

You were talking about how you went over to Miss Jansen's house.

Yes, that was like a little haven to be until the next house was available for us. I don't really remember who and how I got my clothing. It must've been him that took charge and arranged for all of this. Well, here he took me to a house where my parents had been. And my parents had to leave, because they were squealed on. And the girl that squealed on them was killed by the underground.

Anyway, can you believe that after this had died down, that they were willing to take another human being, another Jewish person to be in their house? Well, I came there.

What were their names?

That was Mr. And Mrs. Robertson. And their only daughter, Katie. The house was built on the outskirts between two small towns. We had only--

Are we still talking about Falkenberg? Is that where you--

No, places that I was in hiding is all in the vicinity of [NON-ENGLISH] Triberg-- these are all small coal-mining towns. And this is where Mr. Jansen was able to place us. But I'm coming back to go to the Robertson's house. The Robertson house was on a road that was between two small towns. And they have never gotten together who is going to put in the electricity, who is going to put in water supply.

We didn't have any water supply except for a well in the back yard. And there was no electricity. We only had kerosene. And the only heating place in the house was the stove in the kitchen. It was very primitive, but the people were absolutely wonderful. I stayed there, and we had another lady-- German, Jewish-- from Heidelberg. She was used to a lot of money.

Her parents had a cigar factory, and she had a hard time adjusting-- being a nobody-- absolutely nobody. You are at the mercy of people. If they are good to you, then it's fine. If not, it's a hard time and a different way of life. Don't forget, a little carafe of water had to last us for one week.

I slept with Katie in a single bed. When she turned, I had to turn. When I turned, she had to turn. The bed linens were washed every two months, because they would hang the clothes out. And people would probably watch how often you wash. So they were used to washing once a month, so once a month this bed was being changed, in the next month, this bed was being changed.

Our clothing wasn't changed for at least once a week. And like I said, our water-- we had a little carafe that had to last us one week. But, look, you do anything to keep your life. I was asked once, did you make plans when you were in hiding? And they were so amazed, I said, no, I didn't make any plans, because I didn't know if I was going to live the next day, or the next morning, or the next minute.

Because I didn't know where I was going to be. I didn't know what was going to happen to us if I ever survived. We couldn't tell. The people were very good to us. The food was ample. We ate probably potatoes three times a day, which was fine.

You remember the parents' first names?

No. No. I know that he was a coal-miner and a farmer. And the woman didn't work. And Katie delivered the newspapers. That's all I remember.

So you stayed inside the house.

Inside the house.

All of the time.

All of the time.

And what did you do there?

I knitted. I remember that had handmade sweaters. And they would pull them out, and then I knit them bigger for somebody else-- this kind of stuff. People asked me if I read. No. I never read. There was no reading material in those houses.

What happened to your Jewish star that you would have?

The Jewish star? I didn't have it with me. That was back in Falkenberg with somebody else. I never had it with me. I have it here, but I don't have--

Left it with somebody.

I left it with somebody.

So you're with the Robertsons.

I'm with the Robertsons.

[? You're sewing and ?] [INAUDIBLE].

And yes, I remember one moment that was close already when the Germans were dug in front of the house. Anna is the other lady-- we were downstairs, and what we were doing downstairs, I don't know. Anyway, the German soldiers coming the back entrance and coming into the house.

And here we are-- there's the kitchen, and here's a French door, and here's a round table, and we could not get out of that room to go upstairs. The poor soul asked these German soldiers in the kitchen, entertained them, gave them coffee, gave whatever she had-- and she probably knew that we were in the adjacent room. The adjacent room had a round table and long table cloths. We were under the table in the next room.

You don't know how frightened we were. You don't know how scared we were. If we had coughed, that would have been the end of us. They would have said, who is in there? Let's go see. Because they are aware. They knew that people were in hiding, and the knew exactly what was going on.

You don't know the fright, how scared we were. I don't know, it probably lasted three days to us. But it didn't last that long. I don't remember how long it lasted. But thank God we survived that particular incident. They had to live a normal life and just fell in because people knew exactly how they live.

