**Saskia Tepe – Life Before The War**

Learn about the experiences of Saskia Tepe’s mother, Brigitte Langer, who suffered the tribulations of war and its aftermath three times. Once under the Nazis as a Mischling, then under the Czechs as a Sudeten German, and finally as a refugee in a DP Camp in Germany. The aftermath of the war also affected the second generation too as Saskia explains in the interview.

INT: Today is Saturday the 7th of June and we are here to interview Saskia Tepe. Saskia would you like to begin and tell us a little about your mother’s story?

ST: I’ll start first of all her name is Brigitte Langer and she was born in 1915 in Jagerndorf which is, which was then, part of the Austrian empire. Three years later, [at the end of] World War One, the land was all divvied up and I have to explain the history to you to give an understanding of what happened leading up to the war. The Czechs were given the rights to the lands that she lived in, even though they were Czech speaking and the majority of the people in the area where she lived were German speaking. And this caused a lot of aggravation, probably because of The Depression and inflation and all the terrible things that happened after the First World War. So the seeds of unrest that were sewn as a result of all this kept going and eventually a leader called Heinlein, who embraced the Nazi ideology, went to Hitler in the’30s and asked for help and this gave Hitler the excuse to invade, to try to invade Czechoslovakia because he was taking back these Sudeten German lands. The Sudeten Germans self styled themselves that.

INT: I believe they weren’t called that before Hitler came to power.

ST: No. I think there was sort of 4 areas that wanted their own independence, and they had four different names, one was Bohemia, Silesia and so on and eventually just called themselves the Sudetenland. And you will all have heard the story of Chamberlain coming back with his piece of paper because he’d sold Czechoslovakia down the river, giving Sudetenland to Hitler. So my mother was brought up by a Sudeten, lets call him Sudeten German, father and a mother who was originally of Jewish background. So my mother’s grandmother was Jewish and her mother, Paula Lamb, was christened into the Catholic faith, which I think was fairly common when people married into a different religion. So when Paula married her father Rudolph Langer she changed faith and became a Catholic and my mother was brought up a Catholic. In October 1938 when the Nazis came into the area where she lived I don’t think it affected her greatly in that she had a German father who looked out for her and so on. He was a customs official and I think sort of middle class, they seemed quite ‘well to do’. The only blot on my mum’s landscape I think was the fact that her mum died when she was 3 in 1918 as a result of the Spanish flu epidemic which killed millions worldwide. So her father remarried and she had another Sudeten German stepmother called Hedwig and they didn’t get on very well, so when she was 16 she took the opportunity to train in the ‘looking after of children’, as it says on her C.V. For six months she went to a school and then she ended up working with a family in Hungary for a few years and at that point I think she also went to Vienna with the family, so I think she thought she had moved on and left things behind. But in 193…8, it must have been just before the Nazis came in, her father had a stroke and she was called home to help look after him. So she ended up being where…

INT: She started

ST: Where, you know, the worst possible place to be at that time. Now, I can see through the papers that I’ve found that she spent a lot of years looking for background information as to how much of a Jew she was. The Nazis had introduced with the Nuremberg laws in 1935 I think it was. Some sort of pseudo scientific methodology to decide how much of a Jew you are in blood. And it depended on how many…

INT: What was it they called this? They had a special name didn’t they? For such people. Is it mischling?

ST: Mischling. Mischlings; the word means mongrel.

INT: Oh I didn’t know that.

ST: So basically you are mixed race. And of course it was very important. I think that’s something we are not aware of either is that because of Darwinism and the origination of the species and the idea that people were of different grades of intelligence and so on was very important in those days. Nowadays we think this is lunacy but then it was, you know, figuring out what your bloodline was was, I suppose, an everyday kind of thing.

INT: They believed that there was such a racial difference didn’t they?

ST: Yes.

**Saskia Tepe – Life During The War**

INT: I was just going to ask which town was she living in when she came back? Was it the same town?

ST: Yes. It was a little town outside of Jagerndorf.

INT: Right.

