



Trude Silman, Chapter 1

I'm Trude Silman, and I was born on the 25th of April 1929 in Bratislava, which was then part of Czechoslovakia but today is the capital of the Slovak Republic.

My father was the eldest of 9, he was born in 1887, and eventually he went to Vienna and studied, I think he was the very very first person in the family who went to university and he studied I presume finance and economics, but that was of course before the First World War, and in the First World War he was a second lieutenant and obviously fought opposing the British and the French but he was a part of the Hapsburg Empire of course. And then after the war he and a partner started a bank and that bank unfortunately collapsed with the Wall Street Crash in 1929 and until then we'd been quite well financially placed but after that of course Father lost his regular income and we became what I'd describe as a relatively impoverished middle class family.

It was very difficult for him to find any work so he utilised his writing skills and he became a journalist and he wrote on financial matters and economics and I believe he also had a friend or friends who helped him to earn a little bit of living by helping them out as an estate agent. But that was basically all and I remember him very clearly sitting at the desk, which was in our main living room where he had a telephone which was rather unusual in those days, they were very rare, and he used to write his stuff there, and this room also doubled up as the bedroom for my brother, sister and myself as well as our dining room.

And mother was the typical housewife, she was a very good looking lady, she was accomplished in as much as she played the piano, she spoke French, she was an extremely good cook, and that's what women did in those days.

What I was aware of was that my aunts and uncles used to help me inasmuch as giving me, buying me clothes, taking me out and going for holidays, which obviously helped my parents, allowed us to have a decent life. I also had ballet classes and went to nursery school so somebody must have supported us and mother's family were on the whole rather wealthy so I think the help came from there, particularly her eldest sister Biba who had no children so she helped with all of us.

The things which I remember most is we used to go on a Sunday, we used to go for a walk into the hills and at the end of the walk we would end up at some hostelry, a pub you would call it here in England, and father would have a glass of beer and we'd have some pop or something and then we would just proceed off home. But this was fairly regular during the summer; in the winter of course it's snowy, and my brother and sister would go skiing whereas I used to go tobogganing, I wasn't quite up to skiing yet, and we also used to skate, and in summer we used to go swimming.

Father came from an Orthodox family but my own family were not really very observant, we didn't keep kosher house and visits to the synagogue were probably once or twice a year and that was about it. And the same applied to my mother's family, they were not religious.

I went to a Jewish school and I was in a class of about 55 pupils, that was a normal size and we used to have either a master or a mistress but mainly masters, and he would take us for all our subjects so we just had the one person who was in charge of us. I enjoyed school and I learned how to write German script, which I've totally forgotten now of course, I've also forgotten my German, and at home I should have mentioned we spoke German, Slovak and Hungarian and at school it was a Slovak speaking school but we learned German. And unfortunately much to my regret I have forgotten all my languages except for English now.

With hindsight my schooling may not have been Jewish at all initially, I would have gone probably to a state school, but with the Nazi situation already in Austria and Germany my father decided it would be better for me to go to a Jewish school so I did go to a Jewish school. But whether it was a choice from faith or whether it was choice out of necessity I'm not sure.