Friday morning, she would go into town and buy her groceries. Everything had to be just so. The clothes that were hanging out had to be just normal-- not one piece more than another, because people in small towns know exactly what the next person does. I really don't remember how long I stayed with them until I had to leave again. And I don't know if they got scared of us. There's just so much time that you can spend with a person that's a fugitive. I absolutely was the fugitive in that house.

They were also getting paid.

Yes, everybody was.

Did have you have contact with the underground there?

I'll tell you what happened-- well, at certain times, we ran out of money. So the underground would go back to Falkenberg where we had things, and, I don't know, got in contact with friends of ours-- I don't know if they sold things or what happened. I really don't know. I never asked my father, how did you get the money?

This was the Dutch underground?

The Dutch underground.

The Dutch Jewish underground?

No, no, there wasn't a Jew in sight-- just the regular Dutch underground. And then I was transported pretty far from [NON-ENGLISH] to Triberg. And I got into a house where I was upstairs. I know I didn't like it that much, but I had no other choice.

And in that house also was another girl. And this girl had polyps. She had polyps. And I think that they were able to get a doctor in that house to help her. I don't know if he operated in that house. I don't know whatever happened. But I know that I didn't like it there, but I had no other place to go.

And this was already close towards the end of the war. I remember being at Katie's house. She had a radio, and we listened to the invasion. And we followed them, but we didn't know how long it would take before the liberation came-- if there ever was a liberation, which one didn't know. But that I know we had at Katie's house.

That was June of '44?

Yes. Right. So here I am in Triberg in this other house with more people. And the bombing got heavier. And I remember being so scared. Here we are, we didn't know how soon the liberation came. And I remember I was so scared. And I went down in the basement and there was a potato bin. And I crawled into the potato bin.

And I don't know how often I sat in that potato bin and how long I sat in that potato bin, because when the Americans came to liberate us, the house was in front of a big coal pile. And the Germans would sit on this side and shoot over our house. And the Americans came across-- there was a big field. I'll never forget, the Americans came across with their tanks and infantry.

And we were told to stay in the basement, because we didn't know who was going to stay, who was going to be pushed back. And I know that some of the American soldiers got hurt, but do you know that we were afraid to come out of the basement for days? We didn't if they were going to stay. We didn't know if they were going to be thrown back.

But we did get liberated September 17, 1944. That was a relief, but still scared-- absolutely frightened to death to even tell people, well, here I am. I'm Jewish. I'm liberated now. I'm free. For three days, we did not come out. We were scared-- absolutely scared. Scared, scared. Then we got a call from Mr Jansen that my parents had gone back to Falkenberg.

You were still in the house?

I was still in the house. They already had gone. Well, we didn't have a place to go. We did not have anywhere, because the house that was rented was not ours.

Let's talk a little bit about the liberation. What were your feelings?

What were our feelings? You have no idea. I could've kissed every soldier that there was.

These were the first Americans?

First Americans that I saw. And--

What kind of things did they say to you?

I don't even know that I told them that I was Jewish. I was just so happy to be free, afraid-- don't forget, how long have I been afraid? How long have I been in underground? How long have I been living with people scared for 24 hours all these months? There was not a wink that I could say.

I could smile, I could enjoy, I could live. It was, will I ever be able to be free? Will I ever be able to live? I don't know-- I guess I lived so intimidated that I was scared. And to be free, there were so many questions. What happened to my family?

What happened to my family? OK. Mr Jansen came, and got me, and brought me to my parents. Well, we didn't know where we were going to live. We didn't have--

Back at Falkenberg.

Back at Falkenberg. There was a Jewish family that--

When you first saw your parents--

Oh, my god.

What were your feelings?

My mom-- I didn't recognize my mother. My mother did not eat. She could not stand the thought of pork, bacon. She couldn't stand the smell in the house. She wouldn't eat. My mother weighed about 80-some pounds when she came out of hiding. And she was absolutely devastated.

Here we are, but she knew that my brother had left. Her two sisters had left. Another sister who has a husband and son had left. And she didn't know what happened to them. She wouldn't eat, she just existed. And, well, my father, he was a different type of person.