ST: And I’ve forgotten it…it’s Lobenstein, Lobenstein. So I’m not sure. I’m assuming that the Gestapo made some kind of base, probably in Jagerndorf which is a bigger city and looking at the dates of the papers that I found she probably did this research over several years and possibly because the fact that her father was Sudeten German they wouldn’t want to make too much…what’s the phrase? Make things uncomfortable for Germans because they wanted their loyalty. So the Jewish question never really arose that much but,she was obviously having to find out and prove what her background was. And they divided it up by how many grandparents you had that were of Jewish origin. So if you had four grandparents you were obviously a full Jew and if you had two Jewish grandparents you were a half Jew. And I think I might be getting my facts possibly mixed up here but anyway it turned out that as far as the Nazis were concerned my mother was a mischling of the first degree. And they seemingly had certificates that they gave to you with what degree of a Jew you were that you had to carry round with you, with your papers, so that if they stopped you on the street they could tell. The Star of David didn’t appear as an identifying badge, if you like, until about 1941 in Germany? I’m not sure.

INT: Yes I think it was quite late in Germany.

ST: Yes. So, I think she was reasonably safe until her father died in 1943 and then from what she told me it sounds as though there was a period of slave labour where she went to different factories and worked. She told me she had worked in a factory that made gas masks for instance but she told me she was also a book-keeper and she had worked for a time in an office in a place called Katscher, which is not… maybe about 15 miles from Auschwitz. I should also have said that Lobenstein is probably only about 50 miles. It’s on the Polish border, just on the Czech side, and obviously the fact that her father was a customs official tells you that it was right on the Polish border. And she moved into various locations. I found a CV when she was emigrating to the UK that tells me of all these places that she worked and I suspect that it was in the sort of greater area of the Auschwitz camp, which I think they are now discovering was a much larger place than just a death camp.

INT: It was a hub for many work camps.

ST: Yes. So she knew the area reasonably well. Part of her job was to take pay, I don’t know who she paid, but anyway she’d take pay on the trains so she knew the rail tracks pretty well. Another story that she told me when she was in one of these places was that they obviously lived in the facility, and I think I hadn’t really imagined what it could be like until I saw the film Schindler’s List and thought ‘ah, this is probably what it was like for her’, they would have probably had bunks to share. And she shared with this girl, I don’t remember the name, but her job was to clean the latrines.

INT: Oh dear

ST: My mother had it cushy, she was in an office job, and this girl hung herself.

INT: Sometime after the First World War I think they started calling themselves the Sudeten Germans. Tell us more about your mothers experience then as a slave labourer? Do you know more?

ST: Only that…you have to remember that…I don’t think I’ve actually told you this. My mum told me this story when I was 13 so asking the right questions was not something that was going to happen, it was just a case of listening and she was in quite a state so I just let her talk. It was not a subject that was raised very much afterwards as I knew it was painful for her. So she worked in the slave labour capacity and then she said that she was put on the train to Auschwitz. Now I always thought that this story was a bit fantastical but she said that because she knew the track that the train was going to take, and it was in the middle of winter, she knew where the biggest snow drifts where going to be, and she jumped off the train into a snow drift. And I always imagined… well, how can that possibly be? All the pictures I’d seen of the carriages were that they were fully enclosed but I have found on the web that in that area and towards the end of the war they used any kind of trucks that they could possibly get to shift people. So her story was true. And then she said that she had to look out for herself. No papers- what to do? So she said the safest thing that she could think of was to nurse the wounded solders because nobody was going to ask a nurse for her papers and she stole a nurse’s uniform. I have no idea how she could have managed to do that but she did say that people were very kind. My mother never ever said anything untoward about the German people. She just said it was war, people took a stand, there was good and there was bad but there was no way that she was going to castigate the whole of a nation. So she stole a nurse’s uniform and she jumped on a train and nursed wounded soldiers coming back from the eastern front and ended up in Dresden, jumped off the train, and got in tow with a girl who was carrying food in a suitcase heading in the same kind of direction as a distant cousin that she had, who lived in Marienburg. So they followed the river, set off in the afternoon and they went fairly far out of town and decided to spend the night in a barn and were woken with the dropping of bombs. I’m assuming she thinks that that was the night of the bombing of Dresden, now.

INT: My goodness, when so many people died.

