**Rosa Sacharin – Life Before The War**

INT: Right. Good morning. This is Friday the 21st of September and I’m here to interview Rosa Sacharin. Rosa would you like to start off by telling me when you were born, where you were born and your name at birth?

RS: I was born in Berlin in Germany on the 23rd of March 1925.

INT: And were you an only child or did you have siblings?

RS: I was the youngest of three – my sister Betty was the oldest; my brother was the middle one and then I was… There was almost two years between us.

INT: And what was life like when you were a young child growing up in Berlin?

RS: Well I wouldn’t say that it was anything unusual, except the environment I lived in was a very Jewish one and a politically very active environment and even as a very small child I was very much aware of the problems at the time. People tend to think that Germany in the early periods was a democracy where people could virtually do what they wanted, but in fact it wasn’t. There was a constant struggle between the Communists and the National Socialists, already in the 20s so I was very much aware of the problems.

INT: In what way, sorry, were you aware?

RS: Sorry?

INT: In what way were you aware? Can you give me an example?

RS: Well because there were constant fights and also because my uncles, and in a way my father too, seemed to be very much involved with what was going on. We used to have police coming to the house looking for material or any adverse material against the government, so, I was very much aware of problems and difficulties. I also remember that there was a curfew imposed in our area because, primarily, because of all these fights, which were going on and we were not allowed to go out. Our windows had to be shut and I was a very young child at the time and I wanted to know what was going on because we had police standing on either side of our street, not just with revolvers, but with guns. So I opened the window and I heard this voice shouting ‘Shut that window or we will shoot!’ So my mother came running in and knew exactly who was responsible and quickly took me away and said ‘Do you want us all to be shot?’

But that is what I saw and I was about five years old. So I understood a lot of problems that actually emanated both from the political situation and the purely social and physical situation.

INT: And were your parents employed at that time? Were they in employment?

RS: My father by that time already had his own business; he had a small manufacturing business. He was a master tailor and he employed about twenty people in his works but also had home workers. And he was a staunch trade unionist and I remember when we visited him in his factory premises the first thing he insisted upon was that we went to each one of the workers and wished them a good day. My sister was OK; she did that but I wouldn’t do it. I thought this is stupid. I don’t go up to those people, make my curtsey and say ‘Good day’ and I think he found that very difficult. He didn’t know how to handle me and eventually… I really wanted to play.

INT: Of course

RS: I wasn’t interested in going up and saying hello to people. And then he said to me ‘Roselchen, do you see all these workers working very hard? It is because of them that you have bread on the table’. And in my little mind, I understood what he was saying. I looked round and I went to each one of them, made my curtsey and wished them a ‘good day’.

INT: And did he employ Jewish and non-Jewish workers? Did that enter into it?

RS: I think they were mainly non-Jewish workers. I couldn’t say for sure because I didn’t really know sufficiently about it but, I think they were mainly non-Jewish.

INT: And did you live in a Jewish area in Berlin?

RS: Yes we did.

INT: So would that be similar to other Jewish communities – that everybody knew what everybody else was up to?

RS: Not quite because it was a very large area.

INT: Right

RS: And it was a mixed area. I mean, although Jews lived there, there were lots of non-Jews there as well so it wasn’t a question of us being in either in excess and that the non-Jews were sort of subjugated. Nothing like that.

INT: No. And was it a traditional Jewish area?

RS: Oh yes.

INT: So….

RS: But I think there were variations there.

INT: Right.

RS: Certainly my family was Orthodox but my father was already moving away from it. But I had…my great-grandfather evidently was a Talmudist.

INT: Right. Would you like to explain what a Talmudist is?

RS: Pardon?

INT: A Talmudist is?

RS: A Talmudist is a man who is very knowledgeable in what the Talmud actually represented and what it said and people of course came to him for any questions to be solved. This is basically what Talmudists did. It’s not that they created something new but they had studied it and they knew it in depth.

INT: And they would be very respected as well.

RS: Oh very much so, yes.

INT: And so did you keep Shabbat?

RS: Oh yes, oh yes. We were an orthodox  home.

INT: So how did you leave Berlin?

RS: Pardon?

INT: How did you come to leave Berlin? Did you come over on the…?

RS: I think, the reason why I left… My father was arrested in 1935 and there was a big trial and there were about two hundred Jewish men who were arrested and put on trial and each one of these men had offended the Nuremberg Laws and each one of these men were imprisoned. So it meant that my own life, my own family, became very dislocated. But not only that, as part of the punishment was that they virtually deprived him of all his funds so we were really very poor at that time. While we were quite comfortable at this point, my mother was really left without any means. But eventually I was put into a home because the situation became so difficult and when the Kristallnacht occurred, my brother was arrested, so again there was another loss. I wasn’t at home at the time when that happened. I was safely tucked up in bed somewhere else and I also didn’t see any of the things which happened on that night. But we were told to go to school the next day because I think the adults just didn’t know what to do with us. They didn’t. They were so shocked at what had happened. So I went to school. It was a Jewish girls’ school and I already had experienced my father being arrested; the problems that we had following that, but many of the children in the school didn’t. To them that was the very first thing that they experienced and it was pandemonium in school. Some of these children were so hysterical, the teachers couldn’t cope, and we had a well in the school and some of the children wanted to throw themselves down and I think it was realised that it was safer for us just to go home. So we were just told to go. But in fact, before we left the school, we all were told, two children at a time, at two minute intervals so that there wasn’t a whole group of children going home and on no account to stop anywhere, but run home as quickly as possible. I stopped somewhere; I was very disobedient.

