**Walter Gumprich – Life Before The War**

**Walter speaks about his birth in 1933 and his family. He describes how his Mother missed out on being an Olympian because she was Jewish.**

INT: The date is the sixth of June 2014 we are talking to -WG: Walter Gumprich

INT: And when were you born?WG: The 1st of March 1933

INT: And where were you born?

WG: In Münster Westphalia, 15km from the Dutch border

INT: Tell us about your family

WG: Well, father, mother, sister one year older than me. She was born on the 25th of January, if that strikes a bell with anyone in Scotland?

INT: Burns Night?

WG: Yes and you want to know when I was born? I was born on the 1st of March, which is also an interesting date in Britain because that happened to be St David’s Day, the patron saint of Wales. So when I was at school and they asked me, ‘What’s your name’ and I said ‘Walter Gumprich’ and they said ‘don’t you have a middle name?’ and I said ‘no I don’t have a middle name’.

They said ‘well you have a middle name; you just don’t know what it is. Go home; ask your mother’. When I asked my mother what my middle name was she said, ‘You don’t have a middle name.’ So I figured if there’s one thing worse than having my teacher think my mother is stupid or too stupid to give me a middle name. So finally on the way to school, I thought, ‘Well my Hebrew name is David Ben Shlomo after my grandfather.

So when I got to school the teacher asked me and I said, ‘Yes, I have a middle name’. She said, ‘What is it?’ I said, ‘It’s David’. She said, ‘Oh I should have known, because you were born on St David’s day’ so I went home to my parents and asked if that was reason I was named…so that’s why I was named Walter David Gumprich.

INT: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

WG: One sister, one year older than me.

INT: What was she called?

WG: Brigitta, which became Bridget and my name was Walter all the time anyway. And she’s lived in Israel all her married life, since 1953. She is Gita.

INT: And what did your family do?

WG: Well my father was a grain merchant and imported grains and that’s why I was familiar with the Winnipeg Grain Exchange. Well, I’d heard of it after, not while I was in Germany, and it distributed in Westphalia, Rhineland and parts of Germany

INT: And did you go to school in Germany?

WG: No I didn’t because when I was due to go to school it was too dangerous to go to school. My sister got into school the year before but she didn’t go to school the year that I was due to start either.

INT: What happened in 1933 to your family?

WG: Well, of course, the outstanding result was that I was born – obviously the highlight of the year! But also the fact was that on 29th or 28th March was when Germany became a dictatorship and at that time things changed drastically and a lot of Jews realised that if this happened then life would become untenable because the party that came to power, took power, had outlined a programme of [anti-Semitism](https://gatheringthevoices.com/glossary/anti-semitism/) that was quite extreme.

It was so extreme, it was unbelievable but it rapidly became known that it was believable because laws suddenly passed.

Jews that were born weren’t made Staat-Burgershaft, given citizenship, so I was one of ‘fortunate’ ones who wasn’t given citizenship, German citizenship, and so I was essentially stateless until 1948 when German Jews in Britain were allowed to apply for British citizenship and my parents did, and your parents probably did as well I’m sure, and became British subjects and citizens and so that was the first and so then all sorts of things happened.

My father, I think it was a couple of years after that, about 1936-37, but the idea was to isolate Jews so Jews weren’t allowed to do business

and non-Jews that did business with Jews were listed and publicised so Germans wouldn’t want to do business with them so it was completely impossible for Jews to do business with non-Jews and since the farming public were almost entirely non-Jewish, my father was basically out of business and so for the years for sure 1937/38 he did absolutely no business at all. He at least tried to leave and in fact one of his business associates left for Chile and that was how we eventually got business papers to emigrate to Chile.

INT: And how long did that take?

WG: I don’t know how long from when my father first applied because I wasn’t privy to that information – I was six years old when we left…I was born in 1933.

INT: Did you go to school?

WG: No. No. I didn’t; it was too dangerous to go to school.

**Walter’s mother, the athlete, and the ‘sale’ of her sports car**

So my mother… it was 1936, I believe, that Jews had to sell their cars for one Mark. That was legal tender.

So my mother two weeks before, she had a nice BMW that’s still made, Three Series. It was first made in 1936 and that’s when she got it. My father bought it for her.

So she went to the citizen police chief who she went to school with and knew personally and said the police force were going to get this car and it was a nice car. And he didn’t have enough seniority to get it probably so my mother said, ‘You can have it right now on one condition: – that when you’re at work [I can drive it’], and the police station was only two blocks up the road on Grevener Strasse where we lived. And you can have it right now.

So he said fine. It helped him a little bit because he felt a little better because at least he’d be given it, even though, you know, it was still stealing but nevertheless my mother had the use of her car.

My mother had a ‘Sportabzeichen’ [German Sports Badge], (which was a precursor to the Olympic sports’ medal that’s usually just for professional athletes but my mother was an athlete and it was engraved and she made a point of wearing it.

She was driving the car in downtown Münster and she was stopped by a Nazi, who came out from the pavement. ‘Stop the car!’ He approached the car and my mother pre-empted and said, ‘What do you want?’ and he looked at my mother and he saw the Sportabzeichen and he said, ‘Oh I’m sorry. I made a mistake’.

