**Marianne Grant – Life Before the War**

INT: Today is 25th of November 2015, and I’m here to speak with Geraldine Shenkin, who is going to tell me a little about her mother, Mrs Marianne Grant.

Geraldine describes her mother’s background in Czechoslovakia by reading from Marianne Grant’s autobiography. She goes on to talk about her mother’s great love for drawing and painting.

Geraldine, we want to begin by reading a little from your mother’s own story and in her own words.

GS: This is from her book.  She made a book called, “I Knew I Was Painting For My Life” which includes the Holocaust art works, by my mum, Marianne Grant.  She starts by saying her story.

“My name is Marianne Grant, nee Herman, nicknamed Mousie, from Prague, that’s in Czechoslovakia [Czech Republic].  My father came from a small village, Czirima, near Szadek in the Sudetenland, North Bohemia.  He was the son of hop farmers from a family of ten children.  From the age of eight he lodged with a cantor in Prague in order to get a proper education.  He became the foreign exchange manager of the Bohemian Union Bank in Prague.  He met my mother, the youngest of three sisters, when he was sent to a branch in Bielsko, which after the First World War became part of Poland.  She was the daughter of a cantor, Maurice Rosner, and his wife Cecilia from Moravia.  My mother, Anna, was a milliner and she married my father, in 1920.  They settled in Prague, and I was born in September 1921.

We lived in the centre of the town in a small flat for seven or eight years, then we moved to new flats built by the bank for their employees, near vast beautiful parks”.

INT: And, I gather from what you’ve read, that your mother had quite an easy life, before the war changed everything.

GS: Yes…she went to a primary school and after, when she went on to girls’ high school, she was sent to a private English grammar school.  And then later on after much persuasion by her father’s three sisters and her mother, her father relented and gave his permission for her to attend the famous Rote Schule of fashion and graphic design in Prague.

INT: So, your mother was always interested in drawing and art?

GS: She loved drawing, in her spare time, loved to do little sketches all the way through her childhood and in her teenage days with children, wherever she went, she liked to draw and she loved nature study.  All lovely things she liked to draw or paint.

INT: And why was her father not keen on her doing this, at first anyway; do you know?

GS: I’m not really very sure to be honest, why. He probably wanted her to go down a more educational route. I think she was pretty bright. She spoke six languages fluently later in life and he probably thought that she could do something, maybe become a lawyer or a doctor and not go into the art world.

**Marianne Grant – Life During The War**

Geraldine talks about the increasing difficulties facing her mother and her grandmother as the war progressed. She describes their time in Theresienstadt and then in Auschwitz where her mother’s skills saved her life, when she was forced to draw for the notorious Dr Mengele.

INT: That’s interesting.  And life obviously changed very significantly for your mother in the nineteen thirties?

GS: Well, it did.  My mother was an only child and in 1938, her father died.  That was a few months before the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Germans.  And when that happened they had to leave the very nice district that they lived in.  The lovely area.  And that was only then used by ethnic Germans, and they had to move across the River Vltava and live in a very small flat.  She said that a lot of her relatives lived in that area as well, so it wasn’t too terrible for them.

INT: And then things got worse; when was that?

GS: At the end of 1941 they were forced to wear the yellow star, with Jude on it to show, point out, that they were the Jewish people.  And from then on life became pretty difficult. Before that my grandma had bought my mum a Kapitalisten certificate, which paid for two years in Jerusalem’s famous Bezalel Art School.  But she didn’t want to leave her mum and she cried and cried and eventually they gave the chance to another person to use the certificate.

INT: So she could have escaped?

GS: She could have, yes.  She could have left Prague at that time and gone to Jerusalem, but she didn’t want to be separated from her mother.

INT: And her mother by this time was a widow?

GS: She was a widow, yes. Her father died before the war began.  And as I said, in 1941 they all had to start to wear the yellow star to identify who they were and because of her love of art and graphic design, she taught Jewish girls privately at home to earn some extra money.  She taught them some fashion design.  She did it secretly. She was teaching them how to sew lingerie and all different things. Always on the quiet.

INT: She didn’t get into trouble?

GS: She didn’t get into trouble.

INT: So she was courageous right from the start?

