

Magdalena (Kusserow) Reuter

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Interviewer: Robert Buckley

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Magdalena Reuter was born in a city of the Mediterranean Spain but, about 50 years ago, her peaceable existence and that of her family came to an end not due to her race or nationality but because of her religious beliefs. Hitler persecuted them for being Jehovah's Witnesses. Magdalena herself spent 4 years in Ravensbruck, where 2 brothers were put to death and another one succumbed soon after liberation. Magdalena's was a happy family of 6 brothers and 5 sisters. Magdalena was the 8th child. Frank, the father, fought for Germany during WWI. At the end of the war, the family became followers of Jehovah's Witnesses, abandoning Protestantism. Father was injured in the war, and therefore retired early from his clerkship at the Post Office. That gave him the chance to move to Bad Lippspringe in 1931 in order to spread his new religion. Family was very united, religion occupied an important part in their lives. Every child learned an instrument, and also delved in art and crafts.

In 1936, someone informed the Gestapo about the family's religion, and the father was taken to jail for a few months. He was released but taken in again, with his whole family, in 1940. The children were convinced God will save them. Brother Wilhelm was shot in 1940 in Munster for refusing to go to the front, and another brother, Wolfgang, was decapitated two years later. Paderborn was the first prison Magdalena stayed in, then in Bielefeld. She was but 17. At the end of her imprisonment, she was offered freedom if she chose to renounce her religion. Since she refused, she spent 2 more months in prison and, upon turning 17, she was sent to Ravensbruck. Her parents and another sister were also given extended prison sentences. The sight of the crematorium, where they were "burning Jews and Poles."

The Jehovah's Witnesses were a very cohesive, supporting group. Reuniting with Magdalena's mother and sisters in the camp. Life and work in the camp. The Witnesses were known for not trying to escape and therefore they were given jobs outside the camp, in the private homes of the German officers or in children's nurseries to where they arrived unescorted. The massage therapist of Himmler, a Dr. Hersen (Felix Kersten) who had an estate nearby, convinced him to give him some prisoners as shoemakers, carpenters, etc, whom he needed to work in his home. Magdalena says he was inspired by pity. Himmler obliged, and about 20-30 Witnesses ended up working for him. He lived in Sweden and took one of the Witnesses as house maid. De Gaulle's niece was imprisoned in the camp, and they spoke to her much about their religion.

Magdalena was offered her freedom if she renounced her faith, but not only she did not (and therefore stayed in the camp) but the group managed to make converts to their faith among the camp inmates.

Ravensbruck was liberated by the Russians in the first days of May 1945.

Liberation. They were in hiding for 6 months afterwards until they were finally reunited with the family.

Since liberation, Magdalena continued her missionary work for Jehovah's Witnesses around the world.