INT: I kind of thought that actually, Rosa.

RS: There was a little eh, paper shop there, and I hadn’t known what had happened and then I saw and read what had happened and I felt a man’s arm on my shoulder and he said, ‘This cannot last.’ But I was absolutely terrified. But he was ashamed. Actually, going to school that morning, I had never seen Berlin as quiet as it was then, before I realised what had happened. So I ran home quickly.

INT: And your mother then arranged for you to go?

RS: I was told about a week before I was due to go that I would be leaving to go to England and the day before I left I was told to go to school and tell the teacher I wouldn’t be back. So I did that and I said that I wouldn’t be back and the teacher said to me, ‘Why you?’ How can you answer a question like that? I was aware that everybody was desperate to get out but how can a child really answer a question like that?

INT: No.

RS: It’s only about three years ago that I learned something I didn’t know before and that was that a German woman wrote a book about the Kindertransport and in it she had said that when she had spoken to some of the older people, who were still alive, who had been involved with organising the transports, that she was told that people like myself were already on the list to be transported.

INT: Right.

RS: And that, I think, was one of the reasons that I was in the first transport.

INT: And what age were you then?

RS: I was thirteen then.

INT: Thirteen. And did your sister come over with you?

RS: No, no. No, I came on my own.

INT: Right.

RS: Yes.

INT: And how did you find the journey? One of the reasons I was going to ask was my mother-in-law, my late mother-in-law said that she, I think she was one year older and she was asked to put, she was asked if she would look after younger children which she said she wasn’t very happy to do because she felt she was a child herself.

RS: How old was she?

INT: I think she was fourteen.

RS: Just a year older than I. No we weren’t asked that. There were some adults there who looked after the little ones but our transport actually was quite different from any subsequent transports because I think all of the children on that transport had already been in danger of being transported somewhere else. So it was a different type of transport and also no… no parents were allowed to come to the railway station, which of course didn’t happen on any of the other transports and…But my mother being my mother, she would come. So she came and was told in no uncertain terms, ‘You have no right to be here’ and she told them a few… said to them that, ‘She’s got every right’. However, she was the only one who did that; nobody else came. And we were given our labels and just told to get onto the train.

INT: And am I right in saying that there is a very famous photograph with you appearing as one of the children coming off?

RS: Oh yes, yes. I think our transport again was quite different. When I listen to other people, listen to their stories; it’s…. it was nothing like that. As I said already, it was the first transport, it was not as well organised, and when we reached Holland, there was nothing really there. Oh there were one or two women there and they handed round some chocolates. I don’t remember eating any chocolates or anything like that. We had nothing to eat all day and when I listen or read all the stories, its totally different. But our transport was different and there was very little organised at that time. I knew that there were adults in the train because, just before we reached the Dutch border, we were told that the police would come and search our cases. We had tiny little cases; there was very little that I had in it and the others didn’t have any more and the adults said to us that, ‘On no account must any of you complain if anything is taken from you’ and that we must behave ourselves, which we did. So obviously the Customs people came and they looked at all our things. It was quite embarrassing actually.

INT: Absolutely.

RS: Because there were lots of, I mean we were young people and they picked up things and held them up. They were humiliating us and there was no need for that.

INT: No. No. Absolutely.

RS: And we were very quiet, very well behaved. We didn’t dare say anything. And then, just before we reached across the border, then people gave vent to their feelings and (not myself, I just sat quietly) but some of the boys and girls, they shouted and they spat on the railway lines. However, that’s what they did and then the train stopped and they gave us a little bit of food and then we went straight on to Hook of Holland and just told to get on to the ship and that was it.

**Rosa Sacharin – Immigration**

INT: And where did you arrive in England? Which port?

RS: We arrived in Harwich and were taken by bus when I came off the boat. Actually it was a dreadful journey; we were terribly seasick. Bells rung and nobody came. Really awful, however, we survived it. So when we arrived then, there were reporters there, ‘Smile’, and honestly I didn’t feel like smiling and I didn’t smile. Some of the others did, OK, but I didn’t feel like smiling and then we were taken by bus to a holiday camp – Dovercourt Bay Holiday Camp, and it was pandemonium there. To me, it seemed chaotic. It seemed nobody seemed to be in charge. You didn’t know what was going to happen to us. But, eventually we were put into chalets and some sort of order was created. We had morning lessons in English, in the morning, and during that time adults used to come around – it was like a cattle market – and looked at children. The little ones were picked up quickly, particularly if they were fair-haired and blue-eyed, but my age group was quite difficult. However, a man came to me during the lessons we were having. ‘Stand up little girl.’ I stood up. He looked me up and down and then said, ‘Are you Jewish?’ I said ‘Yes’ and he just said, ‘Sit down’. That was it. But it really was embarrassing and it was also very hurtful and you just felt, ‘Who are these people?’ How could they do that to children?

