

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Ruth Greifer conducted by Gail Schwartz on August 4, 1998, in Alexandria, Virginia. This interview is part of the museum's project to interview Holocaust survivors and witnesses who are also volunteers with the museum. This is a follow up interview that will focus on Ruth Greifer's post-Holocaust experiences.

In preparation for this interview, I read the summary of the interview you conducted with me for the museum on December 15, 1994. I will not ask you to repeat everything you said in that interview. Instead, I will use this interview as an opportunity to follow up on that interview and focus on your post-Holocaust experiences.

This is tape number 1, side A. What is your full name?

Ruth Elizabeth Greifer.

And your maiden name.

Dahl, D-A-H-L.

And where were you born, and when were you born?

I was born May 30, 1922, in Gelsenkirchen, Germany.

As I said, you've been interviewed before, but just to put this interview in a framework, let's summarize where you were during the war. You were the youngest of three children, and in 1938, your father's cattle business was desecrated. And in the spring, your father moved the family and the furniture to Valkenburg near Maastricht, Holland, where your mother's family was from.

On May 10, 1940, Holland was overrun by the Germans. You and your family had to register as Jews and wear a star. In June of 1942, the Germans ordered the Jews to move. You were sick, but you pretended to continue to be sick and were in bed for a few months, wearing-- putting white powder on your face. Then you move to a series of houses.

You were liberated on September 17, 1944. And unfortunately your brother died two days before liberation in a work camp, and your mother lost her entire Dutch family. In the spring of 1948, you came to the United States.

I just wanted to clarify a few things before we go on to the post-Holocaust experience. How would you describe yourself as a teenager. You were 16 years old in 1938. Were you very independent at that time?

No, I don't think so. I'm dependent very much on my parents. I had a very demanding father and a most wonderful, loving, warm, caring mother. What I can only remember even when I moved to Holland, there were Jewish dancers, and my brother would go. But because I wasn't even 18 years old, my father would never even let me go to those dances because that's the way I was raised.

And I was a strict mother also because I didn't know any better. And my daughters can tell you, I raised them rather strictly. And I said, well, you can do it better when you have children because I didn't know any better.

Did you mind being alone when-- again, previous to 1938, did you-- as a youngster, did you-- or a young teenager-- did you mind being by yourself? Or did you always need people nearby? Were you that type of child?

Well, I was used to having children-- girlfriends when I was in Germany. But when I moved to Holland, first of all, I didn't know the people. And the times had changed so much that we were pretty much on our own. Absolutely.

Did you have a favorite holiday growing up.

I would say Hanukkah was my favorite holiday. Why not? We lit the candles. We had latkes. We had presents. This was

a joyous time. It was a wonderful time. Oh, yes. And we celebrated every holiday because I was raised in an orthodox house, and we had beautiful holidays with the family, very warm. My mother was an extremely warm person.

Oh, yes, we-- I was raised in a strictly Jewish environment.

You were not with your family in those different houses during the war. What do you think kept you going during those days in hiding?

Well, the reason that we weren't together was done on purpose because in case one of the parties would have been discovered, at least we were-- not all of us would have been destroyed. What kept me going? That's a good question.

We always look to be liberated. The day really didn't come soon enough, and every day that-- the longer we had to wait, it was drudgery, and it was worries. And it was sorrow, and it was just being away from everything from the world and being with strangers all the time. There's a time that you need for yourself. There's a time that you want to go on and you want to go forth with your life, but we were held back all these years.

And plans that I had, I always wanted to go to America. And I guess that is-- that's what I was grabbing and striving for for being liberated and just go and do things for myself and go to a new country and just meet people and be with people and lead a Jewish life and strive for a better future.

So when did you first have those feelings about wanting to come to America? Was it when you were still living in Germany, when you were living in Holland? When-- do you remember when those feelings first arose?

I just felt even before we went into hiding that there really wasn't a future for young Jewish people in Holland. And that stayed with me most of the time. This is what I lived for. I wanted to go to America and start a new life for myself.

Why America?

First of all, I had a sister here, and my sister was the one that put in the papers for me and sent what they called at that affidavit. And I felt that this is what-- I thought this was best for me. But now thinking back-- no, thinking back after all this time and having-- and looked at my parents, I don't know what I was thinking about how forceful I was and thought about myself that I left my two old parents by themselves.