GS: She had quite a lot, I think, of feistiness in her. She was quite a strong lady- my mum was a very stubborn lady and the stubbornness, as you’ll hear in her story, helped save her life and my grandma’s life, her mum’s life. Well, that, and her art, her art.

INT: What happened next?

GS: On the 28th of April 1942, they were taken to an exhibition centre in Prague where they were kept on the floor overnight and then the next day they were sent by normal trains to the ghetto of Theresienstadt.

Theresienstadt was a fortress built by the Empress Maria Theresa and it was used for the Czech Army.  It was the army barracks for the Czech Army.  So they were put in the military barracks which obviously, they had vacated, and they brought all the Jewish people, now, there.  And they were allocated a room that was tiny, probably, about, I’m not too sure but I know she used to say that her actual space that she had on the floor, was about three feet by six feet, that was allocated to her and my grandma.  And there was about forty people in the room, so you can imagine how tight it was, how congested. In fact, one of the paintings that she did was in lovely colour, that you can see that the bits of clothing and things that they were able to take to Theresienstadt, that she’s put a curtain, a bit of material to make it look a wee bit home like. She always tried her best in every possible way.

INT: And, did she bring art materials with her? Was she able to do that, because I know that was her interest?

GS: I’m not sure…whether she brought art material with her there, or whether she was given them there.  She may have possibly brought things.  They were allowed a few possessions, so it’s very possible that she did. I would probably think that she did. They knew that they would be sent away, and they were preparing. I know that she made béchamel sauce – you melt margarine and flour and you make a thick paste – that she put notes and things inside.  She hid and sewed it into the lining of her coat.  She was preparing ahead, in case of hard times ahead.

INT: So this was money that she was hiding?

GS: Yes, yes, money or anything valuable.  She was a very intelligent lady, who thought…thought ahead.

INT: And they knew what was coming?

GS: Well, they didn’t know exactly what was coming, but, they knew it wasn’t good and that there was a lot of talk and that was the start of her horrific journey  going to Thereisienstadt and that was April 1942.

INT: And what happened? Do you know what happened to her there, in Theresienstadt?

GS: Well, yes, when she was in Theresienstadt, she chose to work in agriculture, as she was told it was more lucrative than the art department as she could exchange second class vegetables for bread and other rations.  And she became second in charge of the youth garden where there were girls aged twelve to seventeen that were working there.  And in her spare time after working she would do some sketching and painting; she would go there with a friend, and she also went to the mock cafés. You know in Theresienstadt it was the propaganda camp. It had to look to the Red Cross like it was actually a holiday camp where in fact, it was obviously the opposite.  And so she would go and she would draw the old Austrian and German Jews.  They had a lot of elderly people there that had actually even paid money [to go there].  They thought they’d gone to a holiday camp.  Most of them perished from typhoid and enteritis through malnutrition.

INT: So, so these mock cafes where places you sat, but you didn’t get anything to eat or drink?

GS: Absolutely nothing, nothing.  It was just to look, to look the part.

GS: When they moved the entire Czech population out of Theresienstadt because of the overcrowding, the empty houses were used for the Jews.

INT: Oh, I see, so people had previously been living there?

GS: Yes.

INT: I see, but obviously far fewer than came in after that?

GS: Yes.

INT: Was she there a long time in Theresienstadt?

G.S: She was in Theresienstadt 18th of December 1943 so that was nineteen, twenty months in Theresienstadt.

INT: But then she was transported somewhere else?

GS: Well my grandmother was summoned three times to go on the train, which was to the East.  They didn’t actually even know where the East was – that it was actually to Auschwitz.  And three times, my mum managed to get her released, to get her off the train.  But the fourth time, it just wasn’t possible and she was taken onto the cattle wagon.  My mum said that she rushed back to the house [barracks].  She left her artwork with a friend, grabbed a few belongings and jumped on the train.  But she wasn’t on the same wagon as my [her] mother.  Just a separate compartment. And it took days, no food, no drink, just a bucket in the corner for them to relieve themselves.  And this train stopped in darkness; they were surrounded by the SS; the killer dogs, black Dobermans. ‘Raus! Raus!’ they were shouting, the soldiers – Out! Out! – and my mum searched, all through the night, all night and eventually they were re-united at dawn.

