

INTERNEES

Babes behind barbed wire

Rosemarie Dalheim – in her own words

It was a beautiful morning, that first day of May 1942, when I set off to take up my very first job. I was sweet 17 and interned with my parents, brother and two sisters in the married aliens' camp at Port St Mary. I had been offered the job of helping at the camp kindergarten, the wages being the princely sum of five shillings a week. Some months previously, much to my own great, and, no doubt everyone else's surprise, I had matriculated (passed the final school examinations.) Taking the examination and passing it after two years of more or less non-existent schooling, was, indeed, quite an achievement. So now the Commandant's Office and my parents thought it might be a good thing if I



were usefully *The Dalheim family on the Isle of Man, autumn 1942. From left: Rosemarie, Anita, Mr Dalheim, Mrs Dalheim, Gerhard. In front: Anita.*

employed. I was not so sure! I was perfectly happy reading all the books the library could offer, knitting, going for walks within the camp with our landlady's dog, Jock, and weather permitting, spending long

leisurely days on the beach. However, the job was mornings only and five shillings a week was an enormous amount. My brother, who went on the archaeological digs with Dr Bersu, only received three shillings and sixpence a week.

It was a short walk down The Promenade from 'Blair Atholl', where we lived, to the kindergarten, which was held in a large room at the back of Cowley's Café. Beyond that was the barbed-wire boundary. The children were in the enclosed garden playing a ring game and what a merry little group they were! German-born, British-born, Jew and Gentile happily holding hands with each other. The kindergarten was bilingual and some enterprising soul had translated German jingles into English. These were idyllic days and I thoroughly enjoyed myself playing with the little ones.

When the Married Camp moved to Bradda, we joined the Port Erin kindergarten, which was held in the little golf club house at Rowany. This being in the women's camp, every weekday would see me going through the barrier between the camps with my little retinue of toddlers. Staff changes were constant as women were released and for one glorious week, being the 'oldest' inhabitant, I was head of the kindergarten. Then a trained woman was installed and my reign as head teacher was over. When peace was restored to Europe, I went to college (in England) and trained as a primary school teacher.