Really and truly, I don't know. I don't know if I could do it again. But at that time, I was so-- I needed to do that for Ruth. And I left. I-- really I've never regretted it. Yes I regret it now that I left my parents, but at that time, no, I did not regret it. I went full force going to America and starting a new life as hard as it was, but I-- I'm grateful that I did that for me and my future family.

When you were in hiding in Holland, did you ever think of eventually going back to Germany to live?

Never. I would have never-- we wouldn't never, never thought about going back to Germany. Who would want to live in a country that persecuted the Jews, killed so many Jews? No.

I remember that before my dad came to America, he wanted to go to the graves in Germany. And he had a passport. Had to have a passport to go over there for three days. He went in the morning, and he couldn't even stand to stay there overnight. It just bothered him so much that he came back to Holland the same day. He just-- it just--

You can't live in a country that has murdered all your family. If you have a place to go, then that's where you go, where you are-- where you're liked, where you're wanted. You don't go to a country that has destroyed all your dreams and all your family. That's the way I feel. I would have never gone back to Germany to live, no.

I had one cousin that went back to Germany. He went to Israel. Didn't-- did not like Israel. But the only reason that he went back to Germany, he was an only child, and he had very wealthy parents. So when he came back, he knew that there was a lot of money waiting for him, and that's the reason why. Otherwise, he's the only one that ever moved back

to Germany.

And do you feel this way despite the fact that your first 16 years were spent in Germany?

Yes. That's only a small part of my life. Don't forget the 16 years were chopped up when Hitler came into-- when Hitler came into power in 1933. So I was 11 years old when Hitler came into power. So I never had the joy or the happiness of a child with a happy youth.

No, we had a solid home. That we had, and we had a solid Jewish community. But joyous, no. It wasn't happy. I don't think it was. No. Absolutely not.

You had said in your previous interview that at the time of liberation, you were too afraid to come out for three days.

Right.

Why is that, or why was that?

The house that we were in was centered in the middle. At that time, the-- [PHONE RINGING] let me take it. The American soldiers came across the--

See, they came across the-- excuse me. They came across the land behind our house, and the Germans were sitting on top of a coal mountain. So they were sitting there. There was shooting over our house towards the infantry and the tanks that were coming in. And the reason that we were afraid, one never knows--

Yes, the Americans moved forward. You never knew if they were going to be thrown back. And if they would have been thrown back, we-- where would we have been? We would have been under German-- under the Germans again. So the reason that we did not come out, we wanted to make sure that the Americans were past us for a while before to come out and said here we are.

What did you do during those three days?

Oh, I was downstairs in a potato bin. That's where I sat most of the time because we were very, very scared with all the shooting that was going on. And the people upstairs bought me some food, and I was just too scared to even move. Because after you've been in hiding for so long, you cannot jeopardize three days. I felt the three days were worth it for me to make sure that I was safe. And I've never regretted it.

What did you do with yourself during those three days?

You just sit. You just lay in a potato bin and wait. You don't do anything. You just-- there are people that have been in hiding underneath the floors for years and years and years. Here I was in a potato bin for three days and prayed and prayed to God that this was our safety before we exposed ourselves to the world.

How big was the potato bin?

I could curl up in it. It was big enough for me. But at that time-- in those days, you don't care what you look like. You don't care what you feel like. You just care that this is the safety that you're looking forward to and that you don't make a mistake.

And this is the way it was. You learn. You learn a lot when you have to.

How did you keep yourselves clean in the potato bin?

Oh, you just don't change clothes for three days. You just go to the bathroom if you can and then go right back in. You don't think about changing clothing or anything. When you're in hiding, that is the least of your worries. Hygiene is not

always the greatest thing.

How did you relieve yourself in the basement?

Oh, I think I went up-- there was no bathroom, and you run up take a chance that nobody is there. And you come down, and you go back in.

Who was with you down in the basement?

Nobody. Nobody. I was there by myself. You don't mind being by yourself. And those-- at that time in your life, you don't mind anything if your safety is concerned. Really. You learn to live just the way it is at that time, and perhaps you look forward to greater times in your life.

How did you know to stay the three days?

Well-- the first people that we stayed with told us they already got word how many days the Americans were right around the house. So after three days, we thought it was time for us to come out.