ST: Yes when so many people died. And she said that, her attitude to religion was kind of strange, but she said if there was ever a god he spoke to her that afternoon because she had a very strange feeling that she had to get out of that train station, which is why she decided to walk rather than wait for a train. After surviving that particular episode she was recaptured and went to another factory but this was very close to the end of the war, the soldiers weren’t watching, lets put it that way, they were probably watching after their own backs on how they were going to escape; the Russians were coming, the Americans were coming. So they managed to steal a truck, she and some other labourers, managed to steal a truck, and headed south because nobody wanted to be in the road of the Russians, they all wanted to get to the American sector. And then she told me that she was repatriated once things had settled down a little bit and she went back to her home, although by this time her home would have been just her step mother, and her step mother, she said, didn’t want her.

INT: That must have been terrible for her.

**Saskia Tepe – Immigration**

ST: So, I don’t know how it happened, but she ended up in a camp and I didn’t really understand this camp that she was in until after she died and I started doing some research. But basically what happened is after the war ended the Czechs took retribution, if you like, on the Sudeten Germans for having put them into the position that they’d been in and there was a lot of killing and raping and horrible activity kind of similar to the things that the Nazis did. So capability is everywhere isn’t it for horrible actions? And she ended up in a camp that was set up. It was probably a prisoner of war camp that was made into a camp for Sudeten Germans, a holding camp while they tried to organize with, I think, the Americans or the Russians to get the Sudeten Germans out of Czechoslovakia. They wanted rid of, it wasn’t genocide but they didn’t want the Germans in Czechoslovakia. And I think over a period of a year or two there were thousands of people transported out of Czechoslovakia. She, however, stayed in this camp until 1947.

INT: Oh dear

ST: And I did once ask her how she managed to get over to the American side then, because in 1947 the Russians had pretty much taken over Czechoslovakia, and she said she paid a black marketeer to get her over the border. She was very thin, she had lost, with gum disease she’d lost half the teeth on one side of her mouth and she was in hospital. They took her to Nuremberg and she was hospitalized for a few months until she became well. And then there must have been monies paid to people who had suffered because she was given money and she decided she would go to school. So she went to Hochschule in Nuremberg to study economics but unfortunately the money ran out before she was able to finish. And then there is sort of a gap in the story because I didn’t ask the right questions, I wasn’t interested, or I felt possibly things were… I didn’t want to bring that kind of story up too often. I was born in [Furth] Germany in 1954. The refugee camp, the Valka camp in Langwasser [a suburb of Nuremberg] is where we lived and from my memories that’s where I was born. Again, a story that my mother told me much later was that the man that I thought was my father was actually my stepfather. I should have clicked because I went to their wedding. There’s pictures of me in the church wedding. When you’re a child these things don’t count for anything do they? So actually I was born to an unknown father and I’ve spent a lot of my life looking for him but that’s another story. She had to put me into an orphanage when I was born. The story that she told me was that there wasn’t a lot of hope for people that were left behind in these camps. If you were in a family and you were capable of work, you were healthy, the chances of emigration were good but nobody wanted single men or single women who were sick and they certainly didn’t want single mothers because morality in those days was totally different to what it is now and she had to put me into an orphanage. She said that my father, she had met my father and he was Czech, from the area where she came from, and it was a love match but he already had his papers to emigrate to the States and although she had tried to emigrate they discovered she had TB and therefore instead of going to the States she ended up in a sanatorium. And it was in the sanatorium that she discovered that she was pregnant, 4 months pregnant before she knew because that’s one of the side effects of malnutrition is that your periods just go haywire. So I was born a big strong baby and put into an orphanage because she couldn’t afford to look after me, obviously still being in this sanatorium. And eventually… Well, she said that she kept writing to Karl, his name was, in the States and the plan was that when she was better she would apply but they weren’t married so I don’t think it was ever going to happen. I think after a year she realized that this dream was not going to come true. When I was three, she told me, she called it a marriage of convenience, she married a Polish chap who lived in the camp who agreed that he would give me a name, I would be able to come out of the orphanage, and as a family we would have a better chance of emigration. So this was in 1956, 11 years after the war there were still people in camps all over Germany. Langwasser was a big one. In fact it became quite famous for a while because they called it a model DP, displaced persons camp, and there was a film made about it and they showed this film in Germany recently, see what you can find when you trawl the internet! And I saw the film, you could view it on YouTube and the church, you know, where I made my first communion, the wooden church that my parents are standing in front of with me beside them at their church wedding. It’s all there on film, it’s quite amazing. Some of the people that are in the film also, children of people that had lived in this camp were saying that they had a long and difficult life voyage, if you like, coming to terms with living in this camp for so long. It was like there was no hope. So many years after the war they were still displaced, there was no home that they could go back to because of the way the countries were carved up after the war and even if they could get back what was the guarantee that the house was still standing or that somebody else wasn’t living in it. So I lived in the camp and we managed to eventually emigrate to the UK in 1961.

