

Transcript

00:00:01 Speaker 2

David Swithenbank, 11th of July again at Porthcawl museum and I'm here again with with Diana John with a with a different story about some some German families family during the start of the Second World War. Diana, what have you got?

00:00:18 Speaker 1

Right. Well, David, I'll try to be as concise as I can with this one because it's not. It's a long, long story. So I'll try to cut it short.

00:00:23 Speaker 2

OK. Yeah.

00:00:27 Speaker 2

Of course.

00:00:28 Speaker 2

Yeah, fine.

00:00:31 Speaker 1

I was only a child when war broke out and my brother.

00:00:35 Speaker 1

And my mother, my brother and myself were sent down here to my grandmother to live in Porthcawl, where I went to school. Then after the war, we returned to London.

00:00:41 Speaker 2

Right.

00:00:46 Speaker 2

And your father stayed in London?

00:00:47 Speaker 1

And my father stayed in London, he bringing us down.

00:00:53 Speaker 1

There's a lovely little story too, but I won't go into that about it, on the day and my first day in school and I was very cross with my father cause I saw his his face at the window. He'd to come fetch me. But that that's another story. [?] But however, having said that, we came down here and we were not allowed to go home to London at all during the war, until the war was over, and occasionally my father would try and get some leave to come down to see us, but it how long he was allowed to stay, I don't know.

00:01:29 Speaker 2

And you came here at the very early part of the war, very early.

00:01:31 Speaker 1

Ohh yes, actually I I think September the third, the day the war broke out was my first day at school and there he was collecting me. I was cross. 'We've got something planned that day in school'. But however.

00:01:48 Speaker 1

So we came down here and I went to school down here in down in the infant school, down in New Road, which is still there exists. But anyway, that's that's another story again. And within the first month of us being here now, of course, in those days, no mobile phones.

00:02:11 Speaker 1

And if you were lucky enough to have a telephone, great. And if you didn't, you had to go to the corner box.

00:02:18 Speaker 1

But my father and mother were very good at corresponding, pen and paper, and in that short time he had a knock on the door from the neighbour next door, who happened to be a German himself. Quaker family.

00:02:37 Speaker 1

And asking my father, could he help him, because he was helping some of the Jews that had managed to get out of Germany. The house was full and this couple had arrived and he had nowhere to put them, and he knew that my mother and I, my brother and myself, were no longer there. We were down here, and because he knew, knew us quite well, because I used to play with his children next door.

00:03:07 Speaker 1

So my father said, 'Well, if I can help you, yes, of course I will.'

00:03:12 Speaker 2

Just what part of London was this?

00:03:13 Speaker 1

This is in Harrow. Yeah. Anyway, it's the famous Harrow school area.

00:03:19 Speaker 2

Right, yeah.

00:03:22 Speaker 1

Anyway, my father said 'yes, of course', he said. 'I'll help you if I can. What is it?' So he said, 'well, I know Mrs John is not there'. He said, 'Is it possible I could bring this couple to stay with you until I can find somewhere for them fairly soon?'

00:03:44 Speaker 1

My father said, 'of course you can'.

00:03:46 Speaker 1

So he said 'what I suggest, then.' he said, 'are they there with you now?' 'Yes.' Or something like that. He said, 'well, bring them in.' He said, 'I'll leave the front door open for you. But when you come back, knock the door. So I know that you're coming in through the door.'

00:04:05 Speaker 1

Anyway eventually they come back and they knock the door, and all my father hears is this tremendous kerfuffle going on. And he thought, 'what on Earth is happening?'

00:04:19 Speaker 1

And when he gets there, poor Mr Schoenbeck has collapsed on the doorstep. Yet this the husband,

00:04:23 Speaker 2

So this is the husband?

00:04:24 Speaker 1

This this is the husband.

00:04:26 Speaker 2

This is the husband, right yeah.

00:04:26 Speaker 2

Mr Schoenbeck, who I eventually called Grandpa. Grandpa Schoenbeck.

00:04:30 Speaker 2

Right. OK.

00:04:35 Speaker 1

Anyway, he collapsed and I think between my father and Mr Berg, they both managed to lift this man up and put him up in bed and call the doctor or whatever anyway, and hence this first letter that I have here from Mrs Schoenbeck to my mother.

00:04:59 Speaker 1

And I don't know very much about them, being a child, but other than seeing him and Mrs Schoenbeck after the war, they became very good friends of the family. But I do know from little stories that I was told or heard in conversation that he had been he he must have had of quite a prominent job from the sound of things, because of the type of home that he had.

00:05:27 Speaker 1

He was playing tennis with his wife one day, out on the suburbs of the city, wherever they lived, and I have a feeling it was Berlin but I could be wrong, and she could hear these cars coming. And she said 'Fritz, the children, quickly.'

00:05:43 Speaker 2

Umm. And as you said, this was their own tennis court. So substantial house and everything.

00:05:45 Speaker 1

This was their own tennis court. You know, it must have been a weekend or something. And they knew that he'd be there anyway and and they were playing tennis, so they quickly hid the children. But the Gestapo came and they took him away and he didn't have a very pleasant time and I think he was in Belsen. But like everything else, come forward in time, you wonder how he managed to get away.

00:06:19 Speaker 2

Indeed, yeah, yeah.

00:06:20 Speaker 1

But the story of the film that I told you about

00:06:23 Speaker 2

It was very similar, yeah.

00:06:24 Speaker 1

A a similar sort of situation. He must I I don't know, I'm assuming but I don't know, he must have been able to buy his way out.

00:06:34 Speaker 2

If they were a wealthy family, that might have been an avenue, yeah.

00:06:35 Speaker 1

Well, he that must have been, or he might have had friends from help from other friends. You don't know. And eventually they have managed to get here. But they had two boys and the older boy was sent to Canada. I never ever met him. But I knew Walter quite well, the younger boy.

00:06:55 Speaker 2

Right.

00:06:57 Speaker 1

And when we returned home, of course, after the war years, they they were, Dad had obviously got to know the family very well.

00:07:08 Speaker 1

And how long they'd actually stayed with him. But however, as I say this letter from Mrs Schoenbeck is literally a month after the war broken out, and I've also got here the a letter from Mr Schoenbeck to my father as a as an intern on the Isle of Man, rounded up, that Christmas.

00:07:32 Speaker 2

Right, so it was very quick.

00:07:32 Speaker 1

So it's as quick as that, you know. And she is so grateful in this letter to my mother that she's written cause my mother had written her a letter apparently and anyway, we made them, gave them the home.

00:07:49 Speaker 2

As [?] as you can. Good. I think that's a really nice story, in fact. So we'll we'll stop.