They spoke with the family that owned this big house, and they asked my parents to move in with them. We did not have a chair to sit on. We did not have a bed to sleep. But what the Dutch government did, they went in to the apartments that the Germans deserted, that the Germans left behind, and gave us furniture, and beds, and chairs to sit on, and beds to sleep in.

And they gave us enough that we could live in this house. This young couple also was in hiding, but the elderly couple had been taken away. Of course, they never returned. And let me tell you something how people take things different than others.

One day-- and I'm coming back to the people that we lived with-- I went upstairs in an attic to hang up clothing, here this young man that asked us to come and move in with them tried to hang himself. He tried to commit suicide, because his parents did not return. And he had an absolute nervous breakdown. Well, we didn't have a telephone in our house.

I went to the doctor, and he was committed for a while, because he had a complete nervous breakdown. Anyway, we stayed in this house. We lived in this house. There were no windows in the house. The windows were all broken from [INAUDIBLE] from the--

Bombs.

From the bombs. And they were all put together with wood. Can you just turn it off? Let me-- all right, the transports were coming in. And--

You're with your parents.

And I'm living with my parents, the transports were coming in, and I was still hoping that my father was alive. He would stand at the--

Train station.

At the train station all day long from morning till night. And when he found out eventually, he thought that my brother would never come home. My mother and I would go into town to Maastricht where she was born, and where my family used to live. And we would maybe go shopping or we would do something. And people would come and say, aren't you the sister of the [INAUDIBLE] basement?

And they looked so much alike. And let me tell you, it killed her. My mother died literally of heartbreak because her oldest son, her only son was killed in concentration camp, her two maiden sisters were killed. Her other sister, and the husband, and son were killed. My whole Dutch family is not there anymore. I'm the only survivor of my Dutch family. There is nobody left.

The only ones left are at the cemetery. And my mother is buried in Maastricht, and my grandparents and my great grandparents. But I'm the only survivor. I didn't want to stay in Holland.

I felt that, as a Jewish girl I didn't have much of a chance. Even so, I had been begged to stay. They needed young girls to marry Jewish men so there would be a continuation of the Jewish people in Holland.

And I said, no. I'm not going to do that. My sister lived here, and she was willing to send papers for me to come to America. I don't know-- sometimes I ask myself, did I do the right thing to leave my parents? But having been through so much in my young life, that I felt that I wanted to start a new life, not really realizing how hard it is to start a new life, because you turn a leaf over and you start all over again.

I left my parents and I came to America.

How did you get there?

Literally on the boat. I came over on the New Amsterdam. And as soon as I got off the boat, the first word my sister said to me, you speak only English. No other language is spoken in that house.

What day did you arrive in the United States?

I don't remember. I have it all written down--

1948.

1948.

In the fall?

In the spring.

In the spring of '48.

In the spring. And she and my brother-in-law picked me up, and we went to Kittanning, Pennsylvania, which is about 40 miles out of Pittsburgh. That's where they ended up. And I don't know how and why, but that's it. I stayed with them for six months to learn the American way of life.

I remember that their friends were absolutely wonderful to me. I spent time with them. They taught me the American way. They invited me to a country club. They had brothers that took me out on a date. It was absolutely a wonderful, frightening experience for me being in this country.

I spoke English pretty well, because we were liberated by the Americans. And when we went to services with the American soldiers--

Religious services?

Yes. The Jewish soldiers came to our synagogue, and they had their rabbi that brought everything. And then they came to our house for tea afterwards. And this is how I learned to speak-- well, I spoke English, but I learned to speak much better. Well anyway, one day, my sister said, after we haven't been there for six months, it's about time for you to go and get a job.

So we took the bus into Pittsburgh, and I went to some stores-- department stores, ready to wear stores. And the first time, I didn't get anything. Well, a couple of weeks later-- there's a slow season in August, things pick up in September-- I went back in and I got a job. I got a job at Max Athens. And that was a store that only sold furs, coats, and suits.

And here this gentleman gave me a job. I was scared to death because, really, I hadn't done much sewing for a long, long time. But I had to have a place to stay.