INT: Why did he ask if you were Jewish?

RS: Well he obviously wanted a non-Jewish child.

INT: But were all the children?

RS: Well, our group was, but subsequent groups there were some mixed children who had Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers and that also created some problems because some of these children objected to be classified as Jewish. They had always assumed that they were full Germans and therefore were not part of these inferior Jews. And the behaviour, was according to that… And eventually I suppose they were really separated.

INT: So, after the man said, ‘No’, what happened to you then?

RS: Well actually because they didn’t know what to do with us, I was asked if I wanted to go to Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, I think, and I said ‘No’. I was crying. I said, ‘I’m not going there!’ It’s not that I knew the countries. I knew where they were, but I couldn’t bear going on a ship again. It was really quite awful and I said ‘No’. So eventually thirteen of us were taken to Edinburgh.

INT: And when you talk about they?

RS: Sorry?

INT: When you talk about the people organising, do you know, was it a government group or was it a group of Jewish volunteers? Do you know who…?

RS: I’ll be quite honest. At that time, I didn’t know who they were. It’s only what I read later on or was told later on that I understood much more about the organisation.

INT: Right

RS: At that time I knew nothing.

INT: Right. So you arrived in Edinburgh.

RS: We arrived in Edinburgh, yes.

INT: And was it a hostel you were staying in?

RS: No. Thirteen of us were chosen. The Edinburgh Jewish Community had agreed to take thirteen children; various families agreed to take a child.

INT: Right.

RS: And they just chose. I take it they asked for the ages of the children because there weren’t any little ones. The photograph that I have I would say the youngest child was a boy of maybe about eight or nine and the rest of us were about my age and Rabbi Dr Daiches met us with another … committee people there, and the only thing that I remember about that episode was Edinburgh Castle was lit up.

INT: Oh beautiful.

RS: It was beautiful. It really was beautiful. And we were then just taken by car to the various families that asked to take us in.

INT: And so you were placed with a family?

RS: I was, yes, placed with a family.

INT: And did you then go to school in Edinburgh?

RS: Well actually it was quite a poor family, I would say.

INT: Right.

RS: And I shared a bed with two other people. They were very kind. They really were very kind but I was crying, I was very unhappy because this was something that I found difficult to take and eventually I slept on the couch in the living room. They didn’t [have all that many rooms]. It was a corporation flat that they had. They didn’t have. But they were very kind people.

INT: I think so.

RS: Yes

INT: To take you in when they had so little.

RS: Yes that’s right. But there was a pussycat there.

INT: Right.

RS: And the pussy shared the couch and the pussy had fleas so…

INT: Ah, so you got fleas, yes?

RS: So that created another problem for me. I didn’t know about fleas but it was very itchy.

INT: I bet.

RS: However, I was taken away from them and was taken to an elderly couple in Edinburgh and when the lady opened the door, I was introduced to her, and she looked at me and she said, ‘I really wanted an eighteen year old one but she’ll do’. And I became a domestic.

INT: Which is not really what was meant to happen, I wouldn’t have thought.

RS: Well, it wasn’t supposed to happen but it happened. So I became…Actually because I was still of school age, I had to attend school and there was another Austrian girl, and I attended this school in Edinburgh and I must say I have never, ever, seen such bad education in all my days.

INT: In what way?

RS: That wasn’t teaching.

INT: Right.

RS: The children were just bullied, just sat to be quiet. If they talked, they were strapped. And to me, this was unbelievable. And we were only there for three months, not even three months, and the teacher who taught German there was asked to give us something to do and he asked us to write an essay. So Herta was the other girl, she was the Austrian girl who was with me, and he said, ‘You can choose any subject you want’. And I, said Oh well I was very interested in Napoleon at the time.

INT: Right

RS: So I decided to write about Napoleon. But Herta said ‘I’m not going to do that, that’s rubbish’. And she wouldn’t do anything. So I wrote my essay and I felt it was wrong what she was doing so I wrote her essay as well.

INT: That was very good of you.

RS: But she got a better mark than I did!

INT: Very unfair. Hope she appreciated it. So you stayed with the family, and was this family who….

RS: Sorry?

INT: The family that you were living with at that time, were they members of the Jewish Community as well?

RS: Oh yes.

INT: Yet they still, they used you as a maid. How nice.

RS: Yes.

INT: And I’m saying that sarcastically as you know. And did they have children as well?

RS: They were all grown up.

INT: Right.

RS: They were all grown up. They were two elderly people. They had, I think there was a man from Lithuania and he had married a Scottish girl and they had a room there as well. It was one of these big terrace houses. It was a very big house.

INT: How did you deal with it?

RS: It was a very lonely time for me.

INT: I think so.

RS: It was extremely difficult and I didn’t meet any other refugees. I was very, very lonely and I started just to, I wrote a diary; it was the only way I could really…I’d nobody to speak to. They didn’t speak to me very much and I didn’t speak very much. I’m not a very easy person. I’m sure I wasn’t very easy at that time either. I’ll be honest.

