

Summary of Oral History: Ruth Gold Rontal

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This Summary was written by a USHMM Volunteer on [04/2022]

Ruth Gold Rontal b. 8/16/1920 Esslingen am Neckar, Germany, two sisters, parents from Austrian Empire, owned chain of stores; discussion on Esslingen's Jewish life, included Jewish orphanage; Ruth, only Jew in an all-German school, witnessed classmates trained for the Army; enduring anti-Semitism; parent's arrest SS, father's stores shut down, 1933 Ruth/sisters forbidden to attend school; since father had earned Iron Cross WW1, parents released, Ruth allowed back in school but "only as a guest," according to Ruth and not allowed to speak to people on street. Her father died in 1937. WW1 wounds; one sister does not return to school, educated privately; then leaves for Palestine. Ruth assists with younger sister. In 1938, Ruth negotiates mother's release from the SS. In 1939, she had to flee to Berlin. Her mother sells the house to obtain papers to Palestine. Ruth wants to say goodbye to friends in Poland and was captured at Poland's border (Mother & little sister allowed to cross). On 9/1/1939, Ruth was imprisoned then released at the border. She was not taken into the firing line, but allowed through barbed wire to cross. She had a long walk to Krakow in the winter of 1940. She struggled to find work, but eventually found work as a maid where she is mistreated & leaves. She finds work in an upscale restaurant. Her harrowing experience fleeing SS invasion of a home where she had been assigned to work "Everyone else in home was shot"; discussion SS killings in three Krakow ghettos, seeing "one dying person after another....truckload of naked bodies"; witnessing one of the Judenrat give up his life rather than give up another Jew; by speaking fluent German & knowing SS patrons of restaurant, Ruth able to thwart arrest and also get some Jews released. Ruth had sewn jewelry into her clothing that also assisted survival; 1943 claustrophobic cattle car transport to Auschwitz; Dr. Mengele selection, stripped naked, shaved, women taken to showers but received no shower. Then led by the fires of the crematory before entering barracks; given Dutch wooden shoes but rubbed feet, so Ruth used smuggled in needles/scissors to make shoes from blanket. Ruth has opportunity to save her life, but offered to friend who rejected but later learn friend survived the war; late Fall 1943 while sick, enduring freezing cattle car transport to slave labor working on telephone equipment, also build houses/roads; starvation, having to steal dog food from farm; enduring bombings at Ravensbruck, liberated by Russians, prisoners told they could go into town, "take whatever they want," so Ruth obtains change of clothing then collapses in front of German hospital, wakes up to clean sheets, hospitalized for typhoid; discussion re: "organized revenge" on Germans in "the forest and in dugged tunnels," Ruth's sisters and brother survive the war and settle in Israel; Ruth returns to discussing restaurant where she saved people and her helpful skill as a German speaker but also refers to a survival technique "chutzpah"; Ruth and husband Cantor Moses Rontal have two children Rubin (Robyn) & Ben (Sherry) Rontal; Ruth discloses that she endured beatings in the Holocaust; Ruth's final thought in interview - "We must share our blessings with each other."