

The following is an interview with Ruth Dahl Greifer. The interview is being conducted on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum on December 15, 1994 by Gail Schwartz.

Could you give us your full name, please?

Ruth Dahl Greifer.

And where were you born?

I was born in Geilenkirchen, Germany.

And when were you born?

May 30, 1922.

Who made up your family that you lived with?

My mother, my father, my brother, sister, and myself.

And what were your parents' names. My dad's name is Isidor Dahl. And my mother's name was Sophia Dahl, but her maiden name was Beesman.

And where did they come from?

Well, Mother was born in Holland, and Dad was born in Germany.

Where in Germany?

In Geilenkirchen.

And what kind of work did he do?

Oh, my father was a cattle dealer. I lived in a small town. And most of the Jewish people were cattle dealers. There was a couple butchers. There was a painter. We had a wonderful synagogue. We had even a rabbi, Mr. Fulman. And he had a wife and a couple of children. And it was a very warm Jewish community.

About how large was the town?

That I don't know. I don't remember.

Where was it near?

It's in the Rhineland. It's near Aachen. And it was a small community. And the Jewish community was small, but large enough to provide us with a wonderful synagogue. In fact, the synagogue had an apartment for caretaker. And it was orthodox.

My father would go to minyan in the morning. And my father would go to minyan in the evening. And Mother kept a kosher home. And I remember sitting upstairs with the women, and men were downstairs in our synagogue. And during the high holidays my father would go to synagogue with a top hat on. And I think-- I don't remember-- what if he wore a tuxedo or not, but I remember the top hat.

And how much religious training did you have?

Oh, I went to Sunday school, absolutely. I went to Sunday school on Sunday morning and on Tuesday afternoons after school. And when I moved here, I could read and write Hebrew, which I was amazed that a lot of the women here did not.

And what was the name of your siblings?

Oh, my brother's name-- he was the oldest one. He's 11 years older than I am. His name was Carl. And my sister's name was Edith.

And was she younger or older?

No, eight years older. I'm the baby in the family.

You're the baby in the family.

Right.

What kind of neighborhood do you live in?

Oh, we had a beautiful home. We lived in a beautiful home. In fact, at that time when-- I can tell people that we had a car. I remember the car had to be cranked up in the morning. I remember we had a telephone. We had full-time help in the house living in all the time. And we had a coal heat that would heat up the whole house. So we lived in a lovely home.

Was it in a Jewish neighborhood?

No. No. There was no such thing as a Jewish neighborhood. Yes, we did have one Jewish family three doors over. And here again, he dealt with horses. And he had a chicken farm and lovely, just a lovely family, the Lichtensteins. And that family is no longer. In fact, the little girl was eight years old when she was taken away. And now, they have named a school after her in this little German town.

So your neighbors were not Jewish--

Oh, no, no, no, no--

--except for this family. And as a young child, you played with non-Jewish children?

All the time. I have a couple of Jewish friends that I played with that were my close friends. But I'm the only one that has survived. None of my Jewish friends have survived.

And tell me about your schooling.

Oh, I went--

You began at which school?

I went to private school. My father was able to that we went to an Ursuline academy. And we went to private school. It was Ursuline academy. It was run by the Catholic nuns. But that was the best school in town. And my father-- my sister and myself, we also went to--

And how did you feel as a young Jewish child going to a Catholic school?

Fine. I didn't feel any different than anybody else. When they had religious classes, I would go and do something else, help the nuns with photography or anything. I didn't stay in. It didn't bother me. I was raised among Catholics. It didn't

bother me.

So you never experienced any uncomfortable incidents as a child?

Not until Hitler came.

Yeah, as a child.

Right, absolutely.

With your neighbors and with your school friends?

Oh, yes, everything was very, very, very fine.

And do you remember if your father, when you were young, if your father expressed any problems in business being a Jew?

No.

No.

No, no, he dealt-- my father dealt mostly with either butchers or farmers. And, no, there was nothing. It was all very well.

And you went to Ursuline Academy until what age?

Until we moved to Holland.

Oh, OK, so that's where you stayed.

Right.

And you said you came from an observant home?

Oh, yes, very. My mother was very kosher.

Did you have any hobbies as a young girl?