INT: It must have been terrifying.

GS: Horrific, you can’t really imagine. They were dying…they were all dying in the wagons. People just dropped in the cattle wagons, literally, not trains, cattle wagons.  And then when they…yes you know the story, when they arrived, they were separated, and those to the left and those to the right.  They were there – who was going to live and who should die – making those decisions.  And the next day, they were taken to a building where Polish women shouted orders for them to strip off all their clothing, and they were herded outside into the bitter cold of the Polish winter.  The German SS officers with their black high boots, they were ordering them, going past them, and afterwards she found out that the one with probably the shiniest boots was Doctor Josef Mengele.  He was the experimentation doctor. He had a leather whip in his hand and he just pointed them to the left and to the right.  And condemned them immediately to death, to be gassed in the gas chambers.  The others were spared and they were sent to the blockhouses, and men and women lived, you know in separate blocks.

INT: I suppose your grandmother was young enough to be picked for life then…she wouldn’t have been old either?

GS: I can work it out… but she wasn’t terribly old, no.  But she wasn’t as fit as my mother obviously for work in the camp. Both of them were sent to the family camp -Auschwitz-Birkenau- and they settled into one of the long cement brick blocks. It had timber walls and there they slept on planks, literally planks with straw mattresses.  And every night they took their shoes off and one morning Mum said that hers were missing. They went missing while under her sleeping plank.  And then she received canvas clogs and her toes got frozen. They were black and septic and unfortunately, she suffered with that for the rest of her life – that affected her.  Because they had to stand for hours in the freezing cold for roll call.  And, obviously, canvas wasn’t good enough.

She was called upon to look after the children, who were separated from their mums.  They were put in the children’s block with the children.

INT: She was lucky in a way to be picked for that wasn’t she?

GS: Well, yes, I suppose the children, you know, were sadly taken there and they were really only there for up to about three months before they gassed them, because the children were of no use to the Germans.  And she tried to make their life a bit better.  She secretly taught them painting and nature study.  And the Germans kept the children’s block in comparative comfort – they tried.  They had a bit thicker soup and they were given all sorts of materials like papers and pens and so on.  There were even tables and rough benches- the height of absolute luxury, she said.

INT: It seems strange when they were going to murder them soon after.

GS: Maybe. Mum used to say that some of the guards had a bit of feeling, a bit of compassion towards the Jewish people, and they were under orders.  They had to do things, whether they liked it or not.  So I think some of them showed a bit of compassion, by trying…trying to make it a little bit better for the children.

INT: That’s interesting.

GS: The SS, they would come frequently to visit and amuse themselves with the children, if they were bored stiff in this desolate part of the world.  And one of these SS was a Slovak collaborator who spotted my mum’s drawings and he commissioned her to make a hand painted fairy tale book for his children.  And he took her to the gipsy camp.  You know they had a gipsy camp as well in Auschwitz and she painted a beautiful…with oil paints, a beautiful gipsy girl for this SS soldier’s wife. And one day, when he came to look for her again, in the block he couldn’t find her because she wasn’t there and then he went…he went to find her in her own block and she was lying ill with pleurisy and terrible boils with her mother, and he demanded that he had to see the Jewish doctor. There was a Jewish doctor in every block and as my mum had no medication, at the time…

INT: These doctors, these doctors were not given any medication?

GS: No, they had nothing, nothing to give, absolutely nothing.  But he, this SS man, he brought her extra bread and butter and necessities and so he actually saved her life –  by giving her more nutrition.

INT: Because he liked the way she painted?

GS: Yes, he was happy with her, she pleased him and I think he wanted her to do more, more artwork for him.  And through all this, news travelled fast, to the notorious SS doctor, as I’ve already mentioned, Doctor Josef Mengele, who did horrific medical experiments on inmates, horrific.  And she was ordered to draw different markings on children, on twins, skin markings or anything. And another time he came (they used to send little boys…she would say – they were called ‘laufers’…a laufer in German means to run, to lauf) and he would send them. They were boys in their striped pyjama suit, and she said that later on she found out they were very abused boys that they used.  And when these boys came to get you from the block, you just went instantly. You ran; you ran…when Mengele wanted you, you went.