You came out, and what was the first thing that you did when you came out?

Well, the underground person came and got me and reunited me with my parents.

Yeah, but even before that. Here you come out, you've been in hiding for all these years, you come out, and you know the Americans have saved you--

Well, these were not very happy times either because a lot of the soldiers were-- got hurt. And they would come into the house and off the street. They took them into the house, and they waited for the Red Cross to come in and take them and all of that. And let me tell you, the first thing that these people that got hurt were calling and you wouldn't believe they called for their mother. These big tall men in uniform with guns and whatever they carried and they were wounded and they were standing there or laying on the floor and waiting to be carried away, they called for their mother. It's unbelievable.

Now these were not all that happy-- those happy days. Absolutely not. There were too many people that got hurt for us. For us, to liberate us. They got hurt to liberate us. And you have to feel and you have to be very grateful that these people made those sacrifices.

I did not dance to the streets. No. No, no. This was all very quiet. This was all very quiet. Yeah. It was very serious. Oh, yes.

Did the world look any different now that you knew that you wouldn't have to be in hiding anymore that the war was over for you?

No. When we came back, there were a lot of worries. When we came back, we didn't have a chair to sit on and a bed to sleep in, and we didn't have anything. And we didn't know anything about our families. And this was all-- you started from scratch.

But I meant here you were a young woman. You had been in hiding. Your life was in danger for all those years. You had to move from house to house.

Right.

And then you come up onto the street, and you don't have to do that anymore.

That's true, but I had nobody to celebrate with. No. These were all people. Yes they were good, but they were-- there

was not that joy. No.

No, we had to start from scratch, and we went on. And I can't remember anything that exuberant or anything like that. It was all very quiet, all very-- no, people were not-- yes, people were happy, but there were a lot of losses and not only human beings. And they were losses whose people lost their houses or the houses were shot up. This was all very serious.

We were-- this was war. This is absolutely war. We were in the middle of a war, and, no, I can't remember this-- all this joy.

Did you feel at that time that for you the war was over on-- at that time?

I don't know. I don't know because I really don't know how many-- yes, probably for me the war was over, but then there was the struggle about whom are we waiting for. Who is coming back if any? It was-- no, I don't remember being that joyous. Absolutely not.

We had to carry so many years of hardship on our shoulders that, no, I can't remember all of that. Absolutely not.

When you got back to your parents, did you tell them what-- I know they knew what you went through in the sense of hiding, but you do-- did you really tell them about the details of what you experienced? Did you talk about that with them?

We compared because their experience I think was worse than mine. First of all, my father had a terrible time being in hiding because being an outdoor man like I said before. My mother had a worse time having kept kosher. And in the morning, just when these people had bacon, it would nauseate her. She couldn't-- she could literally-- she ate to keep alive because when she came out of hiding, she only weighed 80-some pounds.

And they looked awful. Both of them looked drawn, awful.

The people were good to them, but having been in hiding and having this pressure on your mind all these years, it showed more on them, a lot more on them than it showed on me because I was young. I can get over it. But those two never got over it. My mother never did, and my father never did either because having lost most of his family and having my mother's family and having lost their oldest son, my dad would go and stand at the railroad station day after day and nobody that he remembered came back, and it just took its toll.

When did your family find out about your brother?

We got through the Red Cross. I don't really remember when, but as soon as possible, they gave us all the news about mother, sisters, and about my brother. And my mother really never, never recovered, just did not.

I remember when it was V-E-- was it V-E Day? I had done a lot of volunteer work with the people that came back, and you had to get all these shots. I got typhoid, para-typhoid, and all of that, and I remember it was V-E Day, and everybody was jumping on the street and I was in bed with a high fever.

From the shots?

From the shots. So couldn't even par-- I couldn't even participate in the celebrations.

You were 22 years old when you came out from hiding?

Right.

Did you feel 22?

I've never felt my age. I've always felt very young. I still do. And-- no, I felt very young. I-- in fact, I had a very good time. I was walking down the street, and there were all these-- Valkenburg was a rest resort, and there were all these soldiers.

And one soldier comes over to me, we're having this dance tonight. Oh, but you're coming, too, and I said I don't know how you'll come. Well, he told me that I had to go to a certain place, and I would get papers if I was safe whatever that meant at the time. And I would-- I did go. And let me tell you after the war, I did a lot of dancing.