So my mother looks to side and she saw hidden in the doorway a local Nazi who had told this guy, ‘She’s a Jew. Stop her! She’s illegally driving a car.’ But when this Nazi saw the Sportabzeichen, well, he said, ‘Every German knows that Jews aren’t athletes and haven’t a Sportabzeichen. You’re eligible for the Olympics so you can’t be Jewish’. He apologised profusely and let my mother go.

Well these are some of the things, so you’re wondering – if a Jew could walk downtown he would never know when he would be accosted and told, ‘You’re doing something wrong. You’re doing this wrong’ and they had no rights in the law at all. They just had no legal rights in Germany, period, being Jewish, you know.

INT:Can I ask what type of athlete she was?

WG: Decathlon, so she did swimming, high jump, cycling, long jump and sprinting. It was a mixture.

INT:And was she in the Olympics?

WG: No! She was Jewish! What do you want?

INT: So she wasn’t allowed?

WG: Okay, so she was a member of Preussischer Sport Club in Germany. In, I don’t know if it was 33 or 34, the government said, fine –

‘If you want to compete in athletics in any national events, receive any funding or anything at all, you are not allowed to have any Jewish members’.

So what are the Jewish members supposed to do?

INT:They formed their own clubs?

WG: Right, what could they do? In fact, my mother and father did form a Münster club but it was just for Jews so you had no competition of any consequence.

INT:So your mum is feeling pressure and your father’s feeling pressure and they’ve got the papers to go to Chile…

**Walter describes the arrest and imprisonment of his father**

WG: Not yet, so my father was interned and then in Münster prison

INT:  Is this after Kristallnacht?

WG: Yes Kristallnacht was November 1938. We are now in August of ‘39

INT:  So they were arrested in Kristallnacht?

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WG: No, my Dad was arrested in early August of ‘39 and, you see my father had an Iron Cross 1st Class, 1916. In 1916 it was still worthwhile getting an Iron Cross 1st Class. At the end of the war, basically if you survived the war, you were given an Iron Cross.

My father made a point of it wherever he went. He wore it and that was respected. They couldn’t just throw everything out. You couldn’t just say that Jews were given a different Iron Cross from regular guys, you know.

So that’s maybe a reason that he used to get around town and he was fairly well known in town.

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Anyway, my Dad’s in prison as I mentioned before. Periodically the SS would come and see if the prison was full, in which case they would take a load of men to the concentration camps so the German police used to say, ‘Oh no, there’s lots of room’ though the prisons were absolutely crammed.

The reason they did that was because the police knew very that going to concentration camp was not a good idea, was not a healthy situation, but there were people dying also of diseases and what not and there weren’t just Jews at that point, there were also political prisoners who were in there.

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Willy Brandt, who became Mayor of Berlin, escaped, because he was a Socialist, to Norway. Now he didn’t go just for the sheer hell and delight, he went because it was dangerous to stay in Germany and he left well before 1939. My father had initiated getting the papers to Chile through a friend of his who was there already and my mother finalised this when she came to prison with the papers.

**Walter Gumprich – Immigration**

**With the help of a Catholic priest, the family escape from Germany.**

W.G: My father was released and came home and so then we immediately made an effort to get out of Germany, and to get out of Germany it was not feasible to use public transportation because it was too dangerous and with two kids you would be held up all over the place as we were at the border, so my father’s First World War friend, who he was with right through the four years at the French Front, Franz Grosse-Wietfeld, he drove us to the border. He was able to do this because he was a Catholic priest and he was Papal Nuncio to Westphalia, which meant he was a fairly high-ranking individual.

He was the Vatican’s representative to Westphalia, Münster being a largely Catholic area, and most people there were Catholic. Archbishop von Galen, who was a very interesting individual, was Archbishop at the time but Franz Grosse-Wietfeld didn’t have the okay of the Catholic Church at the time.

The Catholic church were having trouble with some of their own priests like Franz Grosse-Wietfeld who were helping political prisoners who were unjustly being put under pressure and Jews as well, so, but just for the record, the Rabbi [Dr Julius Voos] in Münster who had been there for some years, after Kristallnacht went to seek an audience with Archbishop von Galenabout the pressures that Jews were being put under and being put to death and so on and the Archbishop’s reply was, essentially, ‘You brought it on yourselves. You didn’t accept Christ’.

You can check that out with the book and that was the general attitude. But the fact that people were people – well, Jews apparently weren’t people, even though Jesus was a Jew. But nevertheless I have to emphasise that a Catholic priest – Franz Grosse-Wietfeld, saved my life.No doubt about it because when we got to the border…

I spoke to Uncle Franz in 1951 when I was back in with my mother and I said, ‘What exactly happened at the border’. He said, ‘Well, you know, we went to the border and Franz was a big guy and his nickname was Kürbiskopf, which meant cabbage head [pumpkin head], amongst his friends and clerical colleagues.

He was a big guy, and this little SS guy was trying to give my father problems even though all the papers were in order. He was saying, ‘You have to do this and this’ and so on. Franz walked in front of my father, right in front of this little guy whose nose made it all the way up to the middle of his chest and he said in German ‘Tu mir was’ or as Clint Eastwood would say, ‘Make my day’.

He may hit me but Franz Grosse-Wietfeld would have knocked him really but he had to have the first and then he waved my father and my mother and us over the border and gave him papers and Franz Grosse-Wietfeld said it was that simple.

