

Ruth Dahl Greifer
RG-50.106*0010
12/15/94
Alexandria, Virginia

Abstract

Ruth Dahl Greifer was born in Gellenkirchen, Germany, May 30, 1922. Her parents were Sophia and Isadore Dahl. She had an older brother, Karl, and an older sister, Edith. Isadore Dahl was a cow dealer, and the family was well off. Their town had a warm, Orthodox community and a small synagogue. Ruth's father was very observant, and her mother kept a kosher home. No anti-Semitism until 1938. Father lost business, and Dahls went to Falkenberg, Holland, near Maastricht where mother's family lived. Isadore's large family stayed in Germany, and no one survived. When Holland was invaded, Dahls were helped by non-Jewish man to find hiding places. Ruth lived in several homes in coal mining towns. She was scared all the time. After the war, she and parents were reunited. Karl died of typhoid in a concentration camp, and all of Sophie's relatives were killed. Ruth moved to United States in 1948 and lived with her sister in Pittsburgh. She met husband at the Y, and they were married April 8, 1951. Sophie died, and Isadore came to America in early 1950s. Ruth and Bernie lived in Pittsburgh and six years later moved to Alexandria. Isadore joined them and loved living there until he died at age 93.

File 1: RG-50.106*0010.01.02

0:34

Ruth Dahl Greifer was born on May 30, 1922, in Gellenkirchen, Germany. Her mother, Sophia, was born in Holland; her father, Isadore Dahl, was born in Gellenkirchen, Germany. Ruth had an older brother, Karl, and an older sister, Edith. Her father was a cow dealer in Gellenkirchen, a town in the Rhineland. Most Jewish families were cow dealers. "It was a very wonderful, warm, Orthodox Jewish community with a small synagogue. Her father went to minyon in the morning and evening. Her mother kept kosher. Ruth went to Hebrew school Sunday mornings and Tuesday afternoons. She still reads and writes Hebrew.

2:47

They lived in a beautiful home with many acres. They had a car. They had full-time, live-in help. There was no such thing as a Jewish neighborhood.

4:41

Ruth played with non-Jewish friends and a few Jewish friends. None of her Jewish friends survived. She went to an Ursuline academy, the best school in town. No anti-Semitic problems. The nuns were wonderful. Her father had no anti-Semitic problems.

6:33

Ruth studied piano and could also play by ear. After the war, she could never play. She was not involved with sports, and there were no Jewish youth groups.

8:08

Ruth remembers celebrating all the Jewish holidays.

9:12

In 1933, there were a few changes, but nothing really happened. Her father was still in business. A few years later, she remembers being spit on by non-Jewish children from other schools.

10:50

They spoke German at home. She studied French and English, and English came easily. In 1933 mom had an appendectomy in a Catholic hospital and got very good treatment.

12:48

In 1938 father was forbidden to keep his business. Ruth still went to the Ursuline Academy, and the nuns were wonderful.

13:13

Ruth remembers nothing about her father losing the business. In 1938 they sold their large home to a doctor across the street and moved to Falkenberg, Holland, near Maastricht, where her mother had grown up and her parents still lived. Her sister had just been married, and she and husband stayed in Duren, Germany. Her brother Karl came to Holland and lived part time with maiden aunts. The family felt very comfortable in Holland, where they had frequently visited.

In Falkenberg, Ruth's family rented a house, and her father started a new business. But it was difficult for him. Ruth describes her beautiful, brick home in Germany with its large vegetable and fruit gardens.

20:27

Holland was a haven. When Ruth told nuns where she was going, they would have loved to go. Her father's family stayed in Germany. He had seven brothers and four sisters. Like most Jewish people, they did not want to leave their country. One aunt and three children did go to Brazil.

25:40

When Kristallnacht occurred, Ruth's brother-in-law was taken to Dachau. His American relatives started working on papers to get him and his wife out of Germany. They were successful, and brother-in-law was released from Dachau and allowed to immigrate to America.

34:12

May 10, 1940, German planes darkened the skies of Holland, and five days later, the Germans invaded. Mother was in hospital with angina, but Germans sent her home because they needed the room. "We were scared. This was one of the most frightening experiences of my lifetime. We stayed in catacombs across the street when we were bombed."

36:12

Ruth was 18 years old. She learned to sew so that she would have an occupation if she had to make a living in another country. Things changed rapidly. All Jews had to register and give up radios and bicycles. Father's business was taken away. Jews had to wear stars and observe curfews. They could not leave the town. She got two-lined postcards from girlfriends who were in concentration camps, but there were no return addresses.

41:16

In Germany many of her father's family were sent to concentration camps. Older people just did not want to leave Germany.

