

SYNOPSIS - AUDIO TAPE

Circle One:

S / L / P

Name of Interviewee: GREIFER Ruth
(LAST) (First) (M)

Name of Interviewer: Gail Schwartz

Date of Interview: December 15, 1994 Interview Tapes in Archive 1/3/95

Tape I Side A - Ruth Dahl Greifer was born on May 30, 1922 in Geilenkirchen, Germany, near Aachen. Her father Isadore Dahl, also born there, was a cattle dealer. Her mother Sofia Beesman came from Holland. Her brother Carl was 11 years older and sister Edith was 8 years older than Ruth. The family had full-time live-in help, 2 gardeners, a car and a telephone. Ruth went to Hebrew school on Sundays and Tuesdays and attended a Catholic private school. Her home was kept kosher and she attended an orthodox synagogue. She played the piano. She did not live in a Jewish neighborhood. After Hitler came to power other children would spit at her and call her "dirty Jew". The nuns were always good to her. In 1938 the plaque on her father's business was shattered. He sold the house and moved the family and the furniture to Valkenburg a summer resort near Maastricht, Holland. It was spring 1938 and they went there because Holland was a haven and her mother's family was there. Her sister stayed in Germany. Ruth's family was the first to leave. She went to public school and her father started his business again. The family heard that after Kristallnacht her sister's husband was taken to Dachau. Fortunately he had American relatives and he was let out of Dachau to go to America. Ruth had to learn to write Dutch. She lived in a mixed neighborhood, with a small synagogue.

Tape I Side B - Life was normal in 1939 though her house was a haven for people coming from Germany. On May 10, 1940 at 5 AM the sky filled with airplanes and they were overrun by the Germans in 5 days. German soldiers were in the streets. Her mother, hospitalized for a heart condition, was sent home by the Germans because they needed her hospital room. During the bombing, they hid in catacombs in a mountainside across the street. They then had to

register as Jews, give up radios, bicycles and she was angry. "Why me - I'm not different". Jews had to wear a star, obey a curfew after dark. Her father's business was taken away. Ruth received postcards from friends in concentration camps, always with the same sentences and no return address. In June of 1942 the Germans ordered them to pack a knapsack with clothes and food. Ruth was sick at the time and the doctor said she could not be moved. She stayed in bed for months putting white powder on her face so as to look sick. Her 2 aunts were taken away. Her brother volunteered to go to Auschwitz with them. They were killed immediately. He was sent to a work camp and died of typhoid 2 days before liberation. Meanwhile all Jews were ordered to be put in the same place by the Germans. Ruth's father talked to a Mr. Jansen who offered to arrange hiding for Ruth and her parents. After curfew they, with a suitcase, went to a coal miner's house. It was small and her father felt penned up. After a few days her parents went to another place. She learned to eat rabbit, got rations from the underground and help from Mr. Jansen. There were air-raids and German pilots were shot down. The people then wanted her to leave and though they were getting paid she was too much of a risk. She couldn't be seen or heard and had to sit in the attic for days if the people went on a vacation. Mr. Jansen then sent her to a doctor's house to work as a maid. Another maid there realized that Ruth didn't have "maid's knees" and wasn't really a maid, Ruth went immediately to Mr. Jansen's house.

Tape II Side A - She went to a house where her parents had been. Someone had squealed on her parents and they had to leave. The house was on the outskirts of 2 coal mining towns Hoensbrook and Treebeek near Heerlen. The Robertsons' house had no electricity or water supply and only heated by a stove. Anna and another woman, a German Jew, hid there, with Ruth. Ruth had one carafe of water to last for a week. She shared a small bed with the daughter. The bed linens were washed every 2 months. She wore her clothes for a week. She never knew if she was going to live through the next day.

She stayed inside the house all the time and knitted. One day the Germans came into the kitchen and Ruth and Anna hid under the dining room table. When money ran out the underground would get more from friends in Valkenburg. She heard of the June 1944 invasion on a radio in Katie Robertson's house. Ruth then transferred to a house in Treebeek. The bombing got heavier and she crawled into a potato bin. The Germans would shoot over the house when the Americans came with their tanks. She was told to stay in the basement and though she was liberated on September 17, 1944 she was too afraid to come out for 3 days. Mr. Jansen said that her parents had gone back to Valkenburg so Ruth went there. She did not recognize her mother who was devastated by all her losses and had not eaten. When the transports would come in her father would stand at the train station to wait for her brother. Her mother eventually died of heartbreak as her whole Dutch family didn't survive. After 3 years Ruth didn't want to stay. She wanted to start a new life. After her sister sent papers from America Ruth left her parents in the spring of 1948. She sailed on the New Amsterdam and went to Pittsburgh to live with her sister in a suburb for 6 months. She moved to the city, got a job, went to Hadassah meetings and swimming at the Y. She lived on \$25 a week and had M&M's for dinner sometimes. Her mother died and her father came to the US.

Tape II Side B - Wanting to make up for all the years that she lost she went to the theater, took bridge lessons at the Y where she met her husband. They married on April 8, 1951 and moved to Washington DC in 1957. She has 3 daughters. Her father died at age 93.

Feelings - She does not want to hear German, wants to forget the country and the language because Germany destroyed everything she had and ruined her childhood and her education. She would only go back to visit graves in Geilenkirchen. She would always fight to be a Jew and will always be one. She can never forget what happened. She does not receive reparations. She had a large warm family and still corresponds with remaining members because "they want to be the family they were". She appreciates the support she has from her husband.