INT: And did you know what had happened to the rest of your family? Were you able to keep in contact?

RS: Well at that time remember it was not wartime to begin with and in 1939, before the war, I received two letters from my mother. One letter she had received from the Gestapo. She was told she had to change her name. It was too German, and my mother wrote to me, ‘You now must change; write your name in a different way’, and I was terribly upset. And the next letter I got from her was a photocopy from the Gestapo – that unless she and my sister left Berlin within a fortnight they would be arrested. And I was in a terrible state, so I went to the lady of the house and I showed her that and I was crying and I said, ‘Do you know what’s going to happen to them?’

And she said ‘I can’t do anything. I’ve got you’

I said ‘I know you have. I’m not asking you. Who can I apply to? What can I do to help them?’ But interestingly enough on the 1st of September ’39 my sister arrived and she wasn’t all that well.

INT: No.

RS: But she managed to get out in the last airplane, which left Berlin. Maybe not the last one but it was an airplane. But my mother didn’t get out.

INT: Did you then live with your sister?

RS: No I was still under sixteen.

INT: Right.

RS: And my sister, when she arrived, and war broke out, she was sent to Peebles, no, Galashiels, and looked after evacuated nursery children, nursery schoolchildren.

INT: Right.

RS: She already had started training as a Kindergarten teacher, whatever it was. So she loved that work. So she had always worked with nursery schoolchildren and she stayed there until the area became a prohibited area and she…and then of course the evacuation stopped and the children went back home and she went to Glasgow. But I wasn’t allowed; I had to remain where I was.

INT: And when, how long did you live with this family in Edinburgh? Till what age?

RS: I stayed there until I was nearly sixteen.

INT: Right, and did you then decide that you wanted to go?

**Rosa Sacharin – Settling In**

RS: Well it was…. it wasn’t my own decision. My sister, who was in Glasgow, actually was working in a nursery school, which was run by the Church of Scotland and she, I think, told one of the ladies about me being in Edinburgh. I had a visit from… she was a minister’s wife, and she thought I should really come to Glasgow. And, you know, somehow, I don’t know how all the arrangements were made, but I certainly packed up my things. I left the family and I came to Glasgow and that was in March 1941.

INT: And did you live with the minister and his wife?

RS: Oh no, no.

INT: Right.

RS: I stayed… It was a peculiar situation because I had nowhere to stay. But there was one house in Hillhead Street which was a district nurses’ home and the lady who ran it, Miss Currie (she was a gem of a person) she took in refugees.

INT: Right

RS: Whenever she had any empty beds – ‘You can stay here’. So I stayed there and then I went to the Committee, to the Children’s Committee to report, and I was told I had no business to leave Edinburgh. After all, she said, ‘You have a bed to sleep in.’ And I said ‘I think I have paid back what I owed and I am entitled now to learn something so that I can earn my living.’ They were very angry with me and wouldn’t do anything for me. But I stayed in the hostel in Renfrew Street and that was not a particularly nice place. However, it was the minister’s wife who then took things upon herself and she thought I should really go back to school and initially I went to a primary school – a sixteen year old going to a primary school, but it was very useful. I learned the rudiments of English, Arithmetic, handling things.

INT: It gave you a good foundation.

RS: It gave me a good foundation. I was only there for a few months but it was… I learned something. And then she took me to the… in Pitt Street was the Commercial College.

INT: Oh right

RS: So she took me there and they wouldn’t have me because I had no secondary school education and she somehow arranged for me to be accepted into a secondary school and that was in Springburn.

RS: The Committee had said ‘Now we’ll give you six months and then you will just get out and work’. However, I went to school in Springburn and one day I was called to the headmaster and he said, he thought I would do, would be able to sit my Highers (mind you, I was only there for a few months) and he said, ‘You could sit your Highers’ and I said, ‘I’m sorry, I won’t be able to do that. The six months are up and I really have to leave.’

His wife was Baillie Roberts,

INT: Would you like to explain what the role of a Baillie is? What is a Baillie? What is the role of a Baillie?

RS: A Baillie was really a Councillor at the Corporation, as it existed in those days.

INT: Right.

RS: Well it was the Council, obviously. She was part of the Council of the City of Glasgow.

INT: So she would be quite powerful then?

RS: Sorry?

INT: She would be quite powerful?

RS: Oh very much so. I would imagine so yes. I mean she certainly arranged a meeting with the Lord Provost.

INT: Right

RS: And I was taken by the limousine to the City Chambers and taken to a room and had a lovely cup of tea there and the Lord Provost asked me what I would like to do and I said, ‘I would like to teach. I do know that it’s possibly, it’s not a possible thing to do for me, but that is really what I would like to do.’ And he then said to me. ‘My dear, just you continue with your education and don’t worry about a thing’.

INT: Excellent. However, we do know Rosa that you didn’t become a teacher.

RS: I did not become a teacher, not a schoolteacher.

INT: Why did you decide to go into nursing?

RS: When I finished school, I had to make a decision what I was going to do and the minister’s lady suggested I should go into nursing. There were three options: the ATS, munitions or nursing. And she actually said ‘You know, I think you should go into nursing.’