Yes, I played the piano. I played by ear. I started playing when I was very young. And I took piano lessons. But after the war, I've never gone back. I just wasn't in any mood. Barney even bought me a piano, but it has never materialized. I don't want to play.

Any other hobbies that you have--

--no--

As a child?

No.

Were you interested in sports?

Well, we did sports during Hitler time. There were some of these young men that took the youth together and did sports with us. But otherwise no. No sports.

Were you a member of any youth groups with--

No. No. Our town was too small. I would have had to go to a different town. Aachen had youth groups. But I was too young for that at the time.

So you had a very pleasant child.

Oh, yes.

Did you have extended family in town? Grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins?

Yes, I had one aunt and uncle. The uncle was in business with my dad. And that's about it.

So you had cousins that you would be with?

No, they were all older than I was. They were more my sister's age. I was the youngest one.

Right.

I'm pretty much the youngest one in our family.

Do you remember holiday celebrations?

Oh, absolutely. Hanukkah I remember. Passover I remember. Oh, yes, my mother and dad were very observant. And we celebrated wonderfully, absolutely. This was great.

Did your mother work?

No. No, my mother never worked. My mother worked before she got married. My mother learned to be a modista. That means she had she learned to make hats. And she went out of town to learn to make hats. And then she had a store on her own. And she would tell us stories about her store. In olden days when people would get married, they had a trousseau made of hats. And then when we were sick in bed, she would give us the cards that these brides would send her and thank her for all the beautiful stuff that she had made. And she let us play with those cards. I remember that.

Were you a healthy child?

Yes. Yes.

So things went along quietly and calmly until 1933?

That's right. My brother--

What's the first change that you remember that life was a little different?

It started out in 1933. And I think that when Hitler came to power, at that time I remember my mother had to go to the hospital with an appendectomy.

You were 11 years old now?

Yes. And, well, things didn't go very fast in '33. Nothing really happened. I was still going to school. My father still did his business. It was just in the later years, you know, that they began to extinguish between the Jews and the non-Jews. And I remember going to school. So they let me go to school when other kids that were not in my school would spit at me, because I was a Jew. They would call me dirty Jew, and they would spit on me. Well, you don't do anything. You

just keep on walking. You don't do very much.

Do you remember being very frightened when that would happen?

No. I don't think so, because you have to be strong. And I was not frightened. No. Not at all. You just go through it this like nothing happens.

What language did you speak--

German--

At home?

Yes.

And what subjects did you study in school?

Oh, everything. Languages. I remember our first foreign language was French. And then a couple of years later English. And English was always much easier for me than the French language. It almost came just like a natural language. So I was very fortunate that way.

All right, now to get back, it was 1933. And you started to say, when I asked you when did you first notice the changes that your father had gone in for an appendectomy--

No, that was my mother.

I'm sorry, your mother.

But the first change--

Why do you remember that?

Because that was the time I think when Hitler came to power.

Oh, I see. But did she get good treatment?

Oh, yes.

So there wasn't a problem because she was Jewish?

No. No, she went to Catholic hospital, which was just a few doors down. And the nuns were absolutely wonderful to my mother. In fact, they always came to visit in our house. So they got along very well.

Well, one of the first things that we saw was when one morning my father had a plaque on the door with his name and his profession on there. It was shattered. And I think that might have been the time that they told us that he couldn't do his business anymore. Well, once you had forbidden to have an income, you have to look to go somewhere else.

Well, since my mother was born in Holland and her family still lived in Maastricht, we were able to move to Holland.

Now, what year are we talking about?

1938. Spring 1938.

OK, let's do a little bit between 1933 and 1938 before you move. Any other memories of that time? But do you know

when your father's business was ended?

That was probably 1938, because we were able to--

So your father stayed--

Well, we all stayed.

No, I meant stayed in business until--

Oh, yes, absolutely.

And you went to school?

Mm, hmm.

And you stayed at the Ursuline academy.

Right.

Any other incidents that you remember besides children spitting at you?

No, not really.

And the attitude of the nuns toward you did not change?

No. No. They were absolutely wonderful.

So life for you went on until 1938?

Pretty much, yes. Right.

OK. Did you ever hear your parents talking about Hitler?

No, not really. Maybe they're talking, but I wasn't aware.

You weren't aware of it.

No.

So now you're 16 years old right, and it's 1938.

Right.

