

## **RG-50.030.1065**

### **Summary**

Ruth Meissner (Karlsberg) was born on May 8, 1925 in Hamburg, Germany into an upper-middle - class family. Her parents had been born in Hamburg and her grandparents, while now living in Hamburg, were born in other parts of Germany. Her mother, Ilse Mathilde (Heilbrun), was born in 1900 and her father, Bernard Karlsberg, was born in 1899. Having received a Ph.D. in economics he worked for the Cunard lines. Ruth also had an older sister (Rahel) and a younger brother (Walter). The family were atheists, though Ruth's mother's family were more observant. She grew up in a very political household. Both parents were communists, though her father would leave the party because of his dislike of Stalin. Her grandmother on her mother's side lived nearby, but her maternal grandfather had already died. Her paternal grandparents also lived in her neighborhood. Ruth's father had a sister and a brother. The sister's family and brother's wife and children emigrated to Palestine before the war, but his brother died before in Hamburg. Her mother's brother and sister made their way to France and eventually to the United States during the war. All three of her grandparents were later killed in Sobibor; her mother was killed in Auschwitz after having spent a few years in Theresienstadt. Ruth and her siblings survived the war.

Ruth experienced one year under Hitler in Germany. School became more difficult and some friends no longer played with her. But in 1934 her father sent the children to a children's home in Switzerland to escape the Nazis. After he was told that he was about to be arrested, her father also went to Switzerland and then to Amsterdam. Ruth's mother stayed in Hamburg with the grandparents. After nine months her mother took the children to Prague (Ruth was 10). She was happy in Prague, but in 1937 the family went to join Ruth's father in Amsterdam. Her grandparents later joined them. It was not a happy reunion, since her mother and father did not get along. Ruth's father did not want to emigrate since he believed the Netherlands would be treated as neutrals. But when the Nazis invaded, he went into hiding. Her mother, grandparents, and a family friend, Hannah, stayed behind. The children were sent to a Zionist camp, Wieringen, but after almost a year the Nazis came in and deported the young men to Mauthausen. Ruth returned to Amsterdam to be with Hannah. Her brother and sister (with her husband) hid elsewhere. By then, her mother had been taken by the Nazis back to Germany and then to Theresienstadt. In May 1943 Ruth was captured and sent to Westerbork. After several months she was able to escape and return to Amsterdam in September 1943 with the help of Hannah, with whom she later stayed, and the Dutch underground. Since Hannah was only half Jewish she was left alone by the authorities. Ruth lived out the war with Hannah. Ruth's father, brother and sister also survived in hiding, but her grandparents were deported and murdered. Ruth believed that the Dutch response was at best mixed. Dutch civil servants cooperated with the Nazis, Dutch police helped roundup Jews, and Dutch civilians sometimes turned over Jews. On the other hand, some Dutch civilians helped rescue Jews. After the war, Ruth and her sister emigrated to the United States with the help of her mother's sister. Her father and Hannah married and stayed in Amsterdam, as did Ruth's brother. Looking back, Ruth felt extremely lucky and beholden to the gentile Dutch who helped her. She also said that she never discussed her experiences with her children nor others until recently.