And she said that she did all different things. He, of course did research on the dwarves; he took her to the dwarf camp.  She was taken to his hut. Mum used to say that there wasn’t a bird that flew past; there wasn’t a tree that grew in Auschwitz, not a tree, so a bird didn’t fly because there were no trees, and the mud was yellow mud.  And in his hut he had this most beautiful Persian rug, that was lying on top of this yellow mud, where he just paced up and down in his high, leather, shiny boots, and he just pointed at her, instructing her what to do.  And she said she was shaking and she knew if she made an ink blob, a mistake or whatever, she would have been finished, she knew.  And that’s why her book…she named it, ‘I Knew I Was Painting For My Life’.

But he gave her an architect’s tool set to draw the Hungarian dwarf families in black ink. I don’t know where her strength and courage came from, you know, because I can’t imagine the situation.

INT: She must have seen the most horrible things.

GS: Awful…awful and on children, you know.  But what she did try – she got permission and got materials to paint on the wall of the children’s block, because as I said earlier, that the maximum time the children were kept in Auschwitz was for three months.  She wanted to decorate the children’s block, the walls, there was nothing, no colour, so she was allowed to.  They gave permission as it was for the benefit of the British Red Cross.  And she painted Mickey Mouse and Bambi and Minnie Mouse and all the children of the world – Chinese children, Indian, Eskimo, trees, flowers, mushrooms.  It was partly educational and also just to brighten the environment, to give them a bit of colour in their lives.  And in 1997 my mother, by memory, which is amazing, she made a replica for the exhibition called, ‘No Child’s Play, Children of the Holocaust.  She made it for Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Memorial Centre in Jerusalem, Israel.

INT: Because the original was lost then, I assume?

GS: No, the original was painted directly on the wall.  It was on the wall of the children’s block.

Int: And that was destroyed after the war?

GS: Yes.  Well, my mum and my grandma were very fortunate, as to say that they were in Auschwitz for six or seven months.  Very few people were actually were sent out of Auschwitz alive.  But I’d like to just mention before that, that one of the horrific moments, times, that Mum did later on talk about was, on the eighth of March 1944 when the whole camp went numb. When you couldn’t hear a sound, everything, not a motion, nothing.  And the ‘Schreiber’, the person who writes, (to scribe is to write. He’s a privileged Jewish person, in his blue and pyjama suit and a striped cap. They would take note of each person’s tattoo. When you entered Auschwitz every person was given a tattoo on their arm. You weren’t a name; you were a number).  And everything was deadly quiet. There was no selection. You could smell the stench of burning flesh and hair because the people who came before my mum [the transport which came to Auschwitz before Geraldine’s mum arrived], every person, that whole selection, every person was taken to the gas chambers.  The gas ovens just worked all through the night. It was just horrific, when the whole place was emptied out.

INT: So, that’s what was happening – a whole block was exterminated?

GS: Yes, the transport that had arrived before my mother’s was completely taken away. Everyone was sent to the gas chamber.

INT: And do you know why specifically that one?

GS: I think they just had their quota of numbers that they just wanted to get rid of and so be it. No, I don’t think there was any reason.  Can you imagine living through that and you can smell the stench of burning flesh and hair and you’re living through that and you’re living on top of that, in these circumstances. We can’t…it’s just unimaginable, in the filth and the smells.

I remember my mum going with me to see Schindler’s List – that’s the most wonderful film that was made, several years ago.  And yes, to the everyday person that’s great to see and gives a very good insight on what happened in the concentration camps.  But my mum came away and she turned and said to me, ‘But you can’t smell anything; there’s no smell’.  And that’s a hard thing to visualise.

Because the British Government turned their backs, really. They didn’t believe what was happening – the atrocities that were going on in the world.  I don’t think they believed. I’m jumping ahead of myself, but I know that when my mother at the end, I’ve not come to that part of her story, but at the very end she was taken to Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.  And she said she could hear the ground trembling for days when the British Army was approaching.