And you said your father's business was--

Taken away--

Taken away. Do you remember what he said about that?

No.

Did he tell you anything?

No. No. Not at all.

OK.

At least I don't remember that--

Do you remember being frightened when your father's business was taken away?

No. No. Not at all. I mean, everything went very smooth. We sold our house. We went--

Who did you sell your house to?

The doctor across the street. He bought our house. And the house was absolutely beautiful. And we always had a gardener come in and-- two gardeners, one that shaped the trees and one that would do all the planting. We had vegetables in our yard. And we had every imaginable flowers and fruits. And my father would never let us pick the fruit, because when he came home from work, he wanted to go into the yard and just pick it right off the vine.

Oh, one thing I remember, my mother did a lot of canning, a lot of canning of fresh fruit and vegetables. And all winter long we had fresh vegetables and fruit. And I remember potatoes for the whole winter in the basement.

And something that I do remember, and one doesn't have it here-- you know, you don't have the room. You don't have the space. And--

How big a house was it?

Oh, it was big. The house was above the ground. And we did have a garage. And we had room for cows in the wintertime. And we had a nut tree--

Cows in the basement you mean?

No, cows on the side, next to the garage. No.

In a barn?

No, it was all made out of brick. It was quite sturdy.

So your house was made out of brick?

Oh, absolutely, absolutely. We walked up the stairs. And then we went into the foyer. And the foyer was made out of mosaic. And the kitchen floor was made out of mosaic. And I remember then I would walk on stilts. And the maid had scrubbed it. And it was so shiny. And then I fell.

We had a living room, big kitchen with two tables. And we had another room where the seamstress used to come and sew. And we had one room where we never went in. Only the piano and the real good furniture were there.

And then upstairs, we had how many bedrooms? Probably three or four. And then upstairs, we had an attic and a room where the maid slept.

So you were considered very upper class?

Pretty much. Yeah, yeah, a very nice living. My mother, after she got married, she never worked.

OK, your father's business you said was taken away.

Right.

He sold the house. And then what happened?

Then we moved to Holland.

Because your mother's family was there.

Well, we had an entrance because Mother had been Dutch. It was easier for us to get in than--

[PHONE RINGING]

You said you had no problems getting papers to go into--

Holland, because Mother had been Dutch. And we rented a house.

How did you get from one place to another?

Well, we just rented a furniture truck. I mean a moving van. And I remember it was small. It just kept going back and forth. I don't even know how we got all this furniture in that little house.

Did you did you travel in the truck yourself?

No.

How did you get--

I guess my dad drove us.

You drove--

Yeah. My dad.

And there was no problem--

--no--

--with papers?

No.

And what town in Holland did you--

Valkenburg.

And where it that?

It's a little summer resort town in-- well, it's near Maastricht. And I tell you nobody ever hears about these little towns I come from. Anyway, it was also a small town. But my dad absolutely had to start business all over again, which was very hard, because he wasn't that young anymore. He had to start with new clients and new-- just can you imagine at his age to have to start a new business? But, you know, when you have to do things, you're very strong. And when there's a will, there's a way.

We had a Jewish neighbor there next door. He lived two doors over. He also had come in from Germany. And he also

was a cattle dealer. But everybody did their own thing. They were not in business together.

Let's back up a little bit. When you had to leave your town, did you say goodbye to your friends?

No, not the Catholic friends. The Jewish friends, yes.

Do you remember feeling upset that you had to leave?

How was I--

16.

I guess so. I mean, look, you had to go. There was no way that we could stay in Germany. So I don't really remember this. Yes, it was sad, but--

Were you frightened?

No. No, because I was used to going to Holland, because--

Had you been there before?

Yes. My grandfather lived in Maastricht with my grandmother and two maiden aunts. And we would go on weekends, like in our Sunday morning, we would get in the car and visit with grandma and grandpa and my aunts, stayed there for dinner, and come home. And that was a natural for us. I mean, we were used to going to Holland. And when I was little, I would go on vacation and stay with my grandparents and my two maiden aunts in Maastricht. And for me, it was just nothing special.

Did you tell the nuns you were leaving?

Yes.

What did they say?

They would have liked to go with us because they felt just as unsafe as we did. And, oh, yes, they would have loved to go to Holland. But at that time to go to Holland, it was like a haven. It was a safety, not knowing that they came after us. But at that time, for us, it was haven. And for us to go to Holland, we used to going to Holland.