I was invited. I met a lot of interesting people, and I had a good time.

So you didn't in a sense feel older than what you were because of the very difficult times you went through?

No. No. I've always felt young.

Did you have-- when you found out about your brother and when you found out about your mother's family and your father's family, did you have any thoughts of retaliation against the Germans?

No. No. Because I wouldn't know where to start. I wouldn't know where to go. And-- no. There's just nothing that we could have done to rectify what I would have done. I would have probably made it worse, and I would-- whatever I would have done would have been worse for my parents. So we just let it go. There's nothing you can do. Absolutely not.

When the war-- when you got back after being in hiding, did you-- you said you obviously talked to your parents about what you went through.

Right.

Did you talk about that with your Jewish friends and your non-Jewish friends in Valkenburg?

They were not-- there were not Jewish friends. None of them came back. Most of the people that went, there was nobody left. We had non-Jewish friends, and we talked about that. And they were very understanding, and they were very supportive. But nobody can't put-- you can put yourself in the shoes of somebody that has been in hiding or has been gone to a concentration camp. It's very difficult for other people to understand what you went through.

And we didn't have any Jewish friends because they were all gone. The friends that we had were some of the friends that we had before. But there was nobody left.

How does a 22-year-old young woman absorb that, that her Jewish friends will never come back?

You have no other choice. You are exposed to a new world. You don't have friends. I had-- yes, I had girlfriends. All my girlfriends were Gentile. I did not have a Jewish girlfriend there. There was-- there's just nobody there, and that's why I decided that the future for me-- the Jewish future for me would not be in Holland. And that's why I decided that I needed to be in America where my sister was.

You don't have a lot of Jewish friends now in Holland. When I went back, I talked to people that were 85 years old who had survived by being in hiding, but nobody came back from the concentration camps. Nobody.

What about your German Jewish girlfriends whom you had grown up with as a child when you found out that they weren't coming back or did you find that out?

I found out that they were all gone. Nobody came back. I didn't have a lot of Jew-- there were just about a handful, and none of them came back. They were all killed. And that's why I decided this is not-- I'm not staying here anymore. I have to go to Germany-- to America.

It wasn't easy to come into this country, but-- and I postponed it a couple of times because I really had guilt feelings leaving my parents. But then I decided if I want to go, I had-- this is the time for me to go. And I took the bull by the horn and left.

Before you left, did you feel-- how would you have described yourself? Were you Jewish? Were you Dutch? Were you German? How would you have described yourself?

I was Jewish all the way because it nearly cost me my life. And I was Jewish all the way. I was never German. I don't want to be German and--

I really was without a country. Like the Germans did, they took our nationality away, and I never became a Dutch Jew. So I really had no nationality. Even so, I came over under the German quota.

But when Hitler took our nationality away, we were nationless. We didn't belong anywhere. And that's why I was so eager to become an American. In fact, I was thinking about when I came to this country to join the army and become an American immediately. I didn't do that, but I had this in mind very much. This is what I wanted to be. I wanted to become an American the worst way, immediately.

You were 26 years old when you left Europe. And you were leaving your parents, and you said you had different thoughts about that. You had to leave your parents when you went into hiding--

Oh, yes.

And live by yourself. Did that bring that back to you leaving them this time again, bringing back the painful time of having to leave them before?

No. No, not at all. When we separated during hiding, we did it on purpose, and we did it to strengthen our family life, our family expectancy. And you just have to--

I tell you, life is so hard at the time that you don't think about niceties and shall I do this and shall I do that. You do it for the safety of the family of each individual person. And war times are hard. War times are very difficult. And they make you a different person than what you're used to be. But you thank goodness we came on top of it and we survived and we can talk about it.

What did you mean by saying it makes you a different person than you used to be? What were you before, and what were you later.

I was a spoiled brat. I was the youngest child in the family, and I was spoiled rotten. And in every way, I was absolutely spoiled. I was the youngest in the family. My--

[PHONE RINGING]

Mother and sister-- he'll get it. My brother and sister would spoil me. My parents would spoil me. If you talked to my family now, they know I was spoiled rotten.

Are you still there?

Still here.