42:14

By 1941 all liberties were taken away. In July 1942, Jews were told to pack belongings in knapsacks and get up at 5:00 A.M. to get ready to leave. The Germans knocked on Ruth's family's door and ordered her to come with them. Ruth was very sick, so miraculously they let her stay. She stayed in bed for months and put white powder on her face to look sick.

When Germans came to get Ruth's mother, she screamed, and they let her stay. People were disappearing all the time, and no one knew where they were or what had happened to them. Her two maiden aunts were taken away. Ruth's brother, Karl, volunteered to go with them. Aunts were immediately killed at Auschwitz. Brother was sent to work camps and lived until end of war. He died of typhoid two days before liberation.

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46:52

Friend of father's told him to go to post office and ask for a man named Jansen who could find hiding places for them. They left early in the morning with just a few things and were met by a man with a car.

50:22

In the middle of the 1942 winter, they were taken to a coal miner's very small house. Father had very hard time because he could not go outside. Mother had difficult time with father. After a few days, mother and father were placed in another house. Ruth did not see them until the end of the war. "All you think about is your safety. You lived from minute to minute, and from day to day. You lived in fear 24 hours a day. The people with whom they stayed with were also afraid.

54:05

They got food rations through the underground. Mr. Jansen helped them all through the war. He never got paid and was always available. He brought another single Jewish girl to share Ruth's room. Girl was not clean and not friendly and was asked to leave. When

air raids started, we had to be fully dressed. Mr. Jansen found another place for Ruth in a doctor's house as a maid. She had to do floors on her hands and knees, and another maid was suspicious because she did not have "maid's knees."

File 2: RG-50.106*0010.02.02

0:05

Ruth went to the Robertson house where her parents had previously stayed. Like many houses, they were on the outskirts of coal mining towns and had no water supply except for a well. They also had no electricity, and stove was the only warm place. But people were wonderful.

A wealthy German Jewish lady was also there and had a very hard time. Ruth shared a single bed and sheets with family's daughter. A little carafe of water had to last a week. She and other woman had to stay inside all of the time. During the day she knitted. There was nothing to read.

"You do anything to save your life. You don't make any plans for the future, because you don't know if you will survive the next day."

6:52

Germans were dug in in front of house. They came into the house, and she and German Jewish woman had to hide in the next room. They could not even cough. "We were so scared, but thank God we survived."

9:56

Ruth went to a few other houses before the end of the war. Dutch underground would go back to father to get money. At end of liberation, bombing was very heavy. Ruth crawled into a potato bin. Americans came across big field. Germans were still near house.

14:09

On September 17, 1945, they were liberated. Mr. Jansen reunited Ruth with her parents. Ruth could not recognize her mother who only weighed 80 pounds because she could not eat non-kosher meat. Mother was devastated because she did not know what had happened to son or daughter and her Dutch family.

A young family asked Ruth's parents to move into a large house with them. They got furniture from apartments that Germans has used. All the windows were broken from bombings.

20:37

Transports were coming in. Father stood at train station day and night looking for his son. He finally realized that his son was not alive. Ruth's mother lost her whole family.

22:27

Ruth's parents begged her to stay and marry a Jewish man. But Ruth wanted to come to America and start a new life. Her sister, who was in America, arranged for her to come.

Ruth left her parents in the spring of 1948. When her sister met her, she was told only to speak English in her home. She already spoke English and had used it when she went to services with Jewish soldiers stationed near her in Holland. She lived with her sister's family outside of Pittsburgh.

25:51

Ruth went into Pittsburgh looking for a job. She got a job sewing fur coats and made \$15.00 a week. She lived with a friend of her sisters and shared a bedroom. "It was hard."

Sisters' friends took her to Hadassah meetings where she made friends. She also went to the Y, where she could swim and meet other Jewish people.

29:34

Her mother died in Holland, and her father was by himself. The only person who could take care of him was an aunt who came from London but then left for Israel.

Father came to America and moved in with his daughter and her family.

Ruth wanted to try everything that she had missed in all the years she was in hiding.

She bought the cheapest ticket to go to shows, and she took bridge lessons at the Y where she met her husband, Bernie.

They were married April 8, 1951. Bernie wanted to go back to school for an advanced degree in chemistry, so they stayed in Pittsburgh for six years and then moved to Alexandria, Virginia.

34:53

"We have three wonderful daughters, and they are so dear to me." Her sister died of cancer at age 53, and her brother-in-law died within a year.

Father then stayed with Ruth and Bernie in Alexandria, and he loved it. He went to shul all the time. He died when he was 93 years old.

37:42

Ruth said that the only reason she would ever go back to Germany was to visit graves of grandparents and other relatives.

She is proud of being a Jew. "I would do anything for my faith." She talks about her experiences talking in the schools.

"I can never forget what happened to me. I always ask why couldn't my family lead a normal life, like everybody else?"

"I appreciate the support I have of my husband."