Were you a witness to any anti-Semitic incidents in Germany? Not to yourself, you said you didn't.

No.

You didn't even witness anything on the street? Or in school?

No. No.

OK, now you're in the town in Holland.

Right. It's another small town. And--

Where was your father's family at that point?

My father's family in 1938-- all 11 of them, OK.

You tell us a little bit about your father's family.

OK, my father came of a family of 11. 2, 4, 6-- um, seven brothers, there were seven brothers and four sisters. And one died, Wilbert, died of a natural death. He just got sick. I don't remember what he died of. But he died in Germany of a natural death.

The others were all still in Germany. My father always said, I've never done anything. I'm an honest citizen. He was in World War I. He was a soldier. I don't want to leave. He absolutely did not want to leave. And none of them wanted to leave. They were all very-- they were merchants. None of these people ever went to college or school. In fact, my father only had a seventh grade education. He had to go to work, because he was an orphan at that time already.

And very few left Germany because why should we leave? We haven't done anything. And we'll just stay. There was only one aunt-- she was a widow, because her husband got killed in World War I. She and three of her children went to Brazil. And that is really one of the few families that stayed intact because they left Germany.

So your father was now in this town. And he had to start up a new business.

Right.

What did he do?

Well, I don't know if he never conferred with us. He started to do business as a cattle dealer. I don't know if he had friends, if he went with somebody. But he made a living.

What month in 1938 did you get there?

Spring.

Spring of '38.

Yes. And in the meantime, my sister had gotten married. She stayed in Germany. My brother came to Holland. And he lived with us part time. And he lived with my maiden aunts at the time. And my sister got married just before we left Germany. And she stayed in Germany with her husband in Duren-- D-U-R-E-N.

Did you see any German soldiers on the street in Germany?

Not in 1938 I didn't see anything. Well, you saw the Hitler Youth and you saw the SS and you saw the SR. And I couldn't participate in anything, absolutely. But--

Did you have friends who were in the Hitler Youth?

Absolutely, yes.

And what were they like to you?

Well, they wouldn't look at me anymore. They just would not look at me any more.

These were people who had been friends--

Yes, that I used to play with.

And how did you feel about that?

Well, I was hurt. But I couldn't-- I mean, if they tell you, you can't play with somebody, you just don't go. You just don't play with anybody. I had my little Jewish friends to play with. And we were the first ones to leave because of my dad's

business. And that's why-- none of these people left Germany, and that's why none of these people survived. I'm the only one that survived.

OK. So your father started up this business.

Business, right.

And did you go to school?

Yes, I did go to school.

What kind of school did you go to?

Just a regular--

Public--

Public school. And that was in 1938, spring 1938. That was before Kristallnacht.

Right.

And--

The summer came.

Well, the summer came. I went to school. And then at Kristallnacht was when they took all the Jewish men in Germany. Right. They took my brother-in-law to Dachau. And my sister was all alone at that time. The only good thing was that my brother-in-law had blood relatives in America, whom they had been in contact with. And they started to work on papers to get my brother-in-law and my sister out of Germany.

My brother spoke English. And he and the family here in Brooklyn worked on the papers and got them ready just before the war broke out. This is one of the few cases that I have heard that the Germans let a person leave the concentration camp to come to America. And this happened to my brother-in-law. They let--

What was his name?

Rudy Rose. And they let him out of Dachau to come to the United States.

How did you know about Kristallnacht?

Well, the family kept in touch, because we had all these brothers and sisters in Germany. And--

What did you feel like when you heard about it?

Well, it wasn't absolutely dreadful. One of my aunts lived in Solingen. And this is where my grandmother was at the time. They destroyed-- the SS or whoever came in the house destroyed everything in the house. There was not a chair to sit on. There was not a cup to drink out of. They destroyed everything. But when they came to my grandmother's bedroom, they opened the door and saw this old lady, and they closed the door and never touched her or touched that room.

Something else dreadful, my grandmother was 93 years old. And she had sugar diabetes for a long time. But that was old age, which is not very bad. But in the meantime, she developed gangrene in her toes, her foot, whatever it was. And the family got together on the phone and decided that this was not the time to have grandma operated on and have her sitting in a wheelchair. So they decided to let it go and let Grandma die. She was 93 years old.

