. So she arrived in Israel by boat.

INT: And and you were already in in Scotland by this time?

MC: Well yes it was, I think February ’51 I was already in my medical studies doing my, well I left school 1950 so I, I was at university when we celebrated the quincentenary which was lovely. It was a wonderful year to be in ‘cos there were so many celebrations. It was quite fantastic.

So in ’51 in the summer I went with a party of students to Israel [ as her mother was living in Israel by that time.] And I hadn’t seen my mother since 1948 because in 1948 I went back to Poland on holiday, still on a Polish passport.

MC: There was at that time a Polish consulate in Glasgow and, I went with a friend and she was a charming lady, also from Poland and she persuaded the Consul to give me an allez-retour visa so that I wouldn’t need to try and get a visa to return, I had it already in my Polish passport. So I spent too long in Poland. I went by ship from Southampton to Gdynia which was quite an adventure for a 16 year old.

**Marion Camrass – Immigration**

At the end of the war Marion’s mother went back to Poland and Marion eventually came to Scotland.

M: My aunt came to London to meet the transport of children that Doctor Shoenfeld brought from Poland.

INT: So sorry can you go back a wee bit and say who was Doctor Schoenfeld?

M: Well Rabbi Solomon Schoenfeld  was a Rabbi in London and…

INT: Right

M: He realised that after the war, a lot of children of course millions perished, all our family nearly all perished except for us who were in Russia during the war. That’s how we survived.

INT: And how, why were you in Russia? How were you in Russia?

M: Oh that is a very long story, (laugh) well my mother was terribly afraid of the Nazi Germans and she really wanted to sell all the property and come to England before the war because my aunt, my father’s sister was already in Oxford. She was a scientist and eh she had got her BSc and PhD from Krakow University in Chemistry and then she worked in the Institut Pasteur in Paris and she returned to Poland I think just when my parents were getting married and she would have liked an academic career and the Krakow University, which is a very famous University, very old…

INT: Absolutely

M: [ The professors] said yes, no problem because they knew her as a first class student and you know very hard working, ah there was only one little problem, she was Jewish. If she was to get baptised Catholic, no problem. So of course there was no way [she would convert], my grandparents were very Orthodox. In fact for her to study was already you know quite extraordinary from such an Orthodox family but she was extremely strong willed. She was only 18 months younger than my father, two older siblings had died and anything my father did she did only better.

So anything he was learning she learned right there with him, so when he studied for his Bar Mitzvah, she was right there with him. So she knew everything, she was really extraordinary. And so she wouldn’t get baptised so she waited for an opportunity how she could get maybe to Britain and do some work here and there was a Professor came I can’t remember if it’s Oxford or Cambridge but anyway she spoke to him and in November 1938 she actually came to England. I have a journal here which I just got last December. And there is a whole long article about my aunt in it.

INT: Really, Bulletin of the History of Chemistry

M: Quite remarkable woman.

INT: Regina Schoental

M: Schoental, that is my maiden name.

M: So she actually worked in Oxford in the Sir William Dunn School of Pathology and she was working on penicillin.

INT: Oh my goodness.

M: .with all the people who later got the Nobel Prize, the FRS, and she missed out on it because well there was . (laugh). No, there was Professor Florey who was in charge because, although Fleming discovered the penicillin it was terribly unstable and it was very difficult to get it purified and extracted and crystallized and so on.

So there was a Ernst Chain who was a refugee from Germany, and she, he was brilliant scientist but I think she didn’t like him personally and she worked quite. she’s mentioned in all the books, in Fleming’s, in Fleming’s biography and Florey’s biography and Chain’s biography because I have these books. She’s in the photographs but she went to Professor Florey and said I can’t work with this man, get me, give me something else to do and I think that’s how she started on cancer research. And that’s how she missed out on the Nobel Prize (laugh).

INT: That’s amazing.

M: .and the FRS but anyway after some years, she corresponded with Professor Cook who was Professor of Chemistry in Glasgow and he was a great carcinogen specialist so she came to work in Glasgow. So that after the war when I came with this transport of children I arrived in Glasgow otherwise I would have been in Oxford.

INT: And the Rabbi you mentioned just took it upon himself to rescue these children?

M: Well, I mean some people paid for the transport, some children had absolutely nobody and they didn’t. As far as I’m aware my mother paid for me in Poland and my aunt paid for me in Britain so that some other child who had nobody could come you know. A lot of children went some orphanages or hostels that he ran but my aunt came to London and took me straight off the transport.

INT: And so you stayed with her? Did you, is that where you lived?