And she suggested that I should go to the Sick Children’s Hospital. I should make application there. I was not keen. I knew nothing about hospital life. I knew nothing about the role of nurses and I could not see myself as a nurse. However, I made my application hoping it would not be accepted, sent it in and was called for an interview. And Miss Clarkston, the Matron, very gracious, she said to me, ‘Is there any question you would like to ask me?’ and I said to her, ‘How long would I have to stay before I could leave?’

INT: That must have gone down very well!

RS: And she said to me ‘Miss Goldszal, if you don’t like us and we don’t like you, you can leave after three months.’ I said ‘Excellent’. So I was accepted and my whole attitude when I started nursing was really, I hated it. I think I had the totally wrong approach to things. I was also very terrified. Very early on you had one week in classroom to learn the rudiments, how to take pulses, temperatures and that was it.

And you then went into the wards and the first ward I went to was a surgical ward and the burns, the smell of burning skin, the crying of the children – I just couldn’t cope. I became quite friendly; there were only five of us who started actually the training, and I became friendly with a girl in our group, who also hated it and we fed on each other’s misery and after three months, we decided we would hand in our resignation. She wrote her letter; I wrote mine. She went in first and Miss Clarkston told her to go and pack her bag and go. When she came out she said that she was leaving. I said, ‘Well this is easy’ and I went into the room and Miss Clarkston asked me to sit down and she didn’t ask very much but she said to me, ‘I think we should send you to the country branch.’

I think she may have realised that I was stressed out by the acute areas that we were immediately sent into… But I also knew that I would have to go back to Yorkhill. So I was sent to Drumchapel, to the country branch, and while there, there was a senior nurse there. She was such a bubbly person. She was so full of life, so full of fun and the children loved her and she sort of drew me out of myself. I was never like that and I could not be like her – it’s impossible, that’s not my makeup. But I began to realise that I was wrong, that I really should make a go of it. After my… I was three months at Drumchapel, I went back to Yorkhill and just continued my training.

INT: Excellent, excellent. So you became a nurse?

RS: I became a nurse and actually it was very interesting. When I sat my first Finals (the sick children’s) and we had oral exams at that time (we don’t have that now) and after the orals the sister tutor said to me, ‘Oh, the examiners were so impressed with you.’ I thought that was really quite nice.

INT: I think it’s lovely actually; it’s important, I think, to receive praise.

RS: Yes.

INT: So you worked in…

RS: Well I finished. I wasn’t keen to go any further, to do my general training. I liked the sick children of course and I enjoyed working at Yorkhill. I learned a great deal. The training itself was good. Theoretically, I felt there was a lot left to be desired. During my training there I actually attended a course, not a course – this was a Conference on Psychology and I was asked if I would like to go and I went and it really was beyond me. My own educational level was relatively low. It was so high powered, I felt terribly frustrated but it also stimulated me, really, to improve my own education. I became a Staff Nurse in Yorkhill. I went to the Outpatient, West Graham Street. It was really very interesting there and after that I decided to do my General, and I went to Stobhill to do my General. I didn’t like Stobhill. I didn’t. I mean I did the training. I can’t say I enjoyed it but at the same time it was a worthwhile experience and after that I decided I would do my midwifery training and really enjoyed that.

INT: It’s a bit like a bug isn’t it. You know, once you catch that kind of learning aspect you want to continue.

RS: That’s right. I really felt I had to. I realised that with having only a Sick Children Certificate there were limitations to the amount of work I could get. If I had experience of other nursing plus midwifery, it was a much more complete picture.

INT: Absolutely.

RS: I could deal with so many different aspects of caring at the time.

INT: And did you mix with any of the Jewish community at that time or were you staying in nursing hostels?

RS: No, not at all. I had no contact with either refugees [or the community]. My sister, of course, at that time she was living; she was allowed to go and live in a flat, well, not a flat, one of the rooms…

INT: In the hostel?

RS: Bedrooms, that they could live in and she was living with another refugee girl, Jotta, and they were very good friends. But I felt out of it. I was never really part of that very close friendship that they had but Jotta became ill and she developed tuberculosis and, then other events came because my mother then came and things really began to change. But at any rate as far as my own training was concerned, I decided after I finished Midwifery training I would work as a midwife.

INT: Right

RS: And I went to Redlands Hospital for Women. Now it was not a training school and my attitude was that I was not interested in going to Rottenrow or a big training school. Once you finish training, you have to consolidate what you have learned and really become proficient and Redlands to me was ideal. They did everything. You had antenatal; you had the labour rooms; you had the mother-child relationship; you had the delivery of the baby; you worked in every area. And it was an excellent place to consolidate what I had learned and I became really, I was very fond of it, I enjoyed it. And in between, of course, my mother came, so in a way I would have to diverge because while I was doing midwifery work, I was then living with my mother.

INT: because that must have been very emotionally difficult.

RS: It was indeed, yes. My mother arrived. We heard that she was alive. I was still at Yorkhill while I received two letters and one letter was from an American soldier, another one from a British soldier, each telling me exactly the same – that my mother approached them at a synagogue service in Berlin and asked each one of them to contact me to tell me that she was alive.

