



3.3 Roma Oral History Story 3



Rozalia Glowacka

Rozalia is a Polish Roma woman, her Roma name is Chryzantema. Rozalia's extended family were persecuted by the Nazis and some were murdered. As a child she lived an impoverished life and experienced prejudice and exclusion. Later as a young adult she came to the UK for a new life and a better future for her family.

Rozalia Glowacka ©RSG

Life in Poland

Born in 1980 in Poland, Rozalia didn't go to school until she was nearly 10 years old when she attended with her brother and sister. However, the children left school after only a year as there was a lot of racism towards Roma. After leaving school Rozalia learnt at home by herself and with friends and neighbours.

Rozalia comes from a traditional Roma family who lived a settled lifestyle. As a toddler her parents organised an arranged marriage for her with a young boy's family, and when she was a teenager she got married and began living with her parents-in-law. When Rozalia had her first child they decided to leave Poland, for a better family life in the UK.

Second World War

As a young girl, Rozalia's great grandmother Zofia told her stories about her life during the Second World War; how she saved her four young nephews from a concentration camp.

"My great grandmother was a dancer, dancing was her source of income. She sang and danced on a stage for the Germans; she was very well known for that. She saved her nephews, but her sisters were taken to the concentration camp and killed there".

To save her nephews, Zofia found out they were in a camp with lots of other children. She then arranged a meeting place in the forest nearby, where her husband and her own children would wait, and where she would bring her nephews if she could save them. If she wasn't successful with the rescue and didn't meet him, he was to run away with their family.

Zofia was a very tall woman with blue eyes and fair skin and could speak German fluently. When she went to the camp the Germans took her passport and asked her why she had come. She said she was a German dancer and could dance for them. To prove she was a dancer the German officers set out a plank of wood on top of the tables for her to dance on and because Zofia danced and sang all night for the officers, they believed she was a real dancer. The German officer then told Zofia to return at a set time to collect her passport. When she returned she said she had come to collect her nephews, her brother's children who were in the camp. Knowing she was a great dancer but not knowing she was a Roma woman, the German officers said if the children recognised Zofia then they could leave with her. The children recognised their auntie and were saved, *"She carried one in her arms, one in a scarf on her back and the others walked with her to the forest meeting place"*. After their escape she raised the children as her own family, when her nephews married and had their own families Zofia told them the story of how she had saved them.

Coming to the UK

The family left Poland in 1999 when Rozalia was 19 years old and her son was 3 years old. When they arrived at Heathrow airport, they didn't have any relatives in the UK to help them, didn't know what to do or where to go, and didn't speak any English.

"I remember it very well, 30th of August. It was horrible. We slept in the airport; no one was interested in us, we asked for Asylum and we were asked to wait in the corridor".

After waiting for a long time, with the help of other fellow Roma and an interpreter, they were given documents and taken by bus to a hotel with several other people. The family were then moved to many different areas in East London and after 20 years of living in the UK, they now live in Newham (Manor Park).

Religion is an important part of Rozalia's life, and thanks to another Roma woman who helped her find a local Polish Catholic Church (in Goodmayes), she partakes in regular religious events. Rozalia has had 2 more children (2 daughters) and her son is now married and she is a happy grandmother. She likes her life in the UK and she can now speak and read in English. *"I know that my grandson is going to have a better life when he grows up, he will not be struggling as we did in Poland. They say that Poland has changed for the better but there is still a lot of racism and I don't think that is going to change; I don't think about going back to Poland"*.

Romanipen

Romanipen is about being Roma, Roma laws and belonging to the Roma community. *"If someone gives their word and says that they are following Romanipen, but they don't do it, then the person is not worth anything"*.

Roma language (Romanes) is Romanipen. In Rozalia's family, speaking Romanes is an important way to remember their Roma identity, as they don't want their language to be forgotten. Despite speaking Romanes at home, the children also like to speak English among themselves. 'Gadjo' is a Romanes word that refers to people who are not Roma.

When Rozalia was younger she used to listen to traditional Roma music. Traditional Roma songs are about Roma culture, people's lives, good fortune, respect, music and dancing. Traditionally some Roma sang and danced to earn money and make a living. Rozalia's family used to sing and dance as a way of earning money.

Rozalia ends her story by saying "*Be lucky and healthy and may God be with you*".

Rozalia Glowacka's Photos



Rozalia and her family in the Polish Catholic Church in London ©RSG



November 2018 visit to the family war grave in Poland RSG



Rozalia at home ©RSG



Rozalia with her three children ©RSG