M: So well I knew no English, I knew Russian and Polish very well but no, no English. So I came to Glasgow and stayed with her and she sent me to Laurel Bank, because she worked at the University. She lived in Byers Road renting two rooms from a landlady and so the school was just up the road, which was very convenient, and the school was very good to me because I really could not speak a word of English.

**Marion Camrass – Integration**

Here Marion describes her school career in Glasgow and the start of her medical studies at Glasgow University. She tells of her romance with another refugee from Germany, her marriage and her life as the young wife of a busy GP in the same city.

**Read the Transcript**

INT: What did you do after er Laurel Bank school?

M: Oh well , well those were quite different days, I stayed when I finished school I was accepted for university to do Medicine because my Highers were pretty good.

INT: Absolutely.

M: I stayed in the Women’s Hostel which was number one Lilybank Terrace.

INT: Right.

M: Laurel Bank was number two, three and four Lilybank Terrace and number one was Robertson Hall which was part of Queen Margaret Hall and there was a lovely house and a garden just a few steps away.

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But so I started medicine and my aunt left the Chemistry Department and started working in the Cancer Hospital which was facing Garnethill Shul

Now we used to go to Garnethill Shul with my aunt on Yom Tovim because my aunt was a real workaholic. She worked every minute of the day and sometimes through the night if she had an experiment going that had to be watched she was there all night as well. Come home in the morning, have a bath, have breakfast, go straight back to the lab, she was a workaholic. She changed in the top floor of the Cancer Hospital it was research. There was Doctor Peacock was in charge, he and his wife worked there and there was Doctor Beck who was a pathologist.

He was a refugee from Germany and his wife Doctor Herta Beck was a GP in Tollcross, they had no children and shortly, well I was accepted for medicine and my aunt was working there and she came home one day and said Doctor Beck had invited her for coffee and she had said her niece stayed with her and he said bring her along, so we went. Oh they lived far away out you went by number 9 tram car practically to the very end of Auchenshuggle. And they had a house there. Now she had a practice in Tollcross and Henry had a practice in Bridgeton and she had not been well, and asked Henry if he could help her to do some home visits, she invited him for coffee as well and this is how I met my husband Henry. But I was just eighteen!

I was there with my aunt and this gentleman was there, of course nine years older when you are eighteen, you know.

INT: It’s a lot.

M: To me it was a lot. But I remember going home in a tramcar afterwards and my aunt said to me ‘you made an impression’ and I looked at her in astonishment, you know, because this gentleman was completely out of my sphere, so there you are that’s how I met Henry.

INT: And did you carry on studying medicine?

M: Well then he proposed to me not very long afterwards.

INT: Well you know you had gone through lots, I think was that not a generation that.

M: Well he invited me out and we went out a few times. But father-in-law got a practice in London so Henry was born in London and his mother unfortunately died shortly afterwards. So his aunt and uncle brought him up because his mother’s sister had no children so she took him and brought him up. So he was brought up in London ’til war broke out, when he was 16 and he was supposed to study medicine in London, but because of the war, his father made him come to Glasgow and that’s how Henry was in Glasgow.

INT: So how old were you then when you, when you were married?

M: I was 20.

INT: And you gave up medicine?

M: Well the understanding was Henry had a big ten roomed house and a housekeeper, the understanding was I would carry on with my studies.

INT: As well as running the whole house.

M: And the housekeeper was running the house and that was the understanding, oh yes I was not going to give up, well he proposed to me I said ‘no no’ and ran away then he proposed to me a year later again, he can’t live without me. So it was on the understanding I would carry on but of course in those days there was no pill. Before you could say very much, I was pregnant and when I was pregnant, I was sick all the time and I got thinner and thinner, food just made me, the smell of food made me sick and finally I mean I just literally could not lift my arm.

So finally Henry called an obstetrician to have a look at me and he pinched my arm and I always remember him pinching like that and now that is fat but at that time there was just skin, nothing else, and he said to me ‘girl, you are on the point of starvation, no more university for you’.

INT: Hmm and that was it?

M: And that was it. So I had Nina and two years later I had Peter and of course being a GP’s wife, it was a 24 hour job, 7 days a week.

INT: Because people phoned.

M: Unless you had somebody in the house who would answer the phone and take a message, you had to be there to answer the phone, you were on duty all the time. So the housekeeper left when I told her I was pregnant again you know with my second child. So that was the end of the housekeeper. And you know but I had a daily woman, five days a week, every morning but it was really, it was a full time job being a GP’s wife. But also you know some patients came to the house. There were two rooms, which were for patients. As well as a sitting room/ dining room. Then there were the premises at the back. And then there was a great big staircase with a great big stained glass window and the grandfather clock and then another flight of stairs and four big rooms and a bathroom there and there were two rooms in the attic.

