



Iby's Story, Chapter One

I'm Iby Knill. I was born in November 1923 in Kosice and when I was three years old my parents moved to Bratislava where my mother's family lived and I spent my childhood there.

My maternal grandfather was a Zionist, to such an extent was not Jewishly inclined that he used to go past the synagogue on a Saturday in a vehicle smoking a cigar, just to annoy people and in my father's family never had kept any part of religion at all so I didn't really know what it meant to be Jewish because it was never part of my upbringing or education, although my grandmother, one of her sisters married somebody who was very religious and who was a standing joke in the family because it was always said that he didn't do anything except pray all day and expect other people to keep him, but it was a sort of, my grandmother was one of eighteen children so there was a lot of variety in the family.

I really loved school because it was the place where I could get questions answered, and I was always full of questions. When I was eleven I went from primary school to the German grammar school and was very happy there, had lots of friends. The end of year three (year nine here) my mother came to me and told me that I wouldn't go to the same school the following year. That upset me rather because I was happy there and I didn't know whether I had done anything wrong or what the reason was that I shouldn't be able to continue going to the same school. My mother explained that as we were Jewish she anticipated that during the following year Jewish students would be excluded from the German grammar school and she wanted to avoid my having to go through that and therefore she was transferring me to the grammar school where the teaching was in the Czech language.

In a way it was quite amusing because I finished up in a grammar school with only seventeen girls in it, so it had its advantages. The year after that Munich happened and Czechoslovakia was divided and the part which is now the Czech Republic became the Protectorate, the German Protectorate and Slovakia became an independent country under a Catholic priest by the name of Tiso whose first idea was, the first decision was, that boys and girls shouldn't be educated together so I then had to move to a church grammar school, a girls'

church grammar school. Since the boys' grammar school was the other side of the road it wasn't such a very, very great thing, but at the same time what also came in was that people who were Jewish or of Jewish descent had to wear a yellow star. Now I personally found it very, I got very angry about it because I couldn't see why I should be any different to anybody else because none of my friends were wearing yellow stars and I thought I would put them into an awkward situation if I stayed in friendship or relationships with them. We were also told that on public transport we weren't allowed to sit down. In shops we were the last ones to be served and I just decided that I wasn't going to use public transport under those circumstances, I would rather walk to school and use a scarf to cover my yellow star. The nuns at the school were not very much in favour of this agreement and they said at the moment we came into the school we had to take our outer clothes off because they wouldn't have it that students should wear yellow stars, they didn't consider it was appropriate thing at all. The next thing that happened was that the Germans actually occupied Slovakia and they wanted our apartment for the Germans so we had to move out of our apartment and we were allocated a tiny little flat on the outskirts of the town and at the same time Tiso decided that the Jewish students shouldn't be educated beyond the age of sixteen. They shouldn't have intellectual pretensions and they should instead of that learn a practical skill. Since the teacher in school had said that I couldn't draw, it was perhaps inevitable that I took a course in graphic design. Now the funny is about it that I actually became quite a successful designer in England, which just shows that teachers aren't always right, or maybe their criteria are different to those that are required in the commercial world.

So, having finished a course in graphic design, I didn't know quite what to do and so I seemed to spend most of my time queuing up in shops to get food because the rule was that people with yellow stars should be the last ones to be served in shops, so quite often by the time it became your time there was hardly anything in the food shops to buy. Also our business had been what they called Aryanised, that the state took it over and put a non-Jewish person in charge, although my parents had still to continue to work there. We were cramped in this tiny little flat, my parents, my brother and I. My brother's bed was a board on top of the bath on which a mattress was put and I had a put-you-up which was opened out in the kitchen and I just could crawl in from the bottom into the bed because there was just as much room between the sink and the cooker on one side and the cooker on the other side. My grandparents also had to move out of Bratislava and they were in a little village outside Bratislava.