INT: And all that time you were still in the camp?

ST: Yes.

INT: My goodness.

ST: So I was 7 when we finally emigrated to the UK. And the reason that we managed to emigrate to the UK… I think my parents had tried for New Zealand and for Canada and so on and been rejected; my stepfather had also had a history of TB so the odds made it very difficult for them, the fact that he couldn’t work, be productive. In 1959 the United Nations launched world refugee year and I think it was actually inaugurated by…the British kind of pushed for it to try to finally clear these camps in Germany and other places. I mean there was Greece, Italy, there were camps all over the place. Just displaced people as a result of the war. And they encouraged communities within England, presumably Scotland as well, to sponsor families. The British Council for Aid to Refugees kind of grew out of that, and they were the ones that helped us with, you know, brought us over here. And our family, if you like, our family unit was sponsored by the Hertfordshire Teachers Association. And they found us and rented, and furnished, a house, a little terraced house in Hitchin in Hertfordshire and that’s where we settled after about three months when we flew here in 1961. I still have the airplane tickets.

INT: That was the first time you had been on a plane, I would imagine? So do you remember what that was like?

ST: I was absolutely enthralled by it, my mother wasn’t because I remember there was a big dip, you know sometimes you get that, and she screamed, her stomach was obviously left behind and she screamed and I thought “Oh mum, what’s wrong?” I thought it was fantastic. We flew into Heathrow. Yes I think it was quite unusual in 1961 for anyone to fly, it wasn’t as common as it is nowadays.

INT: I was going to ask, were you able to bring much with you? Or were you restricted to how much you could bring?

INT: Did you have much to bring?

ST: We had. When I was in the camp my mother managed, there must have been some, again I don’t know how that worked, that there was government money for people that lived in these camps somehow but there was certainly over the…I can see from the photographs at Christmas that the furniture changed and we had lovely bedroom furniture and new curtains and so on. But we left the furniture behind and the thing that I remember that my mother brought with us was her feather bed, which was a duvet basically but its different to the duvets you get over here, this wonderful feather bed, and the other thing that she brought with her was a coat, a camel coat, which was fur lined because it kept you warmer on the inside than it did on the outside. That was her theory anyway.

INT: Saskia, can you tell us a little about what life was like in one of these DP camps?

ST: Yes. I have a memory of the wooden huts, but they were razed to the ground and I’ve got pictures of what they were like, just long rows of barracks. Essentially this camp had been a prisoner of war camp initially used by the Nazis but in, I think it was ’57, they started rebuilding because they obviously realized people were going to be there for a while. And it was single story; long rows of buildings; and families were allotted rooms by size. There was sort of a central doorway with a toilet and then four rooms leading off that, and as a married couple with child we had a kitchen and a bedroom. And in the other two rooms were two single gentlemen. This camp had been set up originally after the war for Latvian origin people who had been displaced, so it was originally a sort of displaced camp and then it became a refugee camp after the Russians, you know, closed the borders, and people were escaping. So the people that came in were not always affected because of the Nazi system, it was also the Communist system and so on. My mum because of where she lived in Czechoslovakia could speak Czech, she could speak Polish and German obviously, working in Hungary she could speak Hungarian, and she also knew some Russian which I think she might have picked up during those Freiwaldau years. So she was able to talk with a lot of the people in the camp. As a child, I think, it doesn’t matter what language you speak. You can play with children whether you speak the same language or not. I remember it was a very gregarious place, I remember people sitting gossiping on the steps, I think it had a nice atmosphere.

INT: What language did you speak at home?

ST: German.

INT: German.