The Germans had already surrendered; the white flags were out and when the British   Army arrived, under Field Marshall Montgomery, the British soldiers, some of them were absolutely traumatised at what they saw.  The camp was barely functioning just couldn’t…could not believe. An [Irish] doctor, Sean Stiles, actually looked after my grandma when she was rather poorly, at the end, by this time.  And he insisted that both my mother and my grandma went on a Red Cross boat to Malmo in Sweden.  That would be where the best medical treatment was. He gave them good advice.  And we found out only recently, that this doctor, Sean Stiles, I can’t remember how – it was a nephew, some relation, a cousin’s nephew, I don’t know, got in touch with my sister, and…he…I think, he died early.  He never married or had children. He was very traumatised and he died, I think in the early sixties.  He was completely traumatised by what he saw.

INT: At Belsen?

GS: In Bergen-Belsen.

INT: Let’s, let’s go back to what happened before she went there.  She was in Auschwitz, you said, for seven months?

GS: So, Mum was in Auschwitz from December 1943 to July 1944.

INT: And then in 1944, what happened?

GS: Well, in 1944, yet again, they were taken to ‘the sauna’, gas chambers…the gas chambers.

INT: That’s what they called it, the sauna?

GS: Yeah, the sauna, the gas chambers, stripped of everything and the SS women who were checking their tattoos, they secretly belonged to the Communist Party and they assured them that they would get through selection and not be gassed.  And they were correct. After the showers, the SS began the selection.  The able ones to one side, the children and the weak to the other.  And the able ones, like my mother, were given overalls; they were put on trains and sent to Germany as slave labourers.

INT: With her own mother still?

GS: Yes, yes, she was with her mum.  And there they were under the SS Neuengamme Concentration Camp…and they were in a work camp.

INT: What did she do there?

GS: They were in the water site…they were near Hamburg harbour.  They were to do any kind of labouring. They were digging trenches or the foundations for new housing.  That was in Neugraben near Hanover. They were digging the trenches for new houses and for air raid shelters.  And while they were doing that they were being bombed; the bombs were going on overhead.  And many were killed. It was a very, very difficult time, but when they were under the supervision of the SS Neuengamme concentration camp, they were in Neugraben work camp, where a few of the women were sent back to Auschwitz because they were pregnant, so they were sent to their death, basically.  And one girl managed to stay, because she worked in the SS office, and she gave birth to a healthy baby boy, who was instantly put to sleep by their Jewish doctor, Goldie, under SS orders.  And they were all, she said they were all, in shock and in mourning because that had to happen.  So, although they were not in Auschwitz still the horrors were taking place.

And I must tell you, though, a nice story. They were digging the foundations for the new houses there.  There was a young German mother befriended my mum and sometimes over the fence, she handed her a sandwich or an apple.  And as a thank you, my mum made a caricature of this actual woman, with her baby in the pram.  And gave it to her.  And many years later, a copy of this picture appeared after the war – it was in the local housing association.  It was in their twenty-fifth, their fortieth and their fiftieth anniversary magazine and somehow or other it got to my mum.  And that was actually later on.  It was known that this family that they had actually been good to the Jewish people.  It became important for them; it was verification that she’d been a nice lady and she’d helped.  That she wasn’t behaving like a Nazi.

INT: I see, but it means that the camp must have been in the town then, that people would have seen what was going on?

GS: This was in the area where they were digging the new foundations. It was a new housing area that they were developing.

INT: So people would have seen the condition of these workers?

GS: So they would see although they weren’t interested and they were all under Hitler. They did what they were told to do otherwise they themselves would be probably sent away.

INT: Yeah, and they probably were struggling to survive in their own way as well.

GS: Yes, they also had it difficult in certain ways.  So, they were there, but, once again art helped save my mum’s and my grandma’s life, because during that horrible winter, she was asked to paint the German headquarters where she got inside work, to paint the building. This saved her from the dreadful freezing winter and I suppose that helped save her in many ways.

INT: Strange, that this one talent kept her alive.

GS: Yes, art.  It certainly did and they were slave labourers till early April 1945, not long before the end of the war, where they were then sent to another horrific camp, the camp of Bergen-Belsen.

INT: And was she sent on one of these things they called a death march? Was she marched there?