One thing I remember, though, coming back to grandma, before we left Germany, we had a big, big party in Cologne and celebrated Grandma's 90th birthday.

What was her name?

Her name was Helen. Helena Dahl. And that's one time when I saw my whole family, probably never to see again. But this is when we went to Cologne and celebrated Grandma's birthday.

You were in Holland. And you started school. And it was a public school.

Yes. With non-Jews?

Yes.

Any problem?

No. No problems at all. It was very, very-- well, I had to start a new language, you know.

Did you know any Dutch?

Yeah, I spoke it. I spoke it because I would go and visit with my grandma and grandpa.

And so what do you mean you started a new language?

Well, in school, I had to learn to write it. And don't forget, whatever I did was verbal. And I had to start a new language. But, well--

And the neighborhood was mixed?

The neighborhood was absolutely mixed. We did have a little synagogue on the second floor of a store. And here again, it was orthodox with the men sitting in the front and the women sitting in the back. It was a very nice, but a very small Jewish community, but enough to have a little synagogue. And--

Then Kristallnacht happened and you heard--

That they had taken my brother-in-law away.

And then what? What was the next change?

Let me think what happened to Kristallnacht to other people. How we doing? OK, let me get my thought together.

We were talking about what happened in Kristallnacht.

Well, that was in Germany. Let me go back to Holland. Since we moved there, everything went very smooth. I had my two maiden aunts living in Maastricht, which is another city close to where we lived in Valkenburg. And my brother lived with us. And he spent time with my aunts, because they were by themselves.

Until May 10, 1940, that's one morning, we woke up--

All of 1939--

Nothing happened. I mean everything was fine.

You led a normal--

Led normal life.

Did you have any contact with your friends back home in Germany?

We had contact with the family.

But not with your friends?

No. No. We did have contact with the family, some that left Germany. And everybody that left Germany came through Holland, came to our house, and visited with us. Our house was like a haven for people that went from one place to another. And--

Did you feel bad about being in touch with friends from Germany?

No. No. I don't know. Not really, not really.

Did you have any social life in Germany? Any boyfriends?

No.

You didn't?

No. No.

So you weren't leaving anybody you cared for?

No. Nobody. No. If you were raised by a father like mine, you don't date till you are 18. I was not allowed to date till I was 18 years old. And I remember not be able-- when we live in Holland, there was a dance. And my father wouldn't let me go, not even with my brother. I wasn't 18 years. Very strict house.

So 1939 was relatively quiet.

Yes.

And your father was able to conduct business.

Right. And I went to school.

And you went to school.

Well, till May 10, 1940.

And what was the first--

We got up very early in the morning, 5 o'clock in the morning. And the sky was dark, dark with airplanes that had come, and the Germans were coming in and trying to overrun Holland, which they did in five days. I remember the soldiers walking down our street.

German soldiers.

German soldiers. My mother was in the hospital in Maastricht. My mother had angina. And she was there for her heart condition. And they sent her home, because they needed the room for their own soldiers that got hurt.

The Dutch soldiers?

The German soldiers.

Oh, the German soldiers.

German soldiers. I mean, the German soldiers needed that room and sent anybody that was able to leave the hospital, she had to come home. That was devastating. I mean, here this poor woman that had a heart condition had to come home.

We were scared. We knew what was going to be-- we knew what was coming. And here, we just left Germany in 1938 to be overrun again in 5 days. And that was the most frightening experience-- one of the most frightening experiences in my lifetime.

Where did you stay during those five days?

Oh, we stayed in our-- oh, no, no, no, we had catacombs across the street. And sometimes during those attacks, we stayed in the catacombs. There were people that died in the catacombs. There were babies born in the catacombs. But that was just across the street from our house in the-- there were small mountains.

Holland doesn't have any mountains. And the little town where I used to live, Valkenburg, had the biggest mountain there is in Holland. If you look it up in the dictionary, it's called the Cauberg. I mean you walk up. It's absolutely nothing to it. But it's the biggest mountain in Holland.

And Valkenburg has catacombs. And it's very damp in there.

This was in the mountainside?

In the mountainside, absolutely. And--

So you and your family went in--

--oh, yes--

--when there would be raid?