And he didn’t do himself much good because as a result of his attitude he was put under considerable pressure during the war. All sorts of things like phoning him up at two o’clock in the morning and no one would be on the phone, but he had to answer the phone because as a priest he had to say Last Rights and so on so he couldn’t just say, ‘To hell with the phone!’ so there were all sorts of ways of putting pressure on people.

INT:  Did he survive the war?

WG: Yes he did. He actually died in a train accident in 1961 but he survived the war.

INT**:**Was he arrested or put in a concentration camp?

WG: No, no he wasn’t; no they couldn’t. Münster was pretty solidly Catholic and Von Galen’s attitude was rabidly anti-Nazi, completely.

Now he had a reason because he was actually Graf von Galen.He was landed aristocracy and he gave his title to his younger brother so he wasn’t just an archbishop, he was really somebody, nobility so to speak, and had fantastic sway so even the Nazis couldn’t quite grab this guy; they couldn’t do it. They never went in the Dom, which is the cathedral, so he was an absolute German patriot.

The German aristocracy really weren’t Nazis; they wouldn’t lower themselves to become members of the Nazi Party to start with. That doesn’t mean to say they weren’t financiers of the Nazi Party but I spoke to some of them after the war. It’s interesting.

INT**:**So you’re in Holland with no car. How did you get…?

WG: Well we were picked up in the morning by my mother’s uncle. My grandfather had three brothers and a sister and one of them lived in Holland. I believe they’d moved there before 1930. His wife was Dutch, I guess, and they didn’t survive the war, though, but that’s another one and we were there a week.

So a week before the outbreak of the Second World War, a week before the end of August, we went to Britain. We moved to Britain.

My father had managed to get a transit visa to Britain. He wanted actually to get a complete visa for the whole bunch to Britain but couldn’t, but he got a three months transit visa through a cousin of his who was already in Britain, who went in 1933.

INT**:**So he managed to get you visas?

WG: He got us transit visas for three months so we were in Britain and so after a week in Britain the war broke out and all transportation was stopped.

Then we were actually in London with the cousin of my mother’s, my mother’s aunt, and then all Jews that were illegal aliens, which we were, weren’t allowed to stay there because it was a strategic area and they figured there would be an invasion and why would they need German spies there, which we were considered to be – what do they know about us – so we had to get out of there so we went to Manchester en route to Glasgow.

**Walter Gumprich – Life During The War part 1**

**Once in Glasgow, Walter goes to school, his mother finds work, though his father is interned on the Isle of Man.**

INT: Why Glasgow?

WG: My father was interned in the Isle of Man right away so it was just my mother and sister and myself that were at liberty so to speak and Glasgow was an area that needed workers and skilled workers in agriculture and my father was and so anyway, he was in the Isle of Man, but nevertheless he figured that one of these days he’d get out and when he did, he’d be in Glasgow so my mother got there.

My mother immediately started work and my mother worked in the factory that made greatcoats.

That’s heavy coats for army soldiers, that’s greatcoats, and my mother before she was married had a certificate for making shirt collars and back in Germany you get certificates for all sorts of things and it was a pretty skilled thing. It was a two-year apprenticeship course and one thing and another and hand made shirts were the thing in the 30s before the Second World War so it was a well-paid job.

So she certainly knew how to make greatcoat collars and at first she was in timework and then she was in piecework, what we called serious money and was able to look after us quite well. I never knew we were poor, I mean we probably were, we couldn’t afford all sorts but it never occurred to me that we were poor.

I mean, I was a kid.

INT:So did she start working while your father was in the Isle of Man?

WG: Oh yes, sure, we didn’t have any money, sure she worked, somebody had to work.

INT:And where were you living?

WG: In Glasgow.

INT:Yeah, but what part of Glasgow?

WG: Sounds good, Pollokshields. We lived in 43 Keir Street, right opposite the Pollokshields Senior Secondary School and then we moved to 248 Kenmure Street which was a little further away but not too far from Melville Street School actually.

Actually we lived on the corner of Kenmure Street and Leven Street and the next street over I believe is Melville Street and the Melville Street School is just down there, very easy for me to get to school.

**School**

INT:And was it easy to enrol you into school?

WG: I don’t now, I got into school, I don’t know, I wasn’t…I didn’t have any trouble. I was told to go to school, I went to school and the only problem was that the kids were all deaf and dumb, to a man. I only spoke German. I didn’t speak any English and so my mother actually said that she was pretty sure that the kids would all learn German before I learnt English because I spoke.

Nobody told me it was a different language and nobody told me it was difficult so I didn’t have those handicaps*.*

INT:When you say deaf and dumb, was it a special needs school?

WG:  Well they couldn’t hear me. They couldn’t comprehend. I wasn’t sure what their problem was but they had the problem, I didn’t.*(Walter did not realise that the children couldn’t understand him and did not answer because he was speaking German).*

INT:So you went bouncing in?

WG: Bridget wasn’t as talkative as I am, she wasn’t then, but we never missed a year, we kept up.

In fact they wanted to kick Bridget up a year. My parents said, ‘No, they don’t want that because she wouldn’t be with her peers.