GS: Yes, it was partly by train and partly by foot. And when they got to Bergen-Belsen concentration camp she said they were greeted with the sight of dead bodies, typhoid, lice, starvation. The whole camp was just horrendous. They were shocked to see the piles and piles of dead bodies that were everywhere.  The SS were already wearing their white armbands as a sign of surrender and they found a place in a wooden hut in which people were dead or dying all around her.  And in order to protect themselves they had to check their clothes every day to make sure that they were free of lice, as they were the carriers, she said, of disease.  The kitchens weren’t functioning anymore and they had to fend for themselves to get any scraps to eat. I think she dug potato and beetroot from the ground and I think she said that she shared a beetroot every day, with her mother. She shared a raw beetroot.

INT: She must’ve had a tremendous will to live.

GS: Yes, she went a bit crazy, she said, and she started to paint all the dead bodies and the dead all round her.  Between the beautiful birch trees, she painted a beautiful young red-headed girl. That’s one of her paintings.

She left her artwork for the Kelvingrove Art Gallery Museum in Glasgow because she felt that people should never forget. It should be a teaching point that many people should see. But because she’d had a good life in Glasgow, she wanted to give a little something back to Glasgow, to the City of Glasgow.

INT: And this girl in the picture, I assume, was dead?

GS: Yes, she was dead, but my mum saw the beauty in her, she caught her eye.  She said for days, the earth was just trembling, you know, you could hear, under Field Marshall   Montgomery the tanks arriving.  And he liberated Bergen-Belsen on the 15th of April 1945.  And I think I said earlier, how shocked the British army were.  They’d never seen such human misery in all their life.  And actually through their kindness of distributing their own rations, they didn’t realise at the time, it ended up that many people died as a result.  Because the food was far too rich. Many perished. They couldn’t digest the rich food that they gave them.  But of course nobody was wise at that time, to know that. They had such emaciated bodies and they were desperate to eat whatever they were given.  And sadly many died as a result of the food being far too rich at the time.

**Marianne Grant – Life After The War**

Geraldine explains why her mother and grandmother went to Sweden after the war. She describes their life there. She then explains the unusual way her mother met the young man, who became her husband.

INT: And then your mother, you told us this before, ended up in Sweden, with her mother?

GS: She did, she did.  My grandma, her mum, was pretty unwell at the time with typhoid and she was put in isolation in a hospital, that was created by the army and they were re-housed with other survivors in brick built barracks that were originally occupied by the Hungarian soldiers, because obviously the brick built were much warmer buildings.

INT: These were Hungarian soldiers who had helped the Nazis?

GS: Yeah, yeah and she was looked after by, I mentioned him earlier, an Irish volunteer doctor named Sean Stiles and he befriended my mum and my grandma and came for meals which my grandma cooked when she became better.  And he took my mum to a British headquarters’ party, where she was introduced to Field Marshall Montgomery, and she said that she declined the offer of a drink from him, but she had a dance with him and a very interesting talk. Because she was so fluent with her languages, she was so clever, she became an interpreter for the British Army.

And she said that the British Army had orders to burn the whole of Bergen-Belsen, as it was so infectious from so much disease. And we’ve got a painting that she did of the ceremony of burning of the last block in Bergen-Belsen.

And Doctor Stiles decided that my grandma was too undernourished to survive if she went back to Prague as the food on the continent was pretty scarce; that it would be much better for to go on a Red Cross boat from Hamburg to Sweden, which she did.  Even on that boat – I know that because we have one of her pictures in the book – my mum painted. There was a beautiful girl who was dying on the boat. It was a Jewish Dutch girl who was in the terminal stage of tuberculosis and it was she that my mum painted. The boat was filled, unfortunately, with very ill and weak people going for, hopefully, to recover, and a better, a better life.  Which certainly happened to my mum and my grandma.

INT: Go on.

GS:  And they arrived, and it was in Malmo, in the summer of 1945 with their very meagre possessions and they were disinfected with DDT, before they disembarked.  And it was the Jewish community that took an interest in them and some of them were invited to homes and they even put on a show for them, and they were taken from Malmo to a camp of wooden chalets to a forest near Gothenburg and my grandma was taken to a sanatorium and was nursed back to good health.

And my mum made friends with a shoe manufacturer, a gentleman called Herbert Schterner, who came with his eldest daughter to visit my mum. Her name was Mirre. And my mum and Mirre, they became lifelong friends.  She used to come and visit her at the refugee camp.

INT: It must have been such an up and down journey for your mother, from horrors to rescue.