ST: My stepfather spoke Polish to my mum but somehow I never picked it up. But that was probably because I spent a lot of time not actually living there. Because of TB in the camps the Red Cross and the Catholic Church were very aware that children were at risk and there was a lot of programs to foster out the children, send them to the mountains for better air and better food and so on. And although I came out of the, which I didn’t know at the time obviously, the orphanage, when I was 3 I can tell from my Kinder Passport that, 6 months into my third year, I was sent to Switzerland to be fostered for 6 months and I do have memories and I have photos of that. In a farm playing with the children, gathering the hay, it was, you know, lovely. I was only 3 and a half, I’ve got a picture of me sitting on a horse, and in a pig pen not looking very happy but it obviously did me the world of good because my mum said when I came back I was chubby and I was brown and I just looked wonderful. And then 6 months later I think my father went through another bout of TB, I remember seeing him off at the railway station to go off to a sanatorium, and my mother always tells a very funny story of what happened when we were at this train station. There were a lot of G.I s in Nuremberg and I had just finished waving goodbye to my stepfather on the train and off the next train came a whole load of G.I’s including one large coloured gentlemen who I was absolutely fascinated by seemingly. And he bent down and spoke to me and obviously I didn’t understand a word but I just had to touch his hair, and I am sorry if that sounds racist but my mother thought that was a wonderful story and she told that to everybody. So the next trip was to Belgium and I was fostered to a couple who lived on the Schelde, maybe about half an hour’s drive south of Antwerp. And they were unable to have children. She had a hole in the heart and she was desperate to look after some, she was very happy to share her house with a child needing help I suppose.

INT: I was going to ask you, how did they find these foster parents? You are seeming to go very long distances away from Nuremberg.

ST: I think it was the Catholic Church.

INT: Right

ST: And the Red Cross. Between the two of them they seemed to organize these things. And certainly this lady who looked after me who had a hole in her heart was, when she had difficult periods when she was ill, the catholic nuns that lived across the road came and looked after her. So the church was very much a factor in this. And I went back there every 6 months until I started school; in fact I started school in Belgium. And in those three visits she actually fell pregnant and had a little boy. And after we moved to the UK I still went back over to visit these families that I got to know, not just her but her friends and so on and I still keep in touch with them even now.

INT: That’s marvelous.

**Saskia Tepe – Settling In**

ST: So moving on to the UK. After spending three months in a facility hosted by the British Council for Aid to Refugees, getting basic training in English, ‘Can I have a pound of mince please’, ‘two tickets to…’

INT: And coping with the currency of pounds, shillings and pence.

ST: Exactly. We moved to Hitchin and I started the Catholic school there. My mother had a falling out with the priest and I ended up in the Church of England school and the headmaster of that was part of this teachers association that had sponsored the family so everything was fine. And basically, as I said, my mum had a… Her attitude to religion was diplomatic; whatever came her way that was the way it went. So she was quite happy to go to whatever church, to whatever school. It didn’t really matter to her. My step parent, my step father had difficulties integrating. I think my mother had an aptitude for languages. She went to evening classes, she listened to Michael Mitchelmore on the news programmes to learn how to speak proper English whereas he tended to go to the Polish community, there was a Polish club, and found it quite difficult to integrate. And because my mum was not Polish but German I think she felt a little bit on the periphery. Things went a little bit downhill, they fought a lot, I think he drank quite a bit; it was as though the relationship had changed. I think they no longer had that goal that they had had in Germany where they were desperate to get away to make a new life. And when they found that new life there was nothing there to keep them together. So, I know things were bad because he always had friends round and he was drinking and so on and they didn’t have enough money to get by, so she had to get a job. She did what she had kind of trained for, I suppose, all those years previously and she went into service. And the only place that she could find a job was maybe about 10 miles outside of Hitchin; Kings Walden Bury. It was a colonel and Lady Harrison who ran the place and she became housekeeper and they were willing for her to live in, and for me to live in also. And on her days off she would go back to the marital home and she would cook him meals and prepare them all for the week and so on, until one day she arrived and he had changed the locks. So…And he had another woman in tow. So that was the end of that relationship and she was a single parent in the 1960s.

INT: Which was never easy.

ST: No

INT: It was very unusual I think at that time.