OK. Oh, I can--

I can't--

Can I talk? I learned-- I used to play the piano by ear and at a very early age, and I had piano lessons for a very long

time. And it was very much-- I was an accomplished piano player. But I tell you the truth that the war has left so many scars that I have never picked it up. I don't play the piano anymore, and I have never felt that I wanted to go back to where the war made me stop.

So this is one scar that I have that I regret very much, but I have never been in the mood or willing to sit down and play like I did before. That's one big scar that I have, and it's something that will always be with me. I loved the piano. My mother played the piano.

And there was thought that I was going big places, far, but the war has hurt-- left so many wounds, left so many scars that I have never been able to get back to the piano. And this is something that I had you give up. Maybe in my next life I'll be a pianist.

What did playing the piano represent to you?

Oh, it just came from within. I was-- I just loved it. I loved to learn. I loved the music. I still-- I'm a big music admirer. And I was always highly musically inclined.

But then the war took so much away from me, took so much my lifestyle changed. Don't forget I had a beautiful lifestyle while I was in Germany. It's not a lifestyle when I lived in Pittsburgh. I shared a room with a lady and worked as a seamstress to make my own living.

You have to change. You have to flow they way your life goes. I didn't have-- I didn't have a piano for all these years, and I absolutely didn't want it anymore.

This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Ruth Greifer. This is tape number 1, side B.

Oh, don't forget, where I lived in Germany, I lived in a big house with a parlor where the piano was. And even when we moved to Holland, we still moved the piano. But then in comparison when I came to America and had to share a bedroom with a person, there was no piano, and after all these years, I absolutely had-- the desire was gone. It just had too many interruptions, and it just didn't fit my personality anymore.

Have you touched any piano keys since then?

Yes. Bernie surprised me with the piano, and he bought one. And we had it here for a couple of years. It had lost its charm and had lost it's-- it just was not the same, so it's not here anymore. It's gone.

You had said a few minutes ago that the war had left many scars and one of them was not playing the piano.

Right.

What are other scars can you talk about?

Well, the scars of having lost the family. We used to be such a big, warm family, loving, getting together for holidays, getting together for birthdays, and doing all these wonderful things. I admired my mother for being so warm and loving and a giving person.

Well, let me tell you something. When I came to America and saw what kind of lifestyle the teenagers had in comparison to mine, you can't compare my life to the lifestyle that the people have here in America. I remember that my sister bought tickets for a prom. I didn't know what a prom was. I've never been to a prom.

She bought a ticket, and I could watch other people having a wonderful time at a prom. This was-- everything was very new to me, something that I've never been exposed to. And-- but don't forget I was already older when I came here. I never had these joyous occasions.

You can never catch up on what you have lost in your life. You just have to go on and make the best of it and try to fit in.

I remember when I came to America and I was dating, and these young men said to me I was so different. Yes, absolutely, I was entirely different than they had met before. I've never had all these happy times for so many years, and it made you more serious, more-- well, I had to fight for living in every way.

I had to fight for living for when I was in Europe and I came to America. And I was all by myself, and I had to fight for a living. I was a much more serious person than other people were. Life made me that way.

Any other scars from the war?

The scars will be there all my life. I will never lose the scars in comparison to-- if I compare my life to other people's lives that I met, that I am with, I'm a much more serious person. I can't talk about all the happy times that they had when they grew up and how they met and all the people that they know and everything else. These-- the scars will always be with me.

What did you expect to find in the United States? Before you arrived, what did you think you would see or experience when you got here?

What did I expect? Well, I knew that my sister opened her house. It was sister and brother-in-law and opened her house to me. I stayed there to learn the American life because the American life was entirely different from what I was used to. First--

But what did you when you were-- before you got here, what did you think it would be like?

I don't know. I knew that I had to go to work. And I knew I had to be on my own. But there was a Jewish life here that I was very much-- that I very much wanted.

I know when I came to Pittsburgh, there were Jewish women's or young women's organizations that I could join. Something-- when I was in Holland, there was nothing Jewish around. There were no Jewish people. There were no Jewish organizations.

There was nothing there for me, especially where I was. Probably if I would have gone to Amsterdam, the bigger cities, I probably would have gotten a more support lifestyle. So there would have been maybe organizations and support. But in the little towns where I lived, there was nothing.

Why didn't you go to Amsterdam instead of the United States?