INT: That would have kept you fit, I was going to say, running up and down there.

M: It was a huge house for a twenty-year-old girl, it was daunting.

INT: Especially when you had been used to sharing a small room with three other families.

M: Well.

INT: That must have been a very strange culture shock.

M : it was.

INT: So when did your mother come to join you?

M: Oh no, my mother, my mother meantime decided she was going to study beauty culture.

INT: She must have been some person.

M: And she attended classes, it was a two year course because it included massage and it included actually making of cosmetics and creams, it wasn’t just make up. It was quite a deep study and she did very very well and my stepfather didn’t want to go to Israel and my mother was determined to go. Don’t forget that Stalin did not die ’til 1953.

INT: But your mother must have ended.. but we know she came to Glasgow.

M: Well she worked as a beautician in Israel all those years. She came to Glasgow when Nina was born in 1953 and then she came again in ’55 when Peter was born and then she used to come every two years or so to visit, for July and August, you know the hottest months.

She didn’t, well I, when she finally stopped working which was, oh she was well in her 70s, she would come. I would go over there in May and then bring her back with me and after Yomtov I would take her back again. But by the age 84 when I went there her doctor told me that she had breast cancer and only had a year or two to live. So I brought her to live with us in June of ’89. My mother is already 85, I don’t want her to be subjected to that [referring to Chemotherapy] . Whatever happens, happens. Well she lived 20 years after that which I’m sure the surgeon would be very surprised if he knew.

**Marion Camrass – Reflection On Life**

Marion tells of the importance of remembering her roots and her Polish family, but she feels that her Scottish children and grandchildren have given her enormous joy.

This section of the interview was carried out in February 2014.

INT: Right, so one of the things we always do on reflection is ask about the nice things and, although Marion, you’ve talked quite a lot about how horrendous it was about losing your parents and…

MC: Well just my father.

INT: …your father, oh sorry your father, and how wonderful it was that your mother lived.

MC: Yes.

INT: And you married very happily, but you haven’t really talked very much about your family. So do you want to tell us a wee bit about…

MC: Well I had two children very young, when I was 21 and 23, and then we moved house. We moved from a very, very big house in Bridgeton, which had always been a doctor’s house, to a very nice bungalow in Pollockshields with a lovely big garden. And I was very fond of gardening, so was Henry but he didn’t have much time, so really I cut the grass and I pruned the roses and I did all that. We always bought nice plants when we went anywhere so we really had some beautiful plants in the garden. And I wanted another baby, in this lovely [house so as to put] the pram out into this lovely garden. And Henry said “No, no, no, we’re not having any more, absolutely not”. And then Nina finished school and she was going to Norland’s College to be a Norland’s Nanny.

She was very fond of children but they wouldn’t take her until she was 18 and she was only 17, so I sent her to be an Au Pair in Paris, because I had friends in Paris. And she was there for 7 or 8 months and came back speaking perfect French.

INT: Fantastic.

MC: [She] did very, very well, yes. Peter was at school, he was 15, he was very busy with his friends with sport and so on. And so I went to Langside College to do a secretarial course and thought I could maybe do that sort of on and off to fit in with my life. And I was doing very well with shorthand typing, accountancy, everything and then I began to feel very unwell and I couldn’t bear the smell of the dining room. And I got thinner and thinner and it turned out I was pregnant.

INT: Right

MC: And that’s when I had Alice. I had to give up my studies because my blood pressure dropped down, I just was sick three times a day, not just morning sickness. Obviously girls don’t agree with me, I was sick with Nina as well, I was fine with Peter.

INT: You were very…yes.

MC: And with Alice I was really, really bad, well I was 38. And she was born at the end of July when I was 39 in ‘71 and of course she was a wonderful baby and I was walking on air. I thought it was the best thing I had ever done.

INT: Absolutely because you have the time and you have the experience.

MC: Yes.

INT: And do you not find with your third you’re much more relaxed about it all?

MC: Oh yes.

INT: How wonderful.

MC: Oh but she was a lovely, lovely child, an absolute blessing. Of course my mother came from Israel to help me and my mother was wonderful, she really was wonderful. And so that was the end of my studies as a secretary but it did help me to do the books for Henry so that I was able to do that. And of course Alice has been an absolute blessing because she did very well at school; she did very well at University.

INT: So what did she study at University?