When there would be raids. We'd just went into the mountains.

Did you take food?

Take food and blankets and all that. And when it was clear, we just went out.

And how long did you stay in there?

Well, Holland was overrun in five days. So it didn't last long.

Did you stay the five days in that--

Not quite. In and out. In and out.

In and out.

In and out, yes. Because we didn't have to stay there. It was just across the street. If we would have lived far away, we

probably would've stayed there for a while. But we stayed.

Anyway, we were very scared. And--

What did you do when you were scared? By this time, you're 18 years old.

18 years old. Well, I was-- you know, I was out of school. And what did we do? I really-- oh, no, no, no, I started to learn to sew. I went to a seamstress and started to learn to sew. That's what I did. Everybody did this because, one didn't know if you had to go to a different country, you couldn't speak the language, at least you had an occupation that you could support yourself, and which I had to do when I came to this country. I was a seamstress.

And that happened to most of my family. Some became cooks. Some became bakers. The girls all became seamstresses, because with the idea that if you had to leave the country that you had somewhere to make a living.

You had graduated from high school?

Yes.

So now, it's those five days. And then what happened?

And, well, nothing happened immediately. But we're here we are in 1940. But things became changed very, very rapidly. We had to go and sign up, I guess--

To register.

To register who were Jews. And so they knew exactly who lived where and how many Jews there were in this little town. Then we had to give up our radios. We had to give up our bicycles.

Were you angry?

Scared. Angry. Why me? Why am I different? I'm not different than anybody else. I think they took my dad's business away again. They gave us stars to wear. And--

Where did you wear your star?

On my left side. And we had to secure the star on every corner, because if a wind would blow, then the star would fall over. And it had to be clear that it had to be secured on every corner of the star.

All six points.

All six points. And--

Did you sew your own stars on?

No, my mother did all that. I didn't do anything. My mother lined it so it would be more sturdy. And then she put all the pins on. I was a spoiled child. I didn't do any of that.

Were you upset to have to wear a star?

Yes. Why would I be different than anybody else. I just didn't want to be different. Why should I be different than everybody else?

Oh, we had curfews. We could not be out in the dark. We could not leave town. We had to stay in town. We couldn't move around.

And it was absolutely frightening. You had no more liberty. You had no more way of earning a living. You were different than everybody else. And scary, very, very scary.

Did you talk this over with your parents?

Yes, we talked about it. But what could we do? There was nothing that we could do. In the meantime, I got postcards from my girlfriends from Germany, who had been taken to concentration camps. And what the postcard always said-- it said only one or two sentences, but the sentences were always the same. So we knew that there were-- if they wanted to write, they were forced to write the same thing.

But we didn't know where they were. There was no address. There was nothing on it. I could never return their postcards. And we were very, very scared and frightened.

A lot of my dad's family was taken to a concentration camp and never heard from again. But these were all older people already, people that didn't want to leave Germany, people that were of means, people that didn't have anywhere to go or never even tried to go anywhere, because they felt that this is where I live and have never done anything wrong, and I don't want to go anywhere. Well, here we are in 1941. And we had all these liberties taken away.

Did you have enough food?

Yes. Yes. That we had. We always had enough food in our house.

How did you get the food? Your father wasn't working.

Imagine we had enough money to buy food. I don't remember what happened to our car. I couldn't tell you that. But we were told to get ready and pack knapsacks for I don't know how many days-- clothing, food, and everything. So when the Germans come to our house that we were ready to be taken away. One--

Who told you this?

The Germans did.

One--

How?

I guess we got notices in the mail probably. It's not all very clear to me anymore. But I do remember one day in 1942-- I think it was about June or July 1942. There was a knock on our door. And they would come to get me. In the meantime, I was sick. I got sick. I don't know how lucky I was that the doctor that we had in Holland told them that I could not be moved. And by a miracle, they let me stay.

I stayed in bed for months at a time putting white powder on my face to tell people that I was sick. I had to be afraid of my neighbors, because some of my Jewish neighbors were taken away. And here I was, as a young girl--

20.

20, in bed. My mother did everything. I would not get out of the bed. My mother took care of the house as sick as she was. And like I said, it's a miracle that they didn't come after me at another time.