Classes then were about 30. I don’t know if that is large or not but Bridget was always… she, Frances Duff and Helen McNab were always head of this class. It was just a matter of who was up there and the language was not a difficulty; it just was absorbed. It maybe made it easier for us to learn other languages but that was the attitude we had towards learning other languages.

INT:Did the teachers help you?

WG: I really can’t remember.

One thing I remember was Miss Whitson who was my first teacher. My mother spoke some English. I mean she learnt English at school but she wasn’t fluent and I remember my mother coming home and said ‘teacher’ – the teachers generally didn’t pay compliments, like outrageous compliments. They told the truth. Nowadays everybody’s wonderful and everybody passes and every child is a genius, you know, and parents were the same. Parents didn’t tell a child they were wonderful. ‘Work harder!’ that’s what you heard but my mother said Miss Whitson said, ‘You have a very good voice and you sing very well and your fingernails are very nicely cut’.

Well, because instead of cutting my fingernails straight across, one cut, my mother contoured them all the time and this apparently was exceptional at school so maybe Miss Whitson said something else to my mother and it might have been complimentary but I wasn’t told that. Okay, so let’s put that away. What did I know?

I made friends at school. I didn’t have any trouble. Certainly by the time I think it was one year in Albert Road, it’s called Pollokshields Senior Secondary School or Albert Road Academy, whichever name you want to use and then we went to Melville Street and by that time I was fully integrated.

I had a little gang and Monty McMillan had a little gang and Ian McCall had a little gang. This is a thing kids do in the playground.

**Walter’s father is released from the Isle of Man and gets a job in Glasgow thanks to his contacts in the internment camp**

INT:When did your father come home from internment?

WG: He was interned almost a year, so he came home in the latter part of 1940. Well while he was in the internment camp he met some people who were also in the livestock feed business and there was one guy named Mr Rosenthal who was already gone. He came into Britain in 1936. Well that was the cut off date apparently, so guys who came in 1936, 37, 38, 39 they were all stuck in.

He already had a business but he was still in the internment camp. He wasn’t in very long; he was only there three months, but in the meantime he and my Dad made arrangements that my dad would represent all the agencies that he had. My dad could have them for Scotland because he didn’t have anybody in Scotland. He was in England, he came up short of Yorkshire and so when Dad came he had to start finding customers for the agencies he had. But of course cars were impossible so everything was done by foot and by bus and train and so on and that’s what Dad did. And Dad was 48 when he came to Britain so he wasn’t a youngster and though he spoke some English, he certainly wasn’t fluent but I guess he made it. If you’ve got to, you do.

INT:Did you have a Scottish accent then? Did you have a Glaswegian accent?

WG: I had whatever they had. Whatever they had, I had. I got what they got. I repeated what I heard.

INT:Carry on about your dad.

WG: Well my dad – it came 1945. He had made some progress with his business, although he couldn’t import anything and he started doing serious business and formed his own company, had a Scottish partner, guy named Robinson from Gilchrists from Rutherglen – his warehouse was in Rutherglen, at Gilchrists, that’s where Robertson worked. And so it was pretty hard slogging and in those days people smoked a lot.

Being what we would now consider as overweight was the norm. It was considered if you were skinny, you were poor. You know, things have changed since then and of course my Dad had his share of worries. And so in 1950 when his business was going quite well and he knew he was in bad health and he was too much of a hurry even then. He put on even more pressure. He had three massive heart attacks and died and that was 1950, 9th of September 1950.

I was seventeen and I had finished high school and the idea was that I would end up going into my father’s business and the way to do that would be ‘A’ to go to university and ‘B’ get some practical experience with another livestock feed company and come back to the business, so I was just at the start of that part.

**Walter Gumprich – Life After The War**

**Walter describes studying agriculture in Ayr and the challenges of his time working on a farm. He explains what happened when he got into a fight there.**

W.G: I was doing a year’s practical farming which was compulsory in order to get study at the West of Scotland Agriculture and get a degree in agriculture and anyway, I was on the farm; it was on an approved farm in Ayrshire. It was only thirty miles away and I lived there.

I came back home for my father’s funeral which was a terrible, terrible experience which affected me for some time and led me to do a lot of things that I’ve done and then I went back to the farm, finished up.

It was 1950, remember, and the interesting thing was that the State of Israel had only been established for two years and Jews were always considered to be cowards – nobody fought and you know, Jews just gave in and did a lot of praying.

And the guys on the farm, the farmer himself and his wife, were very strong Presbyterians, and were actually pro-Jewish and they believed the State of Israel was terrific and what a deal! What we, as Presbyterians, have been waiting for because this is the return of World Jewry to the Holy Land. They were definitely pro-Jewish, though in a different sort of way, if you could imagine, and quite knowledgeable about the Bible and the Old Testament, as it is called, particularly the Torah. Just to give you a very good example of that, Mr Baird was considered one of the foremost farmers in the area, well that’s why the University of Glasgow approved him for students to go there, that’s why I was there.

So anyway I was on the farm and it was kind of tough to start with. First I was young. There were three hired men. I lived in the farmhouse; they lived in a bothy. You guys know what a bothy is? *(A simple farm building.)*

INT:Yeah.