GS: Yep, but you know, she pulled through.  Imagine, by November 1945 she made her first exhibition of her Bergen-Belsen drawings and watercolours and sold stuffed toys that she made.  And there were very good reviews about her in the Gothenburg newspapers and she also worked there, in the graphic studio and design.  Her mother later joined her in the camp when she was well and she got a job as a milliner in a large department store. And between them, they had enough money to keep themselves and eventually they settled properly in Gothenburg and moved to a lovely flat, just outside the city, where my mum established her own studio, designing hand-painted Christmas mats [for a large department store] and table decorations.  And she even managed to employ a few girls, eventually, and her mother, grandma, gave up work and looked after my mum. In those days, like a mother did.

INT: Yeah.

INT: And she was the breadwinner, your mum, so that’s why.

GS: Yes, she painted lovely things. Some of the mats are on display in the Kelvingrove Art Gallery.

When we were children, there was always this big trunk in our loft that we were not really allowed to touch. Inside it were some of the hand-painted mats that she made at the time in Sweden. They’re absolutely beautiful.  The way she cut them into beautiful shapes and yes, these were a few of her meagre, amazing possessions. And in Theresienstadt she left things with a friend, who managed to keep a few of her drawings from then and from Prague.  And she managed to get some of her things. She got them back.

INT: And she lost everything, I believe, from Auschwitz; none of that survived?

GS: Yes, from Auschwitz, no.  That’s why she did the frieze by memory.  Nothing survived.

And, there’s a happy ending, otherwise I wouldn’t be here telling the story.

INT: She met your father?

GS: She met my father. My mum made a good friend in Sweden. Her friend Margit. Her German born husband, Helmut, he died at a young age and they had a baby, a little son.  And she went to Glasgow to take her baby to visit the baby’s grandmother, who was a lady called Mrs Silverman who lived in Braemar Street, in Battlefield in Glasgow.  And when Margit was visiting her mother-in-law she met this German refugee, who lodged with Mrs Silverman and she gave him my mum’s address and they started to write to each other and the romance, began.  And he came to visit my mum in the summer of 1951 and then he went with her and my grandmother for a holiday in Gstadt on the coast.  And they got engaged. It all happened very quickly.

**Marianne Grant – Integration**

*Geraldine talks about life in Glasgow; growing up as a child of two survivors and about her mother’s role as a minister’s wife.*

GS: And in the autumn of 1951, my mum and my grandma came to Glasgow and they were married in London and their life began.

INT: And your father was a minister of the synagogue here?

GS: He was. My father became a reverend, a minister, and I think that was due to the fact my father, having left, in his teens, Germany, he’d left all his family behind.  The only person that knew him from his past was his teacher at Jewish school, who was a rabbi, Joseph Dunner, who was a very, very, religious, important gentleman who was now established in London, and I think, through his influence, he went to study and went down this road of becoming a minister.

INT: It must’ve been hard, after the experience of both your father and your mother to have a belief.

GS: That’s one of the things, actually, that I find very hard to believe. That, after all the atrocities that my mother endured; after the years of hardship and what she saw, how she had any faith left in her body, to give, I don’t know.  And Judaism was practised obviously in our home to quite a high degree, with my father being head of the synagogue.  Therefore, to this day, I find it quite unbelievable that she had all this belief.  That she had so much.  And she was wonderful. She very much, took the place of the minister’s wife, and did a lot of work in the community for many, many years. My father sadly died, quite a young man, after everything that he’d gone through.  He died, just aged sixty-five, which today is relatively young.  He sadly got ill and he was dead, two and a half weeks later.  He was just going to retire and I felt they were denied that time…time of peace and of tranquillity for them, with their family and they didn’t get this time.

And it was really only after my father’s death at the end of 1986, that my mum really started to tell her story.  It was only after then.  We were sheltered; they wanted to protect us.

Yes, with certain things- we couldn’t leave food on our plate, and certain things were different and I think we’re all a wee bit neurotic. And I’m affected with the fact that I can’t go near gas – gas cookers, gas flames, anything. The smell makes me want to retch.  Obviously as a child growing up I knew that my mother had been in the gas chambers several times, but I thought of it as the gas flames and I didn’t know it was Zyklon B powder until I was older.   And, I think that’s just left its mark on me. I think I was married quite a wee while, before I could even strike a match to light a candle.  And you know, in the Jewish religion we bring in the Sabbath when we light our Shabbat candles and I just found it very difficult.  It was a very difficult thing for me to do.