But in the meantime, my two maiden aunts were taken away in Maastricht. My brother said, I'm not going to let these ladies go by themselves. They're very frail. They're old. They're absolutely the most wonderful people who never hurt a fly. They were ladies of means. My grandfather was an antique dealer. And I will go with them. He volunteered to go with them not knowing that he was never with them, because I found out later through the Red Cross that as soon as

they came to Auschwitz that they were killed immediately.

But my brother, who was young-- he was 11 years older than I was-- he was sent to a work camp. And I don't know where he died. But I know that he lived through, I guess, work camps, concentration camps till the end. And he died either in Bad Warmbrunn, which I guess is a work camp, or in Auschwitz. I am not sure. But he died of typhoid probably two days before he was liberated. So that was our oldest one in the family.

So here you are in bed with white powder--

With white powder on my face. Another time, they came to get my mother. Well, you should hear the screaming and carrying on, and she was sick. And they did not take her either. I don't know what happened. They must've felt so sorry for us that they let us stay.

People were taken away, and people disappeared. We did not know what happened. My father had a friend in another city, who also was a cattle dealer, and he said-- I don't know how they got together-- he said, how come that people are disappearing? And he said, if you go to the post office, and there is a gentleman, and you ask for his fictitious name, Mr Jansen. You tell him that you want to speak with him.

We had been moved from our single house to a house that had a lot of stores and a lot of rooms. And they put all of us Jewish people there together. So if they had another raid, that they didn't have to go from house to house, that we were just all there. I don't know how they moved me. I don't remember anything. But I remember having been moved to this house where all these store fronts were change into places for us to live.

Well, my father went to Mr. Jansen. And he told us that he could help us, that he would help us to go in hiding if we were willing to. And my father said, anything, anything you can do for us, he did. Well, of course, it was very difficult to find houses, to find places for us to go.

He got in touch with us. It must've been before another transport came. And he had found one place for the three of us. But we never wanted to be together, because if we were found, the whole family would have been destroyed.

The man came to our house at night and got some-- I guess my mother had suitcases ready with a few little things for us to wear. I don't even remember what I wore, what I had. I can't tell you. I really don't remember. But I know that he came the night before or a couple of nights before and picked up a couple suitcases. And he said, yes, he had secured a place for us.

We had to leave early in the morning. I don't remember. We had to go up the hill. But that was during a time that we were not allowed on the street. We had to wear our star. And we walked up the hill where he came with a car and took us away. You left everything. Everything you owned, everything you had, you just left behind, because all you had what you wore and a few things, I guess, clothing that he took.

I remember coming to this place. And it was a coal miner where he wanted us to stay. It was a very small town house. And the person made secure to tell the neighbors that she was getting company for the weekend.

This is 1942?

That's 1942 already.

And what month? Or what time of year?

Oh, this was 19-- I don't if this was already the end of 1942, already 1943.

So it's wintertime.

Wintertime. And, well, everybody was indoors. So they just snuck us into this house. But it was a very small house.

This person was a coal miner. And my father had the hardest time. Having been an outdoor person all his life, it was like you had a lion in a cage. My mother had a terrible time with him, because he had to be quiet. He couldn't speak loud. I guess-- I don't even remember, he was used to smoking. I guess he couldn't smoke-- I don't remember. My mother really had an awful, awful time with him.

But we stayed in this one house-- he stayed-- they stayed in this one house I guess just for a few days until they found somewhere else for them to go. And Mother and Dad-- I really never saw them after that until after the war.

What were your feelings when they had to leave?

Scared, frightened.

What did they say to you when they had to leave?

Well, we cried. We hugged each other. But we had no other choice. You have-- you have no idea how hardened you are during that time. All you do is think about your safety, yourself, that you make it till the end, if there is an end. And you just live from minute to minute, and day to day. You don't know if you get caught while being transported, you don't know if you get caught in the house. If the neighbors would hear something and they would go and squeal on you. You really lived in fright-- you were frightened 24 hours a day at all times.

But so were the people that you stayed with. Don't forget, if they would have found us, they would have killed me. They would have killed them. They would have killed the whole family. And--

Do you remember their names?

No. Absolutely not. That's what frightening about being old. I should have written it down, which I did not. I neglected to do that.

They did give you their names at the time.