WG: Anyway I was sort of privileged and Mrs Baird, they didn’t have any children. They both died through polio. Mrs Baird’s nephew, Billy Smith, who was a real rear-end, a former policeman, a London policeman. He had a really narrow attitude. Definitely, he was just anti-me. I don’t think he was anti-Jewish; he was just anti-me. He didn’t like it because he realised that I was going to end up with a better job than him because I was there as a student and there to get an education and he sort of resented the fact that I was living in the farmhouse as he was.

So one day he managed to get me into a fight with one of the hired men. They are not among the most intelligent of people but I got on with all these guys very well, but anyway I got beaten to a pulp, as a matter of fact. The other guys were actually on my side but there was nothing much they could do with Billy Smith who was the manager of the farm or managed it for his uncle. And when I got up. It was a Sunday and Billy had a white shirt on and the other guy was lying down so was I.

I decided that I had to get up and I guess I had a bleeding nose among other things and I couldn’t get my head straight and I was standing there. He was a bit taller than me and also I had my head down and I saw Billy’s fist.

I went up to Billy and I said, ‘Why don’t you…?’ – I realised I had lost my temper and that’s why I fought this guy and during the fight I regained my temper and when I stood up I was really cool and I said… I walked up to Billy really close. I guess I was swaying a little bit, and I said ‘Why don’t you hit me now, Billy?’ And Billy clenched his fists and I was waiting. Well hit me, I’m sore, so it didn’t matter anyway, and he walked away. But what happened was, I guess I touched his shirt.

So when it came after everybody went to church; I didn’t to church. It was Sunday lunch, Mrs Baird, the farmer’s wife, Billy’s auntie, said, ‘Oh Billy, you’ve got a little blood on your shirt’ and it was obvious where it came from because I wasn’t looking too sunny and I was sitting at the table too.

‘Did you cut yourself, Billy?’ Yeah, anyway, Billy didn’t have to bother answering that one but after that I had no trouble with Billy Smith.

Not that I took advantage of the situation but any time that he said something that came remotely…  I just was about to say, ‘Why don’t you hit me now, Billy?’ You know, he was just. Well, fine. And the other guys, they were so much on my side it was almost embarrassing. You know they didn’t eat in the farmhouse, they ate in the bothy; you know it was a class structure thing but I sort of bridged the class structure through this.  I learnt a lot about practical farming and I sure learnt a lot about how to get on with people.

It was a help when I started in Canada: you know with the company I worked for was Canada Packers. They were very strict on credit. You have to know when to draw the line and how to be fair, but you have to know when to draw the line when you can’t put up with any more and just say fine whatever, and so this whole thing, my education in Scotland at school, I want to absolutely emphasis that I did not suffer at all. I mean to say that I was a victim is completely WRONG. It was a very good education and a lot of the kids… How do they learn? How do they learn and strive a little bit, and how do they learn to get along with people regardless?

INT-2: Can I just ask you a question?  Could you talk a little bit more about your father’s business?

W.G: Well, yes, he imported different feed ingredients for livestock; I mean he knew about livestock nutrition, which was what I ended up specialising in. I specialised in livestock nutrition and dairy bacteriology.  People ask me why I didn’t go into the dairy business and my answer to that one is that I learnt too much about the dairy business. It is a 24 hour, oh sorry, a 16 hour business, 7 days a week and so even if you get time off you still have got the worries.

So anyway, his business was selling, importing, grains and selling to either to manufacturers or directly to farmers or whatever and that is almost exactly what I ended up doing.  Though I didn’t do importing. I worked for feed companies that made feed and I sold the livestock feeds, designed the livestock buildings, mainly; and that was what I studied feeding, breeding and management. How to feed the feed and what kind of livestock to feed them to; how to breed the animals; how to design the buildings that they were housed in.

INT-2: And this was what you learnt in Scotland?

WG: And that was what my Dad did.

INT: So you finished your year of farming, practical farming.  Did you go into your father’s business?

WG: No, it was my mother; my mother sold it.  My mother, when my Dad passed away, she had a bit of thinking to do, and the first thing she decided is that she did not know anything about the business and as such to try to keep it warm for me, it was not possible for her. And to get a good manager do so, it was only possible if he took a share of it, in which case he may as well have owned the whole thing. In which case, I would after four years of University and one year of practical – five years – goodness knows what things would look like. Why should she tie me down to do something, which had been planned, which I might not want to do into the bargain?

**Walter’s mother changes jobs and becomes interested in social work**

W.G: Then my mother went to work. My mother went to work for crippled children and adults in Glasgow, and she worked in the office there and she worked with the social workers and quite a few of the people that worked there. She helped train people that were partly disabled to work in the office and she liked being a social worker.  She always wanted to be a social worker. She was not really interested in the needle trade.

So when she came to Canada in 1959, I came in 1957, all right I had been there for 2 years.

Oh you want to know how I came to Canada.

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Anyway to finish with my mother – when my mother came to Canada, sure enough she came to Winnipeg as I was stationed, not in Winnipeg but that was where the office was which I reported to was. I was in the country.

She got a job as a manger with crippled children and adults. She got a really good job there; she became assistant office manager. And the reason I know she had a very good job was because I was going out with one of the social workers and periodically I looked in there. Well, it was a source of Jewish girls and my mother was in charge of the expense accounts of the social workers and the job became vacant because nobody could stand the job and so my mother before she took the job, she was told what her work would be, and since she had a bit of experience,

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she realised that there might be a problem here; why she got the job so quickly, and she so asked, ‘In the event that there are complaints from the social workers because I will make them stick to the rules, are you going to go over my head or do I have complete authority.’

