

Rudolph Graichen RG-50028.0101

Summary of Interview

Rudolph Graichen was born in 1925 in Lucka, 20 miles southwest of Berlin, Germany. Father: Alfred Graichen; from Lutheran background. Mother: Teresa Graichen; from Catholic background. Siblings: older brother and twin sister.

Rudolph's parents became Jehovah's Witnesses before he was born. In February 1933, Rudolph recalled enjoying a slide presentation by Jehovah's Witnesses called *The Photo-Drama of Creation* at a packed theatre. After Adolf Hitler came to power, Jehovah's Witnesses were banned and the Bible House in Magdeburg (the Witnesses' German branch office) was occupied by the Nazis. Rudolph's father moved all of the Witness literature they had to a hiding place in the garage of a family who were favourable to the Witnesses. The family home was searched for Witness literature at least ten times but none was found since his father had hidden it successfully.

In 1936, Witness children were routinely taken away from their parents and put into reform schools, so Rudolph and his sister were sent to a reform school 25-30 miles from their home to be educated as Nazi Hitler Youths. Later, Rudolph and his sister were placed with a German couple, Emil Kürsten and his wife, until they completed their basic schooling. Rudolph was then apprenticed to learn the trade of harness maker, while his sister found work as a domestic servant in a doctor's home. In September 1937, the Gestapo arrested Rudolph's father and he was imprisoned in Ichtershausen in Thüringen (Thuringia), 20 miles from Weimar. He was allowed to write one letter 15 lines long each month to his family. Rudolph was arrested in 1942 at 17, but could not be tried until he turned 18 six months later. Once he reached 18, he was tried in Gera in Thüringen and sentenced to four years in prison. There was a "special court" that dealt with Jehovah's Witnesses. The Witnesses were not allowed to quote scriptures from the Bible in their defence nor did they have legal representation. In prison, Rudolph was eventually transferred to the shoe repair shop which was run by a kind man who gave Rudolph extra food and shoes.

Rudolph's mother was also arrested in December 1942, and in 1943 she was sentenced to one and a half years in prison. After serving that time, she was offered the opportunity to be released from prison if she signed a document renouncing her beliefs; she refused to sign the document so was sent to Ravensbrück concentration camp. Rudolph later heard that she died of typhoid shortly before the war ended. Rudolph's brother never became one of Jehovah's Witnesses and later died as a soldier on the Russian front while Rudolph was still in prison.

When the war ended in 1945, Rudolph, then 19, was released from prison and walked 70 miles to his grandmother's home. German civilians fed and housed displaced people and refugees returning home. Rudolph's father had been released in 1943 but died shortly afterwards.

Between 1945 and 1950 under Communism, Jehovah's Witnesses were recognized as a religious organisation and were free to share their faith and literature with others. Many people became Jehovah's Witnesses in what later became East Germany because they were looking for a hope for the future. Rudolph was a special pioneer (full-time preacher of Jehovah's Witnesses) in a congregation made up of many elderly German WWII survivors. They would invite the public to large public meetings using large placards and printed handbills. Paper was rationed so Rudolph sought permission from a young Russian

commandant to get paper to print placards and invitations. This commandant was very friendly because he saw that Jehovah's Witnesses had not supported the Nazi regime.

In 1950, the Witnesses' freedom came to an end. The Communist government banned and arrested many Jehovah's Witnesses. Throughout East Germany Jehovah's Witnesses were arrested by the East German *Stasi*. Rudolph was arrested in late August 1950 and condemned to four years in solitary confinement in Brandenburg Penitentiary. In September 1950, the Magdeburg facility was again occupied by the police, and the Witnesses working there were taken into police custody and then also sent to Brandenburg. In spite of strict security, Witnesses were able to smuggle a pocket-sized Bible into the penitentiary, which was then divided into many parts to make hiding it easier. To share the smuggled Bible with one another, the Witness prisoners would hide pages from the Bible in their towels and then swap towels when in the shower changing room. In this way, Rudolph was able to secretly read portions of the Bible. Rudolph prayed to God for protection and guidance on how to hide the Bible pages from the guards. Penitentiary guards were as brutal as the Nazis had been. Many prisoners died from tuberculosis. Rudolph was imprisoned in a total of 10 different prisons before he was released.

After Rudolph finished his prison sentence, he escaped to West Germany where he was housed by a Witness family in Berlin for two months while his papers were processed. The government provided him with money for food and accommodation.

Looking back, Rudolph felt he was protected by God when he was mistreated and helpless to defend himself. He felt it was a privilege to know that God is interested in his integrity to Him and wants to help us when we are under pressure by the Devil and his supporters especially since all the Jehovah's Witnesses had to do was to sign a document renouncing their faith in order to be released. Rudolph's hope in God's promise of the resurrection gave him a hope and strength to endure. Even under the Communists, Rudolph felt that his faith in God's promise of the restoration of a paradise earth by God's Kingdom was not in vain.

Keywords and Subjects:

Topical Term

Bibelforscher

Communism

Conscientious objector

Declaration of renunciation

Holocaust survivors

Hiding literature (Germany)

International Bible Students

Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witnesses--Bible House (Germany)

Jehovah's Witnesses--Memorial of Christ's death

Jehovah's Witnesses--The Photo-Drama of Creation

Nazi Hitler Youth

Political neutrality

Stasi (East Germany)

Geographic Name

Brandenburg (Penitentiary) (Germany)

Ichtershausen (Germany)

Ravensbrück (Concentration camp) (Germany)

Thüringen (Thuringia) (Germany)

Magdeburg (Germany)