In the three years there that you were with your folks--

I just stayed home with them.

You didn't work?

No.

So now you have your first job.

I now have my first job. And, well, I had to have a place to stay. Well, my sister's friend had an aunt in Pittsburgh who had an apartment over a restaurant. And she was willing to take me in. I didn't have a room by myself. I shared a bedroom with her. And I shared the apartment with her.

And it was difficult. I didn't have, really, the freedom that I wanted, but I couldn't afford more. And she was happy to have me because she used this money to help send her son to law school. It was hard. It was hard. But then again, I had help.

My sister's friends sent young ladies over to pick me up and take me to Hadassah meetings. And this way, I was introduced to Hadassah and the Jewish way of life. And now there was a Y, and I wanted to take in everything. I went to the Y. I went swimming at the Y.

And through Hadassah, I made friends. I made girlfriends. And it was hard. I was by myself, and I had to live on \$25 a week. I had to pay room and board, and I had to eat, and I had to dress myself. But I did it. I was very frugal.

I remember sometimes if I didn't have any money, I ate M&M's for dinner. And I remember I got paid on Monday morning, then I would go into town-- just enough money to pay the car fare. And I probably had a penny left. But that was fine. I got used to that. I didn't want anything from anybody. I supported myself.

Were you in contact with your parents at all at that time?

Yes. Absolutely. But my mother got very sick. And my mother died. That left my dad by himself. There was nobody that could take care of him except my Aunt Lisien from London. She also was a widow. But she had gone to London

with her son. She did not live for the Holocaust.

My Aunt Lisien came, and stayed with my father, and took care of him. But she also had to leave with her son, daughter-in-law, and granddaughter to immigrate to Israel. So dad was alone. But in the meantime, the papers were ready, and my sister, and brother-in-law, and again, his family from Brooklyn gave him the papers to come to America, and dad moved in with my sister. I was still working and living in Pittsburgh when-- let me think now. I-- can you turn it off a minute?

I wanted to take everything in when I came to Pittsburgh. I saved enough money to go and see the Ice Capades by myself. I took the cheapest ticket. And I know that had the ticket that I couldn't see anything. So I walked around, I stood all evening, I wanted to make up for all the years that I lost.

I took myself to the theater by myself. I sat in peanut heaven, all the way in the back, just enough to see the shows that I had missed. I wanted to make up for all the time. And my girlfriends said to me, you go out on a Saturday night by yourself?

If I don't have a date on Saturday night, I don't even answer the phone. I said, this doesn't make any difference to me, I want to go, and make up, and see everything, and do everything that I've never been able to do.

I didn't care if I had a date. I didn't care, I just wanted to see everything. But anyway, here I was at the Y, and everybody played bridge. My sister played bridge. They all played bridge. And lo and behold, I was going to take bridge lessons at the Y. Signed up, and here are all these young single men taking bridge lessons with me.

Paul Better wanted to date me. And he said to Bernie, I'm going to date this girl. And Bernie says, no, I'm going to date this girl. I want her telephone number. So Bernie introduced Paul Better to somebody else who eventually got married. And we started to date. I met Bernie playing bridge at the Y.

Date-- not regular, on and off. Well, there was a national Hadassah convention in town. And every eligible single woman, single man from all around Pittsburgh area, Ohio came to this Hadassah convention. It was a very snowy night, and a girlfriend and I, we took a cab down to the William Penn Hotel, get up to the top floor wherever this big thing was.

And we walk around, and walk around, and who do I run in to but Bernie? We stayed together all night, and he took me home that night. And from then on, that's when we started to date.

When did you get married?

When I got married? 1951, April 8.

And then how long did you stay in Pittsburgh?

We stayed in Pittsburgh-- oh, we got married 1951, then Bernie decided after April that he wanted to go back to school for his advanced degree. And we went through that.

What did he study?

Chemistry. And we moved here by '51. And we got married in '51, and we moved here in 1957. So we stayed six years at Pittsburgh. It took him a while to get his advanced degree.

Do you have any children?

