

# Doris Segal



*Doris as a child*

Doratheia (Dorli) Klepperova was born 16 June 1932 in Chomotow, a German-speaking town in the Sudetenland, Czechoslovakia. Her father, Siegfried, was a marketing manager

and the family enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle, spending their free time at the Alaun See (the Alum lake), with swimming and leisure facilities in summer and ice-skating in winter.

By 1937 it was clear that the Sudetenland was under threat of being occupied by the Nazis and the Jews of the region were becoming concerned. Dorli's uncle, while listening to news broadcasts on the radio in 1938, decided that the whole family should pack up and leave for Prague, which they did, immediately. Some months later, the European powers ceded Czechoslovakia to Hitler. Almost as soon as the Germans marched into Chomotow, they destroyed the synagogue. The Germans called the town Komutau.

Dorli's family realised the urgency of leaving their homeland. Through a visit by an Irish trade mission to Czechoslovakia, seeking to attract European industry to the west of Ireland, Siegfried was aware that a hat factory was being opened in Co Mayo. The trade mission was headed by Senator JE McElinn and included Marcus Witztum and Serge Phillipson, who negotiated the setting up of the hat factory with Hugo Reiniger & Co, hat manufacturer of Chomotow. Siegfried applied for a work permit and, although he had no actual skills in the making of hats, he was granted a visa. Dorli and her parents, Siegfried and Gretel (Margaret), made the long journey by train across Europe to Hollyhead and on to Ireland by boat in the summer of 1939.

They lived in various parts of Dublin for some months before moving to Castlebar when the factory opened. In Ireland, 'Dorli' became 'Doris'. The Kleppers found life in the west of Ireland very different from their previous existence. None of the family spoke English except Gretel, who had learned some at school. However, an attack of scarlet fever before Doris's birth had rendered Gretel completely deaf, and she had to rely on her ability to lip-read. For Doris it was necessary to learn a third language, too, since all her primary schooling was conducted through Irish. Siegfried or Fred, as he became known, began work in the spinning department of the hat factory. He developed weeping eczema from the

oil in the sheep's wool, which was not helped by the constant dampness of the climate, something unfamiliar to this central European family.

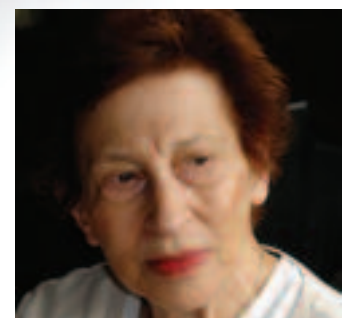
At the age of 12, Doris was sent to boarding school in Dublin. Her parents moved to Dublin in 1952 when Fred's skin condition made it impossible for him to continue working at the hat factory. The family lived in Clontarf in the north of the city and Fred began a small business importing fancy goods.

After school, Doris studied physiotherapy and qualified as a physiotherapist in 1955. She married Jack Segal in 1958, a joint director (with his brother Max, and his brother-in-law, Sydney Morris) of the Jewellery and Metal Manufacturing Company Ltd. Doris and Jack had three children: Henry and Michelle, who live in America, and Robert, who lives in Israel. Jack passed away in 1987 and Doris now lives in Terenure, south Dublin.

Not all of Doris's family was lucky enough to escape Czechoslovakia. Fred's two brothers perished in the concentration camps. Despite desperate efforts to get them out of Czechoslovakia, Gretel's parents, Max and Klara Heller, were sent to Theresienstadt concentration camp north of Prague, in 1942. Eighteen months later they were deported to Auschwitz, where they perished.

Doris attributes the early deaths of her parents – Fred at 62 and Gretel at 63 – to the stress of disruption to the family and to their feeling of helplessness and despair in losing their parents Max and Klara and other close members of the family. They were burdened by the knowledge of their fate and the fates of so many loved ones in the Holocaust.

*I have very fond memories of the Alaun See, where I swam in the summer with my cousins, Franceska, Otto and Karli Heller, who went to live in Israel (Palestine) with their parents in 1937. We lived in my grandfather's house. Downstairs was rented out. My grandparents lived on the first-floor apartment and we lived on the second floor. I was very fond of my grandparents and we were very close. It was very hard saying goodbye to them – even though I did not realise at the time that we would never see each other again.*



*Doris Segal, 2008*

Photograph: Alicia McAuley