Oh, absolutely. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. They knew my name. I knew their name. We lived a normal life. The only thing is I had to fit into this life. I wasn't used to eating rabbits, which were free of ration. And I remember in that particular house, she made rabbit. Just the thought of it coming from a kosher home to eating rabbits. I wouldn't eat it.

And lo and behold, I didn't get anything else. I was hungry. Just smelling this rabbit and looking at it, I couldn't do it. But the next time when she served rabbit, I ate the rabbit, because I was hungry.

We did get rations from the underground. The underground did supply us with rations, which was a big help.

But this one man helped us during the time, all this time, all the time we were in hiding. And if we needed help, he would help us to find another place. And you know that this man never got paid. Never-- he did it all on his own.

This was Mr. Jansen?

Mr. Jansen And he was a single person who lived with-- he had a lady that did his household. And she was in this, because sometimes if you had to go-- we knew where to go. We knew where to go overnight if we needed help.

So I tell you, you were so hardened. You had to live from minute to minute that you don't think. You absolutely don't think. But there was a time another girl came in after--

OK, your parents left and so you're still in that first--

I'm still in that first house. Then he needed the room for somebody else.

Your room, he needed you room?

No, he needed to-- I was there, and then he brought another single girl in. You know, sometimes you don't have places. And so there were two of us. But the people didn't like this girl. She was not clean. She was not friendly. She just didn't fit in. And before we knew it, they asked her to leave.

This was a Jewish girl?

Jewish girl from Amsterdam, absolutely. I stayed there for a while. And it was hard. The air raids started to come in. And every time there was an air raid, we had to be fully dressed, fully ready to leave the house, run out for two reasons.

Number one, the air raids were sometimes airplanes would be shot down. They would be shot. And the pilots that were in those airplanes would try to hide, and sometimes people would give them hiding places. So if there was an airplane that was down and the pilots were missing, well, we were surrounded. And if they would have found us, it was just-- I mean, they would've killed us immediately.

That went on for a while. But then the people got very nervous. They had me for a while. And they said, enough of it already, you need to leave. Where did they send me? They sent me--

Before you left, did you do anything specifically during the day? Not during air raids, just generally. What did you do?

Just helped them in the house. But I had to be very careful that I could not be seen and not be heard. The toughest thing is-- they had to live a regular life.

I remember they were going-- for one day at a time, they were going on a little vacation. Then I had to sit in the attic. I had my food in the attic. And I had my little potty in the attic. And that's where I stayed. I could not move. I sat in the attic until they were ready to come home.

Because if they would have heard noise, then people would say, well, they're gone for the day. Who is in that house? And by luck, maybe they would have called the Germans. By luck, they may have called somebody and said, well, let's go in there. You never know what other people's minds are.

So if they were going shopping or they were going somewhere or doing anything, up in the attic I went.

Did friends come over to visit them?

No. They never had any friends come over. I think they did have some family come over. But then they were aware where I was and who I was. No, they never had any entertainment. They were plain people.

So then they came to you and said, you have to leave--

You have to leave.

So what did you do?

They had to contact Mr. Jansen. And they had to find a place for me.

Were they getting paid?

Yes.

From your father?

Yes.

To protect you?

Yes. Nobody did anything for nothing. But, look, it meant a whole lot of money for us, but for them, if you take the risk that these people took and the agony and the frightening, you could not pay them enough. You wouldn't be able to pay me enough to do it. You could not pay them enough. So this little bit of money really didn't mean anything, as long as everything went well.

You contacted Mr. Jansen.

I contacted-- they contacted Mr. Jansen. And I don't know if I went to this-- let's say-- I don't know in--

In order--

In order where I went. But one time I went to a doctor's house. It was a big house. And they had a maid. They used to have two maids. But the one maid left. So they needed a maid to be in the house.

And, well, I wasn't used to doing maid's work. We always had help in the house. Until the last minute, we had help in the house. Well, they told me what to do. I had to go on my hands and knees to do the floors.

And the other maid said to me, and looked at my knees, she said, you don't have maid's knees. I said, what are maid's knees? She said, you haven't crawled on the floor long enough to have flat knees.

Well, I got scared. I told the owner of the house that I had to leave, because I didn't have maid's knees. So she probably could figure out that I wasn't used to do this kind of work.

I remember I needed to leave immediately. And this is one time that I walked over to Mr. Jansen's house. I knew approximately where he was.