I would have been alone again, and I felt that-- I heard so many wonderful things about the United States. My sister and brother-in-law opened their arms to me. They wanted me to come and start a new life. And I never even gave it a thought to stay in Holland. I just zeroed right into America.

What you did is an incredible accomplishment to come to a new country to start a new life. Did you have any doubts that you would be able to do that?

There was no time for that, no time for doubts. There was only time to go forward to start a new life. I had so many years of losing time, losing everything that's good. There was nothing happy all these years that I just looked forward to a completely new life.

What was your English like when you got here?

My English was pretty good. I learned English in school. We were liberated by the Americans, and I did pretty well.

Absolutely. Yes.

Now you said when you went out on dates, the young men said you were different.

Oh, yes.

In what way were you different than the other young women they have been with?

I don't know. I was me. I can't tell you because I had nothing to compare it with. I probably was more serious. I probably-- I was so eager to learn, eager to see, eager to do anything I'd missed all these years. Like I said, I loved music. I loved the theater.

When I came to America and I didn't have a date and I would go to the Ice Capades by myself on the cheapest ticket that I could get, I was like a sponge that I want to just take all this stuff in over the years that I had missed. And for me, it was the arts, and it was music and just to see new things, stuff that I had missed over all these years. And it was unbelievable for me. I'd rather did without food than not going to see a show.

When you were with these young men or other contemporaries, did you really tell them in earnest what you had been through and your feelings in hiding?

I don't think I ever brought it up. I wanted to be just like everybody else. I did not bother them with my drudgery or my what I been through. I don't think I even told them who I was. They knew-- I had a name, and I was a female. But they probably heard an accent, but they never really went into what background is yours. No. Never.

So you didn't tell and they didn't ask?

No. No. Not at all.

Do you have any nostalgia for Holland?

Yes. I'm grateful. I'm absolutely-- first of all, yes, I have a nostalgia for Holland because my mother. Always loved to go to my grandfather's house. I went there on vacation-- my grandfather, my grandmother, and my two maiden aunts. And, oh, it was a treat to go to their house because it was full of antiques from top to bottom, and I'm proud to say I've never broken anything.

I was used to being around it, and I loved it. I loved the food that they cooked. They were very good cooks. And nostalgic, yes, because Holland saved my life. It was the Dutch people that came forward and to save my life. Otherwise, I wouldn't be sitting here because their life was at stake just like mine. So, yes, I'm very nostalgic about Holland very much. I love the people, and I love the country.

But this country has been so good to me. I absolutely adore America.

To what do you attribute the Dutch people saving a young woman like you?

Why did people save me? I guess that is very difficult to say. What was the reason to put their life at stake and for me?

Probably also their love for their country. I think they loved their own country so much that this was-- they hated Germany so badly because of what Germany stood for at that time that I guess they-- that's the only answer I have.

But I have so much to be thankful for to Holland. Yes, Holland has a very, very soft spot in our hearts, all our hearts. My Bernie, my husband, the children, when we went back, they loved Holland. They loved it, the country. They loved the sights. They loved everything about it.

But I've never, never regretted not to be in Holland, never. This is my home. This is my country. And this is everything I

want and I need.

What was the first sight that you saw when you came to the United States? Do you remember what the first thing you saw?

Yes. I got off the ship, New Amsterdam in New York. To experience New York, having been a small town girl all my life, was indescribable. The skyscrapers--

The cars, the traffic, the people, the way they are dressed, the way they-- I can't believe to tell you. It was-- I was in awe. I didn't know what to say, what to do. My brother-in-law and sister picked me up, and we stayed at the San Moritz on Central Park.

Coming from Europe, it was unbelievable, unbelievable. They wanted to show me what they had accomplished in all these years that they were in America. And it really was an unbelievable sight, unbelievable. I can't describe it to you. It was wonderful.

What was it like to put your foot down for the first time on American soil?

Well, I thought-- well, I have mixed feelings. Don't forget I left my parents.

It was joy, happiness, and sadness. It's not that I didn't have anybody to leave behind. Those two old people were still back there, and here I was. And I was scared.

It's very scary to come to a new country and start a new life not knowing where, how, and what. But New York is still an indescribable city. If I go there after I've lived here all these years or I--

Arrive there but everybody to me was very friendly, very, very heartwarming, and just wonderful.

What language do you think in today?

English.

When did that begin to happen?