INT: Which is wonderful.

RS: It was tremendous. And they said in the letter also, if you want to send any food to them they would make sure she would get it, so we did that. And then we had a letter from my mother to tell us that she was alive, obviously, and that she would not want to stay in Germany.

And we at the time were not sure what was happening to us because we were told that we were only allowed to stay here for the duration and then we would have to go back. And of course after the War when Germany was really virtually destroyed, there was a question in the House of Commons and Churchill was asked, ‘When are the refugees leaving the country?’ Because people didn’t want us to stay here; I mean there are a lot of issues and things I haven’t talked about, that’s one of the things. And Churchill said, ‘You cannot do that. There is nothing for them to go back to.’

Then we were told, if we wanted our mother to come, because they were not keen for any refugees to come, we would have to apply to the British Commandant to allow permission for my mother to leave Berlin. And we did that and then that was a whole lot of things. We had to promise to look after her, that she would not be a burden on the British Government.

INT: The state.

RS: That people did not require their funds. Both Betty and I were not earning very much; I was earning very little. I was still in training. Betty, already, was earning three pounds a week so that was always something and after the War we also had to get out of our digs because the men came back from the War and…

INT: They needed somewhere to stay.

RS: So Betty and I decided, Jotta at that time was in hospital, and Betty and I decided we would buy a flat. We hadn’t a penny to our name.

INT: I think that’s quite ambitious.

RS: Ambitious? It was absolutely idiotic! However, we went to a number of places, there was even a bungalow we looked at!

INT: Start at the top, I think.

RS: However, eventually…We had a very good lawyer, who was very good to us. Again he knew the minister’s wife who was very, very helpful to us and also the lawyer was very helpful to us. And there was this flat in Trefoil Avenue in Shawlands and we looked at that and it cost £750 We didn’t have a penny.

INT: No.

RS: So we said, ‘Well we must get it’. But we had to put down a deposit of £100.00, £150.00. We had no money so we went to the Board of Guardians, cheek of us, and asked for a loan and they wouldn’t give it to us and said, ‘There is no guarantee that you will pay it back to us. We can’t give you any money’. I could understand that. We were strangers. They really knew nothing about us. We had not a penny to our name and I could understand it. Eventually they said if you can get somebody to guarantee for you then we will give it to you and there was another refugee, a Mr Doktor. He was a marvellous person and he suggested going to Mrs Geneen.

INT: Ah!

RS: And Mrs Geneen said, ‘Yes I will guarantee for you’.

INT: She was a remarkable lady.

RS: A marvellous, she was such a good person and she eventually gave work to my mother. She was really a very kind person. So once we got that we bought the flat in Trefoil Avenue and paid back every month our mortgage. So we had our own flat but we didn’t have much furniture. We used orange boxes for bedside tables, things like that. It didn’t matter.

INT: I think to have your own place must have been wonderful.

RS: Absolutely, at least we had somewhere and we had somewhere where my mother could stay, because otherwise where would we put her? So she arrived in February 1947 and it was really quite emotional. The minister’s wife was with us at the station when she arrived at the station and she was the same bubbly, little mother that she always was, full of life, and the first thing she said to us – ‘I must help you. I must help you’. As if she felt guilty of what had happened, but really didn’t, needn’t…I mean she did a lot for us in her own way. And we took her up to the flat.

And one day we got a visit from one of… a lady (she also had been a refugee) telling my mother how much they did for me and I exploded and I said, ‘And what did you do for me?’ She was very upset and she walked out and my mother trying to calm me, and trying to calm the woman…But that’s how I felt. I mean as far as the Jewish Community was concerned, I got no help from them. And maybe…And just because, at least, they did give me some money so I could pay the hostel until I went into nursing, but it’s the attitude towards me at the time, where they were not willing to help me. I felt very upset.

INT: So your mother lived with you and did she learn English?

RS: My mother wasn’t allowed to work.

INT: Because of her status?

RS: My mother was desperate to work. She was desperate to help us as well and she was also very lonely in the flat when we were out. Betty was working; I was working and she was alone and couldn’t speak the language. Eventually she worked, although she wasn’t allowed to do it, with Jewish people who were selling second hand clothing and my mother helped with repairing the things. At least she was with people and they gave her a few pence and that was important. But psychologically, she was really suffering and at the time we knew a lady, Dr Winifred Rushforth. She was a psychologist, and she ran the clinic in Edinburgh, the Davidson Clinic, and it was actually that clinic that created the conference in psychology, which I had attended. And it was she who wrote a letter to the Labour Exchange at the time, and said unless my mother would work, then mentally she would deteriorate and then she was allowed to work. She got a work permit.

INT: So you worked in Redlands and after Redlands you…is that when..?

RS: Well I worked in Redlands and then there was an advert that they were looking for midwives in Israel and I thought to myself, well, that’s really where I should be. I should help there. So I applied and eventually went to Israel. I took Hebrew lessons before. I already had rudiments of Hebrew but not the modern. It was Modern Hebrew that we were taught in Berlin, but I’d forgotten a great deal. But there was an Israeli student and he taught me and helped me so that when I reached Israel, I could communicate with people. To me that was important.

