

Inspirational legacy of little girl who fled the Nazis for Scotland

DORRITH SIM found solace in Scotland and penned book *My Pocket* about starting a new life in a foreign country, which is being distributed in schools across Renfrewshire to tie in with a website about the Holocaust.

BY

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Dorrith escaped from Germany during the war and moved to Scotland (Image: Garry F McHarg)

WHEN Dorrit Sim fled Nazi Germany for Scotland, her only English was: "I have a handkerchief in my pocket."

Later, she recalled: "Every time I learned a new word I would put it in the phrase. I have a teacher in my pocket, 'I have a dog in my pocket, I have a house in my pocket. And that's one of the ways I taught myself English."

That experience formed the basis of a book called *In My Pocket*, the inspirational story of a little girl who has to leave her home and family to start a new life in a foreign country.

And now a new generation of schoolchildren are to share in the legacy left by Dorrit, who died in August last year at the age of 80.

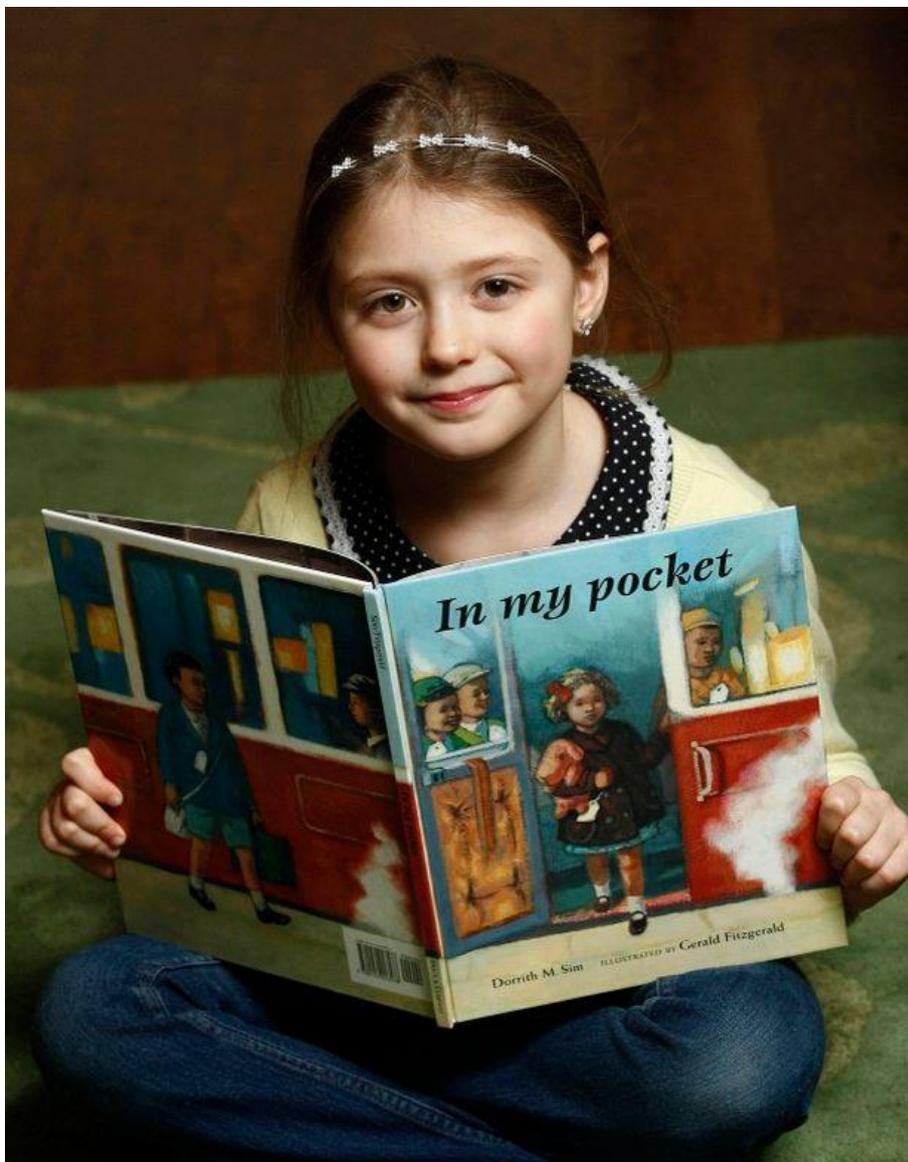
Her book is being distributed in schools across Renfrewshire to tie in with a website about the Holocaust.