I don't know. Bernie said I still count in German. Then I think I do. I don't know. In fact--

This morning, I saw a little animal and I couldn't think of the English word. So little bug. No, I told you when I got off the boat, my sister said to me we don't speak anything but English. So I have not spoken German that much anymore. And I'm sorry to say I do not speak it as fluent. I should keep it up but I don't.

What about Dutch?

Lost it completely. I don't have any occasion. I would think if I'd be there a week or two, I'd be back in the swing of things but not right now. I understand it. I can read it but speaking no.

When would you say that you felt assimilated into American life?

It didn't take me very long because I had a lot of help. My sister's friends helped along. They were wonderful to me. And I think having married Bernie, I give him a lot of credit for being the husband that he is and helping me along, becoming Americanized. I just feel completely Americanized.

I don't know. I don't speak German unless I really have to.

And your husband is American?

Yes.

Do you think you would be a different adult now if you hadn't gone through the experience that you did during the war?

I don't know. I really don't have any idea what it would have made of me. I know that I had to work hard to support myself. And--

I made a lot of good friends here who helped me along. I had some very good examples of young Jewish women. And I always was a joiner and was accepted. And that helped me very much to feel good in this country and to especially-- I mean in Jewish organizations. I always loved to work.

So do you think you'd be the same type of adult today if you hadn't gone through what you did?

I don't know. I don't know what kind of lifestyle I would had in Germany. I don't know whom I would married. If I married, I don't know where I lived and what it would be like. But living here, having married Bernie, having moved into this town, and having been active not only in Hadassah but in our synagogue and be part of the Jewish community, I'm perfectly happy here. I have no intentions to move anywhere or do anything. I think that this is ideal for me.

Are there any sights that you come across or sounds that you smell today that bring back those years in hiding?

Not really. No. Not at all.

I speak with one-- the lady that is still lives in Canada, and we talk about the time that we were in her home in hiding.

Who is this woman?

Her name is Katie Robertson. She lives in Canada. She is 80 years old and single, never been married and lives all alone by herself. She has no family here at all.

But we talk about old times. And-- but she also turned a leaf over. She left Holland as a Christian. She came to Canada and worked as a nurse and has absolutely no desire to move back to Holland. She does-- she did go back because she has family there, but moving back, never. She's perfectly happy here in Canada.

When your children were teenagers and older, did it remind you of the time when your life was in danger. Did it reinforce it? Did it bring it back more when your children were the same age that you were?

Yes, I was thinking where I was and what I was doing. But they were so happy with their lifestyle here that I didn't bring it up because why should I make them feel unhappy if they have a happy life here. I would never would do that to them. I would never say, well, when I was your age, look where I was and I couldn't do this and I couldn't do that. No, I don't do that.

I don't compare myself. I want them to have-- I wanted them to be happy with what we were able to give them.

Are you angry that you had to have that kind of a young adulthood, teenage years, young adulthood, and others didn't?

I never took it that way because I was not exceptional. I was not the only one. Everybody that I grew up with, everybody that I knew had the same problems that I did. As long as I wasn't alone, no, not at all.

Why should I be different from everybody else? I'm happy I survived and to able to go on with my life and to raise a happy family. But, no, I never went back. I never said to the girls, well, you went to high school and you had a prom and you had this and that and things that I never had. No. I never made them feel bad. I just let it slide by.

When did you tell them about what you went through with the teenager and young adult?

Well, they knew because I would go and speak in high school. When Carla was in high school, I was one of the speakers, and later on, I would go and speak at school. So they all-- they knew that this mother was different from the other mothers. But I was always called upon to go and speak. And so they knew that their mother was different.

Had you told them in detail exactly what you experienced in those years.

Not really, not for a long time, no. But they know now. I don't remember when we sat down and we talked, but they know exactly what makes mother tick, and she's still different [? They tell me ?]. I don't think you ever outgrow whatever-- what your youth was like really. I don't think you ever do.

Do you feel that you were more overprotective, more vigilant because of the dangerous times you lived through.

No, not overprotective but more strict. I gave my kids curfews to come home to, and they tell me I was a very strict mother.

Why do you think you were that way?

I was brought up that way. I was raised that way, and I didn't know any better. If I would have to do it over again, I probably wouldn't be as strict as I was. But I was brought up that way and--

I felt some of the American kids were brought up a little bit too-- what shall I say--

Maybe not as respectful enough as some do. I don't know, but I have learned.

