

Aroundtown Meets. . .

Ursula Sherratt

Our story begins in a Hamburg harbour, with the dust and despair of the Second World War settling around the waters' edge.

A then 22-year-old Ursula Sherratt was on her way to catch a ferry to work one summers' day in '46 when, little did she know, she was to be dealt an exciting hand that would wash away the sadness from her heart and replace it with a much stronger emotion – love.

It was on that fateful day when Ursula wobbled on her bicycle whilst riding over the tracks in the dirt, left by the many war wagons passing through the once-beautiful town.

She toppled over the handle bars and two British soldiers rushed to help her to her feet. One of them was Frank Sherratt – a Rotherham-born soldier who would one day become her soulmate, her husband, her one true love.

Now 92-years-old, we recently met the remarkable Ursula to hear about the toils and triumphs of her life.

Pottering about her Parkgate home, Ursula is far from her years – with a quick wit and smart mind, it is clear to see we are in the midst of a truly noteworthy woman.

As we sit and chat, tales from the past begin to dance through the air.

Born in Hamburg in 1922 to a Jewish mother, Ursula spent her childhood years paved in sorrow.

"It was hard living under the Nazis as a young person. If you had Jewish blood or were not a supporter, you were in a sticky wicket, so to speak," she says.

With years of persecution for her family heritage from the anti-Semitic Nazis – her mother was sent to a concentration camp and a soldier who asked her hand in marriage was sent to the Russian Front and

never heard of again - Ursula says the worst part of it all was seeing the destruction of her beloved hometown.

She relives in detail the utter annihilation caused by the Allied air raids – with soldiers and civilians all fleeing for sanctuary as the city crumbled before them.

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"Everyone was fleeing somewhere, it was chaotic. I can't begin to describe it," she says.

After the destruction caused by Operation Gomorrah which killed 42,000 people, Ursula lost almost everything, including her home.

"I literally had one pair of shoes and two dresses."

But her knight in khaki brown Battledress was to rescue her from devastation.

After the bicycle incident, Ursula made her way onto the ferry as normal for a day at work. But after catching his eye, Frank waited and



waited for this mysterious girl to return.

"He must have waited all day as there was a ferry every hour and he wouldn't be sure which I was on," she says.

And so he waited.

"Oh! The embarrassment I felt when he came up and asked me if I was okay. I said to him, 'Yes I'm fine thank you.' But he walked with me.

"The looks I got. I was so nervous," she says.

Fraternising with the enemy was

simply prohibited. Although the war was just over, it was still very much frowned upon to be seen speaking with a British soldier.

"You would be tarred and feathered if they caught you," Ursula says. The most inhumane humiliation for the simplest human task.

A few days later, Frank waited again for Ursula to step off the ferry in the harbour, but this time he plucked up the courage to ask her to join him at the pictures.

"He had to smuggle me into the cinema. You see after the war finished, the British took over the whole city. And therefore, the cinema was for Brits only. But he got me in all the same," she says.

The couple began clandestine meetings in fear of retribution from the strict policies. German girls were classed as cheap if they were to even bat one eyelid at a Tommy.

"It was nothing like courtship. We couldn't walk down the street arm-in-arm, no way," she says.

But for Ursula, she says it filled her with a sense of adventure.

Frank took Ursula to army dances where she kept her identity unknown, but as she says, you can't keep a secret all too long.

After falling pregnant with their



Family Times on the Beach

son Lawrence in 1946, the couple faced an almighty uproar from everyone around them. The nurses demanded the baby be given up for adoption and when the baby was passed back to the new mother, one cried: "Here's your little Tommy."

The ultimate insult which spat their disgust.

But as she says: "Love doesn't know borders."

Frank was demobbed in 1948 and returned home to Rotherham. Although he sent letters every day with packages of Yardley Lavender Soap and her favourite perfumes, the reality was harsh.

After endless form-filling and striving to be reunited with her

beloved Frank, Ursula was finally allowed to move to the UK in 1949.

"Things were very different back then, the rules and regulations were completely different. You couldn't just work anywhere, you had to start in either domestic or nursing," she says.

And so, determined to stay, Ursula worked for two years at Rotherham Hospital.

After spending so many years in the surroundings of the harbour, Ursula says she found it hard to adapt to the small town of Rotherham.

"I felt somewhat tied when I first came, it took me a while to find my feet. The world is only small for so many people. But I loved freedom and I needed to be out there," she says.

Arriving in Parkgate when industry ran strong through its veins, Ursula saw the stark contrast between the thick smog-filled air from the steelworks, blackening the surroundings of her new home and the tranquil marina back in the shipping docks of Hamburg.

But after starting work as a sales representative for Joseph Peck department store, Ursula found her love of Yorkshire after learning to drive and taking to the road extensively.

Passing through the great Yorkshire countryside, she says she was in heaven.

"I saw so much beauty. I know more about Yorkshire than people born here," she laughs.



Ursula and Frank

Although she now cherishes the amount of friends she says she is so lucky to have, Ursula tells us how the first two decades spent in Rotherham were tough.

"I had a lot of heartache to overcome, a lot of bearing. But there was still a lot of stigma attached to me. So many people are often quick to judge – but you never know what story is behind someone.

"People are people whatever their nationality. And they will still hurt you if they wish to," she says.

But as she says, she is so very proud to have the friends that she does.

The couple spent many a happy year touring their beloved Yorkshire and attending various events with the Fellowship Frank belonged to.

After spending his remaining working years down the pits and as a council caretaker, Frank suffered a series of medical setbacks and poor health – but as always, he had his darling Ursula by his side. She says she nursed him for many years through the hard times.

To give herself a break from the constant pain of seeing her husband ill, Ursula joined a local writing class at Dearne Valley College. It was here she began to pen her thoughts, winning an award for a poem she wrote about her Frank's deterioration.

More than a decade since her husband passed away, Ursula says she has adjusted to life without him, but she still misses him every day.

After finding her love of words, Ursula penned her story, Pain and Prejudice – with the book reliving the highs and lows of her life.

"I only wrote what I wanted. I have so many painful memories, there were simply some things I just couldn't write," she says.

But after hearing for ourselves how she rose from despair like a phoenix from the ashes, it is quite simply very humbling and heart-warming to meet such an inspiring lady.

She finishes on a word that truly touches our hearts.

"Older people are often overlooked in life. But we are the last of our generation who can relay the stories of those days. "

Ursula: Pain and Prejudice by Ursula Sherratt, is available in paperback as a special post-free readers' offer, price £7.99, from the publishers, Léonie Press. Please send cheques payable to Leonie Press to 13 Vale Road, Hartford, Northwich, Cheshire CW8 1PL

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Ursula and Frank



Ursula and Lawrence