**Walter Gumprich – National Service**

**Walter describes his time doing National Service. He tells of a remarkable coincidence: a meeting between a British Major and his father when they were both fighting, though on different sides, in the First World War**

W.G:Then I did my 2 years National Service.  I could have evaded because I’d been in agriculture. I could have got round it, but I felt that the Government had paid for a lot of my schooling – I mean I had got a bursary through University. So I went in and did my two years.

I volunteered for the Army because by volunteering I could get into what I wanted to.  I wanted to get into the Royal Artillery because I did not feature myself being in the infantry which is pretty dangerous, and I certainly did not want to got into the tank corps – sitting in a tin can getting fired at – I didn’t like that.

My father had been in the artillery.

Field artillery is what I preferred because it moved fairly… My Dad was actually in the heavy artillery. My father got his Iron Cross when he was in the German Regiment that looked after what is nowadays called Big Bertha, which was a huge gun, which travelled on railroad tracks.

Interestingly enough when I was at Mons O.C.S, that’s Mons Officer Cadet School (Aldershot). I was being interviewed by a Colonel – I remember his name – Bellamy. He was a First World War man and he looked through my papers and he said, ‘‘Gumprich, I see you volunteered?’’

“Yes, Sir” – you just answered ‘Yes, Sir’ to everything and he said, “Family?” and I said, “Yes, Sir”. “Namely is it a family reason for joining the artillery, following your family.”

And he said, “First World War?”

“Yes Sir.”

”Where? France?”

“Yes, Sir.” He got really interested and he said, “Where?”

He actually had to ask. I did not say something. I kept saying, “Yes Sir” and it sort of got personal, almost.

“It was a place called Lille”, because there were pictures of this church, which was an odd church tower and I had been there and it was definitely Lille, where my father fought.

“When?”

I said, “1916.”

“Oh” he said, “ What is your name again?”

“Gumprich”.

“Shouldn’t I know your father? “

I said “No, Sir.”

“Why?”

“Because he was at the Front. He was in Lens in 1916 and the lines were pretty stationery. They did not move around.

I said, “Perhaps it was because he was on the other side, Sir.”

And he looked back and he said, “Oh, the Kaiser’s boys”. Like this is heaven to know a son of the Kaiser boys … one of his buddies!  He tried to kill them but that is all right you know.

He said, “What happened?”

And I said, “My father was decorated Iron Cross First Class” and

he said, “Was he a Lieutenant acting as a Major?” and

I said, “Yes, he was”.

Well the Major was on leave; the Colonel had shell shock; and the Adjutant who was a Captain was out of it or whatever – actually what happened was that this Colonel explained… Dad had never talked about it. But what had happened was that the British attacked and routed the Germans and according to the Colonel a young Lieutenant rallied the German troops and fought off the attack giving the Germans enough time to withdraw Big Bertha along the railway line and get it back out of there.

And that it why the British attacked because they wanted the gun and the Colonel knew that this young Lieutenant, who was later promoted to Captain, was a big deal and he felt pretty sure he would get Iron Cross First Class for this particular deal.  Yes. So that was Dad.

INT-2: Why did a British Officer know what was happening behind German line?

W.G:Because they played soccer on Sundays that’s why, they played soccer, football on Sundays. They all got out there and played soccer.

INT: I thought that was only at Christmas?

W.G: Ach, well these guys knew each other. He knew who is who. And he wasn’t in the German Army. I can guarantee that.

INT:So you did your National Service…

W.G: One year I was fooling around taking all kinds of courses. I took a parachute-jumping course. I took a REME course [Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers]. Great stuff. Rolls Royce engines we took apart and put them together. Excellent instructors. In parachute jumping, five jumps was a dream and then of course you never got the final one because they asked you, “Are you willing to sign on for an extra year?” … and I said, well I will think it over and they knew that meant, no. So you never got the few pennies extra so and then I after I went through Mons with the O.C.S.

I wanted to go to Hong Kong and I applied for Hong Kong but I only had 14 months left.  I only had 12 months left.  I applied for Germany, as I was fluent in German and I was with the British Army of the Rhine doing winter warfare skiing and marathon running in the summer.

I didn’t do too many parades.

INT 2: Which year was this?

W.G: 1954 to 1956.

I got out on the 9th October 1956. The reason I remember was, it was when the Suez Crisis broke and it broke actually that day or the day after because I was at Woolwich and I was being de-mobbed. They were waiting for the bus to go down to Woolwich station.

I did not wait for the bus. I took my kitbag and I walked down to Woolwich Station, changed into civilian clothes in the waiting room and hopped on the first train, because, as a Territorial, I was not smart enough to get into the Army Emergency Reserve. They were already called up, incidentally, as everyone tried to get in there. I was lucky that I didn’t, though I realised that the next thing was they were going to do was call up the ‘Terriers’ and I was on the train.

Well, they have easily have recognised me because of my hair cut, but nevertheless I was out of Woolwich.