ST: Yes. So there followed a period of job changes. She worked in the Bury for maybe about 9 months and it was getting too much for her because it was a big house and they entertained a fair amount, it was a lot for her to do. At least that’s the story that I figured out for myself. I don’t know what the circumstances were but anyway, she found another job back in Hitchin, and I didn’t have to take the bus anymore and so on. And she worked as a housekeeper for an old gentleman who had become established in Hitchin, Mr. Moss, for grocery stores. A very nice old gentleman who had great difficulty in saying my name, Saskia, and… because he was a little hard of hearing, So I ended up being called Sandie. And this was at the time of Sandie Shaw and I was absolutely delighted. I didn’t want to be called by Saskia, this strange foreign person. By now I felt very integrated, could speak English no problem at all. Obviously my mum had a very strong accent but I didn’t. And so I told people I was called Sandie and I went through a period of not wanting to be foreign, wanting to be part of… And I’m sure everybody that has come from a foreign country goes through this process as well. I didn’t actually start calling myself Saskia again until I started my first teaching job many years later.

INT: So you obviously became a teacher. So what do you teach?

ST: What happened was, after all these various moves and so on, my mum tried to do some nurses training, so we moved to Papworth in Cambridgeshire and she trained as a nurse and then became ill, is the story I was told. Obviously while she was training she was living in and I lodged with a lady so I don’t know the whole story. I was about 12 at this stage. So that was my second secondary school. She became ill and we moved back to Worthing where we had started out with the help of the British Council for Aid to Refugees. And they housed us and then she went through a period of doing a lot of menial jobs. Not a happy time for my mum at all. But I was doing well at school and got my A levels, tried for university but didn’t get good enough grades, but was very interested in languages, and French was my particular favorite. I spent some time as an au pair in France. During a holiday job I met a Scot, and and came up to Scotland to be with him. So my husband was what brought me to Scotland. My mum didn’t come up to Scotland until many years later, shortly before she died, when she became fairly ill and it was time to move her. She’s told me that her happiest times were in those last 20 years from 1971 till 92/93 when she died, not very rich, living on the state you could say. And I always get very angry when people talk about refugees and sponging off the state and so on. I think my mum did her fair share of work in all the time that she was capable. She had a stroke when she was 52, she had a heart attack when she was 56, and I think a lot of that was just stress.

INT: And hard work.

INT: And poor health before. You said that she talked to you a lot when you where 13? What do you think triggered?

ST: When we first moved back to Worthing the house that we lived in that was owned by the BCAR, we had the downstairs and upstairs there were 3 rooms and there were 2 single gentlemen and a lady who was German speaking. We weren’t there long, she had just moved in and I came home from school and found my mother sitting sort of staring into the distance. I wondered what was wrong, and then she just started talking, she said “that bitch upstairs, that bitch upstairs”. I’d never heard my mother use a word like that. The woman had been a Commandant’s wife in a camp and because my mother speaks German she thought .. you know, my mother was an ally… And she started talking. My mum obviously didn’t say anything. but I think this brought up a lot of memories, and that’s when she told me about being Jewish. And I thought ‘Well we’re Catholic, how can we be Jewish?’

‘It had nothing to do with your religion, it had to do with your blood.’

And she told me then about, you know, what had happened to her and the train, jumping off the train and so on. And it was a subject that after that one night I realized that it was a painful thing for her to say, so it was always a touchy kind of subject. But I would ask her the odd question, but being 13 you never quite know. You take things as you hear them but you have no concept of what lay behind that and certainly I didn’t know anything about it, about Nazism and so on. I did do some research. I remember wearing a Star of David around my neck because I thought it might be quite nice to be different when I was about 17, as though it was some kind of…it was strange, I couldn’t figure out why, I think part of being a teenager is you want to be different. I think I had also read enough to know what she had escaped from by then. So I think I was kind of fiercely proud of that fact, that although she wasn’t Jewish she had had the Jewish experience, let’s put it like that. The only other time that we really talked about her background and where she had come from and so on was maybe about 2 years before she died on a visit up to see us. I had moved to Scotland, had had children up here and she came to visit and I went down to visit her. And this particular time she obviously realized that she had to tell me about her background in more detail. And she had this box of documentation and brought out her mother’s marriage certificate and her grandmother’s death certificate to show the fact that she had been Jewish and the papers that she’d had to show to the Gestapo and so on to prove how much of a Jew she was. And we drew out a sort of a historical timeline, if you like, and traced it back to a famous composer called Leo Fall, I don’t know if you’ve ever heard of him?

INT: No, but we will look for some music.

