



Trude Silman Chapter 4

I sort of just found myself being like a little ping pong ball being moved from one place to another and somehow I just had to accept it. But it didn't quite work out like that because this wonderful family the Gills. Perhaps I ought to tell you a little bit more about this because before a family could take a child they had to actually put down £50 as a guarantee to the government that they would keep the child and it wouldn't be a burden. Now if people weren't able to afford the £50 very often a group in church would collect the money and then one family would actually look after the child and I think this may have happened with me. Now the major thing was, a wonderful family doing their utmost to pacify a very homesick child who couldn't communicate. I couldn't speak a single word of English, they didn't speak any of the languages I spoke, well that's enough to start with. Then I'd been brought up on different food, I'd been brought up in a beautiful warm centrally heated flat, and everything was alien to me. Also I'd never lived with animals and they had a couple of Dalmatian dogs. So the house was draughty, I was cold, I'd never eaten toast, kippers, marmalade, porridge, all the things which are perfectly normal here. So I was desperately homesick. And they even kitted me out with school uniform to go to school but after about 6 weeks through the help of the Czech refugee committee they decided I had better be moved because I really wasn't settling. So I had another aunt, my aunt Biba and her husband, they were in London in transit to America waiting for their visa so the Czech refugee committee decided it would be good for me to move in with them.

So I actually moved there probably in June 1939 and I start attending the local primary school which is Holy Trinity a Church of England school just off Finchley Road and I seem to settle much better there. A) because of course I was with an aunt and uncle so I was having normal food, what was normal to me, and I could communicate, and at that stage at school I discovered my tuition at school in Slovakia was such that I was better at arithmetic than the kids here. So every time we had an arithmetic lesson somebody would take me out and give me English lessons so within several months I was quite fluent. So that was useful.

My aunt and uncle had arranged that I was going to go to another school called Francis Holland College for Girls, a really posh school off Baker Street and it's still there and I had a wonderful grey outfit with red and I was due to start I

suppose first week in September. It never happened because on the first of September the British government decided all school kids should be evacuated. So I now get evacuated with Holy Trinity Church and end up in Rickmansworth and that too was quite an experience because we only went about 25 miles out of London and arriving at the station there were a lot of volunteers, mainly voluntary women's services I presume and they would take a bunch of kids and each would take a particular road and they would just knock at the door and say "How many of these children will you have? Will you have 1, 2, 3 or can't you take anybody?" and I was getting a bit anxious because nobody seemed to want me. Anyway I was very lucky, I was one of the last ones, probably the last one and I ended up with the most wonderful family, they were called the Pavlows and I stayed with them basically for a year and it was at that stage that we used to sleep under the stairs, they had a large pantry which was under the stairs, we used to have mattresses there and if the air raid siren went we would go and sleep down there. And they had two dogs, one was a sausage dog and one was a sort of mixed terrier, by that time I was quite happy with dogs and with English food, and basically I settled quite well there. The homesickness seems to have been put into the background, I realised I had to get on with things, and I did occasionally get letters from my father who kept on encouraging me to study hard and you know be a good girl, all the usual things and I took that to heart.