INT: Absolutely. And you left your mother and sister?

RS: My mother by that time was well established. She was working. She was satisfied; she had Betty around her and she didn’t stop me. ‘If that’s what you want then that’s it.’ So I went to Israel.

INT: Which must have been…Well it was quite different in that time, I think.

RS: Oh absolutely. I went there in 1952. In fact the plane I was on, it was delayed because Chaim Weizmann had died and they were waiting for his son from America and he was catching the same plane to come for the funeral of Chaim Weizmann. So that’s the plane I was on. And I actually was supposed to work as a midwife in Israel and when I arrived in Lod Airport, I had actually been given some car parts. Henry my brother-in-law’s cousin was in Israel and they had asked us for some car parts that you couldn’t get in Israel.

INT: Car parts?

RS: Car parts.

INT: Oh right OK.

RS: And so I took them with me. I was met by a lady from the Israeli Health Department and when Asher came (who was the husband of Henry’s cousin) he said ‘And where are you taking her?’ and she said ‘To Tiberias.’

‘No you can’t do that; she needs to be acclimatised first.’ – It can only happen in Israel.

INT: Absolutely, everyone has an opinion.

RS: So I was allowed to stay in Tel Aviv to get acclimatised but eventually actually worked in Sarafan Hospital and when I arrived there I said I wanted to work as a midwife – ‘We don’t need midwives’ She looked at my certificate and said ‘We need somebody like you for the children’s wards’.

So I said ‘I don’t mind where I work, if that’s where you want me to work I’ll work there’

And that’s what I did and eventually had two wards. There were one hundred children but it was a very, very interesting, very difficult time, but very interesting time. It was still a time when there were so many survivors coming in. Israel was in turmoil, it was just trying, it had just fought a war. They had tremendous difficulties, they couldn’t pay us and we just had tokens so we could have dinner or meals in the hospital. But there was a camaraderie there, which perhaps isn’t quite the same today as it was then.

And it was a tremendous education. It was really quite tremendous. And I remember I had one of the nurses, she was not a trained nurse, had been in a concentration camp and Chaya just walked round the ward singing all the time and some of the young nurses were saying ‘You know, she’s not really pulling her weight’, complaining to me, so I said ‘Well how can I help Chaya’ So I spoke to her, I said ‘Let’s have a wee chat. How can I help you to make life easier for you? What is the particular problem?’

And she said ‘We have so many babies on drips’ (Some of these babies were extremely dehydrated) and she said ‘If these drips stop and the babies die, I couldn’t stand it’. So I said ‘Look I do look after these things, I’m sure, I’ll make sure that the drips are running, that there is no swelling of tissue. But if it’s easier for you why not take a chair, take a baby who needs to be fed and you can still watch the drips.’ And she did that and that seemed to calm her a little bit. There was another one who was just walking around like a zombie. I mean the people were really in a terrible state some of them. The mental hospitals in Israel at the time were full of people like that.

INT: They would be.

RS: But they were trying to give work to as many people as possible and then of course there were people coming in from the Yemen, from Morocco and the area that the hospital was in, in fact had a lot of Yemenites and a lot of Moroccans. And it was, it was fascinating actually to watch how people were actually absorbed and how they themselves contributed in their own way.

INT: So why did you decide to leave Israel because it sounded a very exciting time?

RS: Yes I was asked to become, to take charge of the maternity hospital in Tiberias and I was quite interested in that and then I heard from my sister that she was expecting a baby and was due any time, that her husband was mentally unwell. He was actually admitted to Crichton Royal. And my mother had difficulty walking due to the problems that she developed during the war and I felt that I had a responsibility towards them. I couldn’t leave it all to my sister, that was wrong, so I went back.

INT: So you came back to Glasgow and did you go back into midwifery?

RS: No I went back into Sick Children’s.

INT: Right

RS: And became a Ward Sister at Yorkhill and decided that it was really time I moved up the ladder, (I was very keen on teaching) that I wanted to do the tutor’s course.

INT: Right

RS: I went into the classroom (and I did some teaching before the course. There is an episode there which wasn’t successful as far as I was concerned). However while I was there I realised I always had the feeling that the theoretical part of the training, of any nursing training, was really very badly thought through and particularly the sick children’s ones. It was based on the general nursing and there was no attempt made really to look at the variations, the differences between the child and the adult. And there were no books available on the management of procedures pertaining to nursing children so I decided I would write a book. That was the first book I wrote and Miss Clarkston was very encouraging. So I wrote the first and the second edition but I still felt that my own knowledge was actually so limited that I could not write a book which really encompassed not only basic nursing but looked at anatomy, physiology, psychology and all different aspects which should really be included in a course of that kind. But that had to wait until I married.

INT: So tell me how you met Joe?

RS: One day, oh yes, during, while I was doing midwifery I had delivered Mary…

INT: Mary Finkel

RS: Mary Finkel’s daughter. She had been at Redlands and I delivered her baby so she knew of me. Joe evidently was without a girlfriend, so I’m told, and my sister said we were invited out to Mary Finkel’s. I said ‘What for?’