**Walter Gumprich – Working Life And Emigration To Canada**

**Walter explains about his working life after National Service and his decision to emigrate to Canada.**

INT: And you were coming back up to Glasgow?

W.G:Glasgow, right absolutely.

INT:So when you arrived in Glasgow, what was the community like then?

W.G:Well, I really wasn’t all that interested. First of all, because we really just circulated in the German Jewish community.

We belonged to Pollokshields Shul, which was just at the end of Leven Street and Maxwell Road there.  I mean it was really close and it was turned into a Mosque several years later.  And we really just went on High Holidays and Succot and Pesach [Passover].

INT:So there you are, you are back in Glasgow. You’ve done your National Service.  What did you do next?

W.G:I started looking for a job – so the long and short of it was that the jobs I was offered didn’t look terribly good; prospects weren’t all that good. I did not mind the initial work at all. It just looked as if I had to get old before I got promoted – that was basically the nuts and bolts of the thing.  I think that was generally how things worked. You had to have seniority.

I was working for a guy and after two weeks of sorting Invoices I was getting to know the mix of products that customers wanted.

So if I went to the farm – “I want such and such” – I would ask him does he need this as well, so you know I thought this was okay, showing I was keen. I was memorising all the stuff.

INT-2: You were not just filing; you were absorbing information.

W.G:Yea sure. I was not going to keep my eyes closed. Why not do something with the time. My Dad use to say, very simply, “Don’t waste your time”. He could have said, “Use your time well” – that is the bottom line. So basically if you are doing something it doesn’t matter how stupid the thing is that you are doing maybe you can do it a little better than somebody else, just a little better…. okay.

So the Boss said, ‘We should really be having you do advisory work but you look too young; you do not have credibility.’

INT: Where about in Glasgow was it?

W.G:It was in Kilmarnock but the company was in London. It was BOCM. And so I thought the idea of my getting training somewhere else was almost on a world basis, it wasn’t that it had to be in Glasgow; not that any country was ever mentioned but Dad did business with Canada, in Winnipeg where the grain exchange was and I always thought of experience being all over the place.

So I said, “How would it be if I got some experience overseas?”

“Oh “he said, “That would be wonderful; that puts a different complexion on things. That is experience that is unique and something that customers might be interested in, and the knowledge itself might be of value”.

He said, “Where?” And I thought, got to be an English speaking country. You have Australia, America, Canada. Australia is awful far away but I have a cousin there. I only had two first cousins – one is dead.  America just had McCarthyism. That is no good. I don’t like that. It’s not a good way of operating a country and Canada will probably have the same wage scale as America, mainly high, and even better it has got big cars too, which I like.

He said, “Where? Canada. Where about in Canada?” and I said Winnipeg as that was the only place I knew and he said, “Wonderful. Would you want some references?” and I said, “No”.

Okay, the reason why I did not want references was that I wanted to get experience on my own and I didn’t want – ‘He only got the job because they felt sorry. He lost his Dad when he was seventeen’ and all that sort of stuff.

I had to go to the Canadian Consulate in Glasgow and he was very helpful. A young guy… He said, ‘We can offer you a free trip to a job in Canada”.

I said, “That sounds pretty good. Where is it?”

And he said, “It is in Northern Manitoba and you will get a free passage and a contract for three years”. Well that was job security, if ever there was one.

I think all important things over overnight so I said, “I will let you know”. And I came back the next day and I said, “I don’t know the cost of living in Canada and I don’t know exactly where Northern Manitoba is and what the social life is like.  Riding in the range has a lot of appeal and it is a lot better than what I did in the Scottish Highlands with the sheep, with an unobedient sheep dog at my tail for two days, after that he was OK. Maybe horses are smarter, but I will look at the contract.

You can put my name on it but I am not going to sign it until I get to Canada and I know what is going on and I will let you know a week after I get there, because by then I will have an idea what is going on.  He said that was not exactly what I had in mind but I will pay half, and you will report to the CNR people when you arrive in Winnipeg.

INT:Who is CNR?

W.G:Canadian National Railway. They are the people that sponsor this programme. Maybe CPR – Canadian Pacific Railway, the same thing.  Canadian National Railway: they have been colonising Western Canada for the better part of the Century.  They were the people that got people out there.

INT:Did they have to do background checks on you?

W.G: Maybe they did. I cannot remember.

INT:Basically they wanted bodies to go out to Canada.

W.G: He knew I had a degree, and I was single. Ten days before I left I got a letter from my father’s brother, who lived in Trinidad, and he said that he had a cousin in Winnipeg.  Maybe you should write to him.

So I wrote to him and as I was leaving the house – my mother and I were getting a taxi to the train station because I had a trunk and a big suitcase the Postie, Mr Hawthorn, came running up.

I knew Mr Hawthorn very well as he had been delivering mail for over twenty years.  I mean I really knew him.    He came running up with a sealed airmail letter. “Walter you need to read this letter from your cousin in Winnipeg. He is going to meet you at the station.” He had opened the letter but that is okay, he was part of the family, but he absolutely made sure that I got this letter.

So the voyage was in February.