And it is hoped that her story will soon be read by children across Scotland.

She is also among the people whose testimony about the Nazi atrocities is collected on the Gathering The Voices website, a project set up in partnership with Glasgow Caledonian University.

With the help of £45,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Gathering The Voices will ultimately carry interviews from 30 of the Jewish men and women who sought safety in Scotland.

A travelling exhibition based on the interviews will travel around schools and communities across Scotland.



Eilidh Sim (8) reads her grandmother's book (Image: Garry F McHarg)

As descendants of the victims and survivors prepare to mark Holocaust Memorial Day this Sunday, Angela Shapiro, a tutor at Glasgow Caledonian, spoke of how she came up with Gathering The Voices.

She said the idea came from listening to her mother-in-law Gretl Shapiro, who came to Scotland from Vienna on the Kindertransport – the organised rescue that took 10,000 Jewish children from Nazi Europe to Britain.

Angela said: “Like all the people we interviewed, she wanted to be remembered as a productive member of Scottish society, rather than merely a victim of persecution.

“We passionately believe that we need to preserve these first-hand accounts so that we can educate future generations.

“The testimonies show us that the survivors were ordinary people who coped with extraordinarily difficult circumstances.

“In spite of this, they remained positive individuals who went on to make significant contributions to our society.”

Dorrith’s book, beautifully illustrated by Scots artist Gerald Fitzgerald, is a valuable aid to educating youngsters about the experience of child refugees.

Dorrith’s son David, from East Kilbride, said: “It was my mother’s wish to spread the word of what happened. She didn’t want revenge and she wasn’t bitter but it was important to her that people were never allowed to forget.”

David’s daughter Elidih is now eight – the same age Dorrith was when she fled her home – and the little girl loves to read her grandmother’s book.

As the terror of the Nazis grew, Dorrith’s parents tried to cling on to the hope that they could stay in their beloved homeland of Germany.

Her family still treasure an incongruous picture of Dorrith ice-skating with two young boys – members of the Hitler Youth.

But after the horror of Kristallnacht in 1938, it was clear that Dorrith could not remain in Germany.



Dorrit Sim in the Kinder Transport as they leave Germany (Image: Garry F McHarg)

The wave of pogroms – anti-Jewish mob violence – across the country left the streets covered with broken glass from the windows of Jewish-owned stores, buildings, and synagogues.

At least 91 Jews were killed, many more brutally attacked and a further 30,000 arrested and incarcerated in concentration camps

Dorrit's school was burned down and her house was ransacked by the Nazis after her father Hans took Jewish children from the local orphanage to his home.

Hans, the manager of a foundry, and Dorrit's mother Trude then sent her to Britain as part of the Kindertransport.

She first travelled by train to Holland, then on to Britain by boat. Her book shows her looking forlornly from the deck.

It reads: "It was 1939. It was July and we were on a boat, a boat full of children, escaping from danger."

In my pocket



Dorrith M. Sim

ILLUSTRATED BY Gerald Fitzgerald

HARCOURT BRACE & COMPANY
San Diego New York London

Dorrith Sim ID papers (Image: Garry F McHarg)

Dorrith was taken in by Fred and Sophie Gallimore, an Edinburgh couple, who loved her and treated her well.

In the book, she wrote: "The man and woman came from Scotland. Everything there was different. In Germany, I sat on a little seat on my father's bike.

"In Edinburgh, where they lived, there was a car and I had a real dog."

The book shows her playing with children on the street.

She wrote: "In Germany, I couldn't play with the children in our street because I was Jewish.

"Now I played with my new Scottish friends."

In the last pages she talks of a letter she received from Mutti and Vati – her parents – telling her they missed her and would see her soon.

She wrote: "I put Mutti and Vati's letter in my pocket. I kept it and read it every day. Even after the war began."

The book leaves it there but Dorrith's parents perished in the Auschwitz concentration camp. She never got over losing them.



Dorrith Sim as a baby with her mum and dad (Image: Garry F McHarg)

She lived with the Gallimores, who she called mummy and daddy, until she was 21 when she married a young lawyer, Andrew.