ST: The Dollar Princess, I think, toured in the UK in 1912? But obviously because of the Nazi influence and the fact that he was Jewish, that kind of music was no longer played, it sort of fell out of favour.

INT: And this was a distant ancestor then?

ST: Yes. So that particular afternoon we went through and she told me a little bit about her dad and her step mother and so on and I got a lot of my knowledge, what little there is of it, of her life before the war.

INT: She must have been very keen that you knew more?

ST: Yes. So it was a bit of a shock after she died and I looked through that same paperwork to discover that she’d held out and not told me that she had had a baby at the end of the war.

**Saskia Tepe – Reflection On Life**

INT: So Saskia you were telling us about what you discovered after your mother passed away.

ST: In the documents in her box I discovered in a medical document that it said that she’d had 2 pregnancies, two normal pregnancies, one in 1945 and one in 1954. The first child died in infancy. And then suddenly, I was obviously distraught at finding this out, things started to make sense because I couldn’t figure out why she would want to go back to her stepmother. And I think it was because she was pregnant. She obviously didn’t know what to do or where to go. And if the baby died in infancy maybe that’s why she waited so long in that camp. Maybe she couldn’t go without the child, and it was only after it had died that she eventually managed to, you know, to leave and go to the west. The thing that struck me most though was that she hadn’t been able to tell me about this. There was obviously a lot of shame involved in this, and the fact that I was illegitimate was shame enough so why couldn’t she have told me about that? And then I wondered, well, whose baby was it? Had she been raped? And was that even more shameful that she couldn’t tell me about it? She said that she’d had a friend and there was always talk of them getting married but his mother wouldn’t, didn’t encourage it, and anyway she couldn’t have married him at that point because the law was that if you were Jewish you couldn’t marry a non Jew. And she said ‘he stood by her’ that was the phrase that she used, but eventually they took him off to the western front and she never saw him again. So the only thing I can think is that because he was mixing with somebody of the wrong sort he was eventually taken away.

INT: So do you think this affair… it sounds like a love affair took place when she was still a slave labourer?

ST: The timing’s odd.

INT: Yes that’s what I am thinking.

ST: But so I am thinking if it was at the end of, there’s no date, if it was the end of ’45, then she could have been raped when the Russians were coming, she hated the Russians. One of the comments she’d made was, maybe I shouldn’t say this, was that ‘the Russians, the men were awful, they took women 3 or 4, 5 times a night’ which is a strange, strange sentence for anyone to utter. I didn’t know whether she was referring to Freiwaldau Camp, because I’m sure there must have been Russians there, but it wouldn’t have surprised me if they had raped the women there. It took a long time for me to get to grips with the fact that she hadn’t told me that for whatever reason. But I think I realized that there was a lot of shame, my mother must have felt a lot of shame in her life, not belonging to any particular group, shunted back and forth, being labeled and so on.

INT: She must have been very, very proud of you

ST: Yes well that was another burden. That was a bit of a burden because I felt like I was never quite capable of fulfilling all those dreams that she had for me. I was very interested in drama, oh yes I was going to be the next great film star, I’d think I could fill that role and I was going to do this and I could go to university but I couldn’t quite manage that. It was a big burden having all those dreams placed on my shoulders.

INT: She was around when your children where born?

ST: Yes

INT: And did you find that there was a different relationship between her and her grandchildren? Or do you think she had the same high expectations?

ST: My mother was extremely good with children, you could see why she had become a sort of governess. She had this great rapport with the boys, of course nothing was ever discussed it was just a, just a grandmother relationship.

INT: Which is lovely, which is lovely.

ST: And it was limited because she still lived in England at that point. The great thing was, when we moved her up and got her a little flat so she could be independent, although she only had 6 months in it, was the fact that the kids could go after school and get to know her as a person. It was a good time.

INT: It would be a lovely time actually

INT: Saskia, thank you very much, and we very much enjoyed talking to you.

INT: Thank you.

ST: Thank you.

Saskia Tepe’s Blog provides some further background to the book “Surviving Brigitte’s Secrets: A holocaust Survivor. Her Daughter. Two Traumatic Journeys.” Not already included in her interview.

It also describes the twists and turns of the process of becoming accepted for publication by Authorway Ltd. It will be available for download as an e-book by the end of February/beginning of March, and as a paperback a couple of months later. It will be available on a world-wide basis.