I sailed from Liverpool to Halifax but this Consul said, “You can take this boat, and there is no extra charge going Liverpool – Halifax – New York.  Not only is the train fare cheaper (for them of course) to New York, but it is a regular train, a regular compartment for regular people whereas the train from Halifax is a glorified cattle car for immigrants, not terribly comfortable at all.  So, I recommend that you stay on the boat when you get to Halifax. It is a day’s sail then you get to New York. ‘

The only other thing he told me was that the problem is you have to get a visa as you only have a British Passport to go through the United States.  So you have to go to the American Consulate in Glasgow to get the visa, no charge but you have to get it.

But he said they will ask you some questions and don’t be what nowadays they call a smart ass.

When they ask you, “Have been a member of a Communist Party?” just say No. Don’t say, ‘What the hell! I mean what are you trying to do here’.

“Not only that don’t wear a red tie and to be safe where black shoes not brown shoes”.

I did exactly that and I went there and got interviewed by this little kid, the Vice Consul.  He said, “Have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?” I did not say anything. I did not breath. I just said no.  So I got to New York.

I took the train. On the train there was a big French Canadian who wanted to see my passport and he saw this two year work permit that I had in there.  He said “I am going to give you this.” and I said, “What is it?”

“It is a landed immigrant status”.

I said I didn’t want it because perhaps I would have to do National Service all over again in Canada. I didn’t want to do that.

He said you have to have it or I will throw you off the train. You can’t get into Canada. I said okay, so I got this lousy stamp and that was it. And nowadays that is what everyone had been looking for. It was just a little stamp. I operated with my British passport until 1975 because after three months I was able to vote. I had all the rights of a Canadian Citizen. In 1975 I changed because I had to be a Canadian Citizen as well as a British subject.

**Walter Gumprich – Integration Into Canada**

**Walter summarises his working life in Canada**

INT:So when you were in Canada and people said, “Who are you? Are you German, Scottish – what were you?

W.G: They just assumed that I was Scottish.

Well I got a job. I got a job within a couple of days, not doing what I wanted, but after 3 months I did.

I was right into the feed business. I was posted to a place called Dauphin, Manitoba, for Canada Packers. They were the biggest in Canada. It was a nice company. Being accepted never came up. It was never a topic of conversation for sure.

INT: Because everybody is an immigrant.

W.G:Yes. There was one man in town, Mr Oliphant. He owned the hardware store. He came from Glasgow when he was six years old.  He was an orphan.

When I got to Dauphin I was told to go and see old man Oliphant. He was an older man by then. Nobody could understand him.

So I went to the store, saw Mr Oliphant and spoke to him. He first greeted me. I could not understand a word he said.

I said I was from Glasgow. He spoke quite normal Canadian.  He said “That is the reputation I have. Nobody can understand a word I say, except the price!”  He was popular; he was a good guy.

He knew his stuff.

He spoke something that was not Glaswegian. It was just something.  Anyone from Glasgow would realise this – he made it up on his own.

INT:So you had your job. Later on, was it when you retired that you started working for UNESCO?

W.G:Yea. I worked out of Winnipeg, then Dauphin for 3 years and Northern Manitoba for 3 years and then I moved to Saskatchewan on 19thNovember 1962 and then worked for International Packers for 25 years and then I did International Consulting for United Nations International Culture Organisation, for the World Bank, CIDA – Canadian International Development Agency –

and they farmed me out to different people. I worked in six continents but I missed one.

INT**:** Which one was that?

W.G: Antarctica. There you go.

**Walter Gumprich – Reflection On Life**

**Walter talks about his family and his philosophy of life**

INT:So all in all what message would you give to anybody listening to your story? We are going to have a lot of school children listening.

W.G:I think when you look back two thirds is attitude. I don’t want to say successful life, because I do not want to say I have a successful life, but I mean I have a good life and I enjoy life and two thirds of it is attitude.

Unfortunately, a big chunk of that comes from your parents so if you are born in the right circumstances you get more that just a head start.

INT:And your mum must have been a very strong person?

W.G:My dad was pretty strong too.  You know I mean my mother was certainly interesting.

They were an interesting pair.

INT:Your sister went to Israel?

W.G:My sister married in 1953 and moved to Israel.

Bridget moved to Israel and got married there and she has lived there ever since.  She has four boys and eleven grandchildren. They are all in Israel.

INT: And you married?

W.G: I married in 1964.  Tomorrow it will be 50 years – 7th June.

INT: What is your wife’s name?

W.G: Oh my wife, my wife.

My wife is Lois Kay. We met in Winnipeg. She was just finishing up university and finishing off three years of being Manitoba fencing champion, foil you know, and so I live a dangerous life so you know … every minute. No damage at all.

INT:How many children do you have?

W.G: We have four children. They are all living in Vancouver, in the same area. I can cycle there. The furthest is a 35 minutes cycle run.  One daughter lives just across the back lane there and we have five grandchildren.  We see them pretty regularly. We bump into them at least once a week.

We live far enough away that we do not see them leave their houses. Every second Friday, we are all together for Friday night supper.

We moved from Saskatoon to Vancouver almost eight years ago.

We decided, as three of them were here, and the one who was in Saskatoon had been working here. They are all very good friends and do all kinds of things together and they have done all their life. The middle two are competitive sailors. For them coming to Saskatoon twice a year – we had the room but it was an awful expense and it meant we did not grow up with the grandchildren.

The climate was not much of a consideration as we got used to the climate.