Yes, I have three-- the most wonderful, wonderful daughters. I don't know what to do. They are my support. Between my husband and my three daughters, I have the most wonderful support that I need. Carla is the oldest one, and she was born in Pittsburgh. Helen already was born here in Alexandria, and then Amy also.

They are absolutely so dear to me that I wouldn't know what to do without them, because I really don't have family. My sister who let me come over, she died at the age of 53 of cancer. Her husband was so dependent on her, he had nobody either, because his family was also killed. Then he died within a year and left their daughter an orphan at the age of 19. I do have my niece, but that's another story.

And then your father came over?

Oh, yes.

How long did he live?

Father came over when we got married.

Was it after you were married?

No. He did come to the wedding. So he came over before we were married. But he lived with my sister. And after we got married, he lived six months with us and six months with my sister. Well, then we rented a house here in Alexandria, and he loved it. But after we moved into this house, he said, I'm not going back.

So he stayed with us at least 10 years, solidly. And he loved it here. He loved the children. He loved my husband. He was a happy person. He went to school all the time. When they needed a minyan, they came and picked him up. They made him an honorary member of the synagogue. And he got ill. He had heart failure, and he died at the age of 93.

Can we talk a little bit now about your feelings and reflections after the war? How do you think the war--

Is it on? OK.

What are your feelings today about how the war has influenced you?

The war has influenced me to the point that I'm the person that say, you should not hate Germans. You should forgive and forget. Well, I am of the opposite end. When I hear somebody speak German, I get such fury in me, I cannot take it-- even so on my own side-- my dad, I had to speak German too.

I have cousins in Brazil that when I write to them, I have to think in German, I write to them in German, because their mother tongue is Portuguese. My mother tongue is English. Yes, they speak English, but not well enough to write letters. So when I write to my cousins-- and we are in constant contact-- I have to write in German. I want to forget Germany. I want to forget the German language. I want to forget the German country, because it ruined. It has destroyed everything I had

There are some members of my family that I'm in very close contact with us. But I am one of the youngest ones alive. And when we are gone, our whole big family is no more. But my feelings about Germany-- I have friends now, people that I went to school with that want to be friends with me. They invite me to come and visit, they want me to stay at their house. I don't know if I have a--

Non-Jewish Germans.

Non-Jewish Germans that I correspond with, because they insist that I correspond with them. I would like to go back, and the only reason that I would go back for would be to visit the graves-- the graves of my grandparents in Gelsenkirchen. I have grandparents, I think great grandparents probably over there-- and the grave of my mother in Holland with my grandparents and great grandparents in Holland.

And I know when mother died, that dad had the names of my brother, and my aunts, and family put in. No, I have no feeling for Germany, absolutely not. Germany has ruined not my life-- I have a beautiful life now. But my childhood,

my education-- the whole family, there is no more family.

What kind of feelings do you have because of the war about being Jewish? Has it changed--

No, hasn't changed. I'm proud of being a Jew. I will do anything for the Jewish people, for the Jewish religion. I'm born and raised in that, and that's what I die with. I'm perfectly happy to be a Jew. And what it means to be a Jew-- if I have to fight for it, I will fight for it. And I will always be a Jew.

Did you ever talk about your war experiences before today?

Sometimes, yes.

Who did you share these with?

With the schools. I was asked to share it with schools.

What about your children?

Not really. I haven't sat down with them. I really need to do that. They need to know. They know my background.

Do you receive war reparations?

No. I do not get a red cent from Germany, because I never worked in Germany, and never had a job in Germany, and no, I do not get one red cent.

Does the war still affect you in any way?

I don't think I can ever forget what happened to me. Why me? Why did it happen to me? Why couldn't I lead a normal life? Why couldn't my family lead a normal life like everybody else? We had a very large, warm family, the Dahl family. And we're still very much in contact with each other. We correspond with each other, because we want to be still the family that we were.

Is there anything else that you want to share that we've left out?

I appreciate the support I have from my husband.

Well, thank you very much for doing this interview.

This concludes the interview with Ruth Greifer. The interviewer was Gail Schwartz. The interview took place on December 15, 1994 in Alexandria, Virginia.