MC: I wanted her to study Pharmacy but she had excellent Highers, she could have applied for anything, but no, accountancy. And when it came to the graduation, it was on a Saturday and by this time she had become very orthodox and she wouldn’t graduate on a Saturday. Alice went to Manchester to work in an accountant’s office but as she became so very frum [religious] and the Holy Law Synagogue was looking for an administrator to put things on the computer because the people that worked there for years didn’t want to do that. So they took her on and she did very well there. And then my aunt died and left, well, the proceeds of her flat were divided between us all and each child spent the money differently. Nina bought a car…

INT: Right.

MC: …and invested the rest. Peter was just having his 40th birthday at the time so he had a marquee, a jazz band…

INT: Fantastic.

MC: …120 people.

INT: That sounded absolutely wonderful.

MC: In the garden, it was a wonderful party yes. And Alice used the money to go to She’arim in Har Nof.

INT: Ah right.

MC: To study Jewish religion. And my goodness she certainly studied that and that’s where she met her husband.

INT: Very nice.

MC: And he came over (from a non orthodox family) and he had finished university, I think in Denver, Colorado where he comes from, and was going to do law. But he went to Israel meantime for a few months and decided to become religious and went to Or Someyach…

INT: Yeshiva?

MC: …Yeshiva. And that’s how they met.

INT: Lovely.

MC: And they’ve got four lovely boys.

INT: And they live in…?

MC: They live in Edgware now.

INT: In Edgware?

MC: Yes.

INT: And they have four boys?

MC: Yes. Two boys were born in Jerusalem until he finished his studies and then he got a job in Leeds as a student chaplain to Yorkshire Universities. And she had another boy in Leeds, that was Shlomi, and then he got a job in JFS [Jewish Free School] in London teaching religion. So they moved to Edgware and she had little Moishe in London.

INT: Lovely. So she has four boys.

MC: So we have four grandchildren from Peter, a boy and three girls.

INT: Oh my goodness, four there as well. And so are they older?

MC: Oh yes they are older, yes, oh yes. Sam finished Warwick University and got a job very fortunately with AXA.

INT: Oh right. Ok

MC: So he is doing well there. Katie is now 21, she is in her final year in York doing French and History. Anna is in her second year at Leicester and Lucy will be 18 at the end of December, she’s in her final year at Maidstone Grammar School.

INT: My goodness. And Nina has an interesting job I think as well, doesn’t she?

MC: Well Nina… When she went to France, after she finished, she finished Norland’s and they have to do private nannying to get the Norland’s certificate and she got a job with a family, I think they had a 6 year old girl and a baby. And they had lived in Kensington and they had some estate in the Borders in Scotland. So she thought she would take that job. But by the time she actually came to take the job they had sold up in this country and bought a châteaux in the south of France, in Bar-sur-Loup or Tourettes-sur-Loup which is not far from Grasse and it’s the perfume industry there. So she worked there and of course she made friends with all the staff, because they had staff. They had somebody to cook and a gardener and a housekeeper etc…

INT: It sounds very Downton Abbey.

MC: Oh absolutely, absolutely. So she worked there for about 9 months and then she came back to Glasgow, got a job in a nursery in Battlefield  which was slightly different, but she decided she wanted to go to Canada. Henry’s two younger brothers lived in Canada, one in Manitoba, one in Ottawa. So she wanted to emigrate to Canada, and having French as well as English, she did the applications and so on and she emigrated. So she lived in Canada for about 8 years. And then she decided to go backpacking around Europe. And then she returned to the south of France to visit and she got this job in the perfume industry, a secretarial job.

INT: Right.

MC: She got training, about three months training she got. And she liked it and they were very nice people. It’s a big firm. They don’t do, sort of, retail, it’s all wholesale. It’s all export and wholesale, big quantities of all the things that they use in the perfume industry. So she’s been working there now for over 20 years.

INT: Fantastic

MC: Oh it’s a beautiful place, the whole thing looks like a film set, it really is lovely.

INT: But she has lovely nephews and nieces.

MC: Oh yes she’s very fond of them, she always comes to see them.

INT: So, and if you look back Marion and if you think about where you started as a child.

MC: Yes.

INT: And now you’re living in Glasgow, you have…

MC: I’ve been very lucky.

INT: …lovely children and lovely grandchildren.

MC: Yes. Well, if Hitler had his way there would be nothing, so we were very lucky that they took us to Siberia. Yes.

INT: I know. But I think your life has been absolutely fantastic and it’s been a real privilege to interview you. Thank you very much Marion.

MC: Thank you Angela, thank you very much.