As you've gotten older, do you think more about those years. I've mellowed in my age. Absolutely, yes. I'm mellowed. I'm more lenient, and-- but-- no, I really don't think back that much.

Right now I look forward to the few years that Bernie and I have, and I want to enjoy as much getting older and have some problems that crop up with old age. It's more important to us right now than thinking back.

Really?

I think our health is more important at this point in our lives.

How often do you think about your late teenage, early 20s years?

Not much. Not much, just-- I have such a busy life here. Between the-- my life is entwined with the museum, very much so. And I'm involved in the synagogue. I'm involved with other things. And my life is so full that I don't dwell on my background. I just look forward.

Yes, I can't say I-- it's all gone and I'm not thinking about it, but my life is so full of today and tomorrow that thinking back is hard sometimes. It's difficult, especially when you go and speak. You have to start all over again.

And it hurts. And other people look at you and think look what she has gone through. But you have to go and tell the world because the world needs to know. But otherwise, I look forward what's going to happen to us when we get older. And that's just as important.

Why does the world need to know?

Well, there not that many of us that have survived. And the world needs to know what happened to us during those years. Because look at the museum. They are only 40 some of survivors that are volunteers, and we're all-- if I look at them, we're all very, very different, very different backgrounds.

The world needs to know because this is part of history, and this is a very, very different history that has-- I don't say it's never happened before, but it happened to the Jewish people in so many different countries and how deeply we are hurt. We are hurt so deeply how many few people have survived and can talk about it and should talk about it. And then the generation, the next generation should talk about it, what happened. That-- it goes into history just like we're talking about history, what happened to Moses and what happened to the other people. Same thing.

It's very, very important.

Have your political views been influenced by living under the government that you did in Germany and then experiencing--

I've never been really into politics. I don't like politics. Ever since Hitler, I do not like politics.

I have to know what goes on in the world. I have to know what is being done here in America, but as a favorite subject no. I despise politics. I just don't like it.

Your particular views though, do you-- how would you characterize that.

Well--

I like the freedom. I like the freedom here in America--

More or less.

Well, we need politics. We need this country needs to survive, but I'm really not into politics.

What are your thoughts about Israel?

Oh, I think Israel is wonderful. We have to do as much as we can for Israel so that it survives. I remember that when people came out of concentration camps and they had no family, at least it was a country that opened its arms to those lonely people that were pushed away from every corner of the world.

And I think Israel is a country that we have to support that should be there always, not only for the poor and the need it for people that want to go and live there, help out, make this country bigger, make this country more-- bring knowledge to this country.

I think it's a country that we as Jews need forever.

You feel that will always be necessary to have--

Oh, I would think so. I would think it's a necessity for the Jews to have a place to go, which they should call their own. They don't--

They have their own problems, and I wish they wouldn't have all these problems. But I don't know how this can be solved. But, yes, Israel is there forever in my mind.

Do you think that there will ever come a time again when the Jews would need an Israel to go to?

I hope not. I hope not. I hope that we survivors have suffered enough, that they don't need another place to run to because we Jews have given 6 million Jews that should never be forgotten. It's too many. Absolutely.

You expressed your feelings about Germany before and not wanting to go back there to live. What were your thoughts during the Eichmann trial in Israel?

During what?

The Eichmann trial in Israel.

The Eichmann trial?

Do you remember how you felt during that time?

Well, for me, I don't have time for Germans. Germans really don't live in my vocabulary. Even so, I have friends that think they are friends of mine.

Anything that has to do with concentration camps and killing of Jews, they should not have the-- not privacy-- should not have any time to live on this world. Anybody that killed or was involved in killing Jews should not live on this world to my estimation.

Because they were-- they had too much in their minds to destroy us, which they will never do. We hope to be strong. We tried to be strong. And if we raise our children to be strong, maybe we can get back some of all the people that we lost.

That's way I feel. Anything that has to do with Germany-- my husband bought a Volkswagen. We nearly had a divorce over that one. I wouldn't sit in it. Absolutely not.

So it's been a hard life. It's been a hard life, but you have to make the best of it. And I don't dwell on it. I don't forget about it, but I don't dwell on it. I make a happy time for my children, and this is what we need for me.