**Marianne Grant – Reflection On Life**

Finally Geraldine reflects on her parents’ lives and her own. She considers whether the world has learnt from the lessons of the Holocaust.

INT: It’s a hard thing to know your mother suffered.

GS: Very hard, but as children, we knew we weren’t allowed to leave anything on our plates; no food was to be wasted; nothing in our home could be wasted.  Every envelope was written on, even on the back. I’ve even actually got my ten-year-old birthday card somewhere here and inside it, if you open it up, my mum has used every bit of paper. I think she was getting new curtains made; she’s got the measurements written down, or for a shopping list.

Every newspaper that came into our home was re-used.  The paper was re-used, whether it be for lighting the fire or wrapping up her precious flower bulbs in the winter to protect them. No matter what, it was re-used, re-used, in every way possible.  Everything. We had a stool; I always remember in the kitchen we had a stool that had a shelf underneath it and all the papers would be kept.  If somebody wanted a paper from three weeks ago past Friday, I’ll say, we’ll have it.

But things were kept quite quiet in a sense, in my early years because my grandmother lived with us in our home as well for a number of years.  And it was very difficult.

My father had a very difficult background. He came from Germany, well from Konigsberg. It was East Prussia. He came about the age of seventeen. His parents managed to get a visa to Britain for him in 1938.  But his little brother and his parents didn’t make it out.  They were gassed. They were sent to the gas chambers as he later found out.  And imagine being a young teenager and you’re sent away, and you’re coming to somewhere you’ve never been and all on your own. It was too painful, I think, for my parents to discuss their past experiences really. In our early years, it was very difficult and also they spoke quite a lot of German in the house with my grandma and I was a bit embarrassed about that at the time.  German to me, in those days, when I grew up, I mean I’m talking about when I was more aware of it, in the late sixties, early seventies – it was such an ugly language and people didn’t really want to talk about the war  it was only later on in life in Britain it was much more acceptable

But you know now it’s all a lot easier, but I think that certain things are definitely passed from generation to generation, but sadly the world hasn’t learned…learned from the Holocaust. There’s been so many other horrendous goings on in the world, in Rwanda and the refugees. It’s just horrific. Nothing, nothing really has changed…sadly.

INT: Do you think, really as a last question, do you think that your mother remained optimistic about life; how was she in herself, after all these events that she lived through?

GS: She had a great sense of humour. She was a very stubborn lady. I said her stamina and her stubbornness kept her going.  And determined…she was determined.  Because later in life, she had very bad osteoporosis, but still, still insisted on walking to the synagogue on a Saturday.

She would see always the good.  You know she would always push, push, push, but she didn’t trust people.  A lot of times she would say to me the police can be crooked. It was a hard thing for her. How could she trust anybody?

When she arrived in Auschwitz, I know there was a young boy. When they were in Prague, before she was taken away they used to have to take in certain people to their homes for lunch.  That was one of the stipulations.  And there was a lovely boy, that used to go to her house.  And he was one of the boys that she first came across in Auschwitz and he whispered to her, ‘Have you any valuables? Have you got any valuables, Mousie? I’ll keep them for you safe’.  And he did keep his word. She gave him a few things and he did come and find her and he gave them back.  Which obviously probably helped in certain ways to save her and my grandma’s life as well.

However, his sister, he had a horrible sister, and this woman was now dressed, she said, in the heaviest warm coat and special leather boots and the best clothes in the midst of the darkness of Auschwitz.  And she ignored her; she turned her back on my mum because she was in charge.  She was one of these Jewish women that was whipping the Jews.  Jews whipped the Jews, you know, because she got extra…extra…

INT: Rations?

GS: Rations, only for herself. So I think that my mum couldn’t believe that somebody could become like that and I think my mother’s trust in people was sometimes a bit wary, a bit difficult.  Which is very understandable.

INT: It certainly is. Thank you for sharing your mother’s story with us this afternoon.

GS: Thank you.