‘Well it’s quite nice to meet other people’ says she. And Mendel [Plotkin] was going to take us because we didn’t have a car.

INT: And Mendel was Mary’s brother

RS: Correct, that’s right. So Mendel took me and Betty to Mary Finkel’s and when we arrived at Finkel’ s there were other women there; two other women and a man and I hadn’t a clue who they were. And we had our meal, we talked and once we finished and we were going home Mendel said to me ‘I’m not taking you home. Joe can take you home.’ I said ‘Why should you not take me home?’

‘I’m not taking you home. Joe has to take you home.’

So Joe went into his car, I had no idea who he really was. I was very naïve let me tell you.

INT: Absolutely

RS: And when Joe took his sisters (I didn’t know they were his sisters) home then took me home and then he said to me ‘Can I see you again?’

I said ‘What for?’

He said ‘I’m interested in you’

I said ‘But you’re married’

He said ‘I’m not married.’

I said ‘Well who were these others?’

‘They were my sisters’

INT: And how many years have you and Joe been married?

RS: Well it was a very, very short…During that time he was away doing tropical trials.

INT: Right

RS: So I didn’t see much of him. I said, Ach well there’s nothing more coming off, that’s it, forgot all about it. And then he came back and then he wanted to continue, which we did. So that year we actually got married.

INT: Right, and you’ve been married how long?

RS: Fifty-two years.

INT: Which is, these days, I have to say Rosa, remarkable; just wonderful. And you have had two daughters.

RS: Yes. But actually all I can say – I couldn’t have married a better person. Not only did he bully me into improving my education, I have rarely met anybody like it. I mean I have these two children, I went to evening classes, went to Glasgow University, extra mural classes, that, it was quite tremendous. And then Joe became a Counsellor at the Open University and he said to me ‘Why don’t you join the Open University?’

I said ‘No way, couldn’t do that’

‘Of course’ he said ‘You could’.

So he bullied me into it.

INT: And one of the things I have to say Rosa, is that your book is still in Glasgow Caledonian University.

RS: Yes. I think actually it is one of the best things I’ve done. When I look at nurses’ books, nowadays, I don’t find them very informative but that book which I then, I had the first and second edition and it was also translated into Spanish and Indonesian, Bahasa, I mean I thought these were really good books. It covered embryology, it covered anatomy, physiology, it covered psychology and it covered disease processes and nursing management of children.

INT: Which is very important, very important.

RS: And to my mind there isn’t a book like it. I’m not being facetious about it.

INT: No, no.

RS: I really mean that.

INT: No I know what you mean. There are but they’re all in different books.

RS: Absolutely.

**Rosa Sacharin – Reflection On Life**

INT: So one of the questions, which we always finish with is highlights. When you look back and reflect back on your life, what would you say are the major highlights?

RS: There are so many actually. I don’t think I could say there is one particular thing that influenced me. My parents who influenced me, and particularly, I think, my father at one point; when I think of the people who looked after me when things really just collapsed, the love that I got from them. These were tremendous, in Germany, these were tremendous people and the help I got when I came, eventually came to Glasgow, all the help that I got. And I cannot say there is a single episode that is of greater importance than another; it’s the sum total of it; and not to forget my husband.

INT: Absolutely, I think Joe has been a wonderful partner, a wonderful supportive partner for you Rosa. One thing that we just want to finish with which was a major input from you was the founding of SAROK.

RS: I didn’t found SAROK. in fact it was Dorrit.

INT: Dorrit.

RS: Who founded SAROK. But I helped Dorrit a great deal. I realised early on that Dorrit had problems and Dorrit came… Well actually she went to the Wuga’s first and spent some time with them and the Wuga’s phoned me and said would you have a word with Dorrit, she seems a little bit…finding things difficult. And yes Dorrit came to me and I soon realised what was really the problem and I said ‘Well Dorrit I think I’ll help you with as much as possible. I’ll do X,Y,Z’ ‘Oh good’ She said, so she handed everything to me.

INT: But SAROK played a huge part I think in bringing a lot of people together.

RS: Sorry?

INT: SAROK, the organisation

RS: Yes

INT: Played a…

RS: I think yes, I think, well when I took over of course things changed from the sort of kitchen cabinet thing. I made it much more organised. I also wrote the newsletter which Dorrit, which was a very chatty thing with Dorrit, which is not the way I do things. So I changed things and I also… There were a number of problems actually because we were not a cohesive group as such, we were not all Jewish and the programmes we made had to cater for different groups and when people who survived concentration camps came they also had to be accommodated. We had to satisfy their needs too and then some of the younger people came. It was actually not an easy group as far as I could see it because I was determined that there was a Jewish element there, mainly Jewish element there, which Dorrit of course could not understand anymore and perhaps some of the others objected to it. But I did try to keep us together.

INT: I think I should finish by saying I know we didn’t cover everything because it’s impossible to cover everyone’s life in a short time.

RS: You can’t no.

INT: But I thought it was extremely interesting and a privilege to interview you Rosa and I hope that you’ve found it of interest as well?

RS: Actually I did. And thank you for asking the questions the way you did them. Thank you.

INT: Thank you

RS: Thank you