

**U. S. Holocaust Memorial Museum  
Volunteer Collection Interview**

**Ruth Rappaport  
RG.106\*0185**

**October 14, 2010  
Interviewer - Gail Schwartz**

**Track 1** - Ruth Rappaport was born on May 27, 1923 in Leipzig, Germany. Her father, Mendel Rappaport was a Romanian subject, born in Rostoki. Her mother, Helene Rubinstein, was born in Mielic, Poland (south of Tarnow) and was a first cousin to the well-known cosmetics businesswoman, Helene Rubinstein. Mendel's first wife had 3 daughters, then died in childbirth, and later he married Helene in 1911. Mendel's family owned a sawmill in Rostoki and he went to Leipzig to sell lumber, stayed and became a furrier. Ruth had a brother who died at age three of whom she has no memory. Mendel was a Zionist and had always wanted to go to Palestine, but her mother who had three brothers in Seattle, Washington wanted to go to the U.S. They had papers to go to Cuba and were #34 on the American immigration quota, but the Romanians only got two visas a year so this would have meant a 17 year wait. The family lived in a mixed neighborhood and belonged to the large modern Orthodox Carlebach synagogue. She considered her home to have been traditional with a kosher kitchen, but not a religious one. She went to the Carlebach private school. Ruth was a bright, precocious child, grew up confrontational and assertive but not aggressive. She had a collection of English novels when she was ten years old and went to the English Language Institute in Leipzig where she had non-Jewish friends. She was very nearsighted and not into sports and belonged to the Zionist youth group Habonim. Once when attending a meeting honoring Trumpeldor she stood up and said "It is better to live for a country than to die for it." She read books forbidden by the Nazis such as those by Trotsky and Max Brod. The books were passed around and then the pages were torn out. Some of her teachers were professors from Heidelberg who lost their jobs after 1933. She saw books being burned and cried but kept going. She wasn't frightened as she had a Romanian passport with no label of being Jewish and thus had no curfew. She did feel the unrest and turmoil in the air. She saw Hitler once when he came by in a motorcade but did not salute. When the Germans expelled the Polish Jews to go back to Poland she saw many of them at the railroad siding. She ran to a drug store and returned with a large number of toothbrushes to give to the refugees. She remembers seeing elderly bearded Jews who were rounded up by the river's edge. The Germans shot into the air pretending to kill the people. She made a point of going after hearing from her German Communist neighbors about it. Ruth was feisty and felt it was better to see it than not as she felt more in control that way. She told her parents what she saw and they were horrified. The night before Kristallnacht her German neighbors warned Ruth and her family about the destruction that would take place and urged them to stay inside. Instead, Ruth went out and walked through the town. She saw men against a wall, books being burned, her synagogue on fire and Jewish stores being looted. The fire department protected the foreign owned buildings. She was shocked and disillusioned but not afraid. Her Carlebach school was closed permanently, but she still met with her youth group. Her family left for Switzerland very quickly after Kristallnacht. Her parents decided to go back to Germany and Ruth jumped off the train at the station right before it left because she did not want to go back to Germany. She became an au pair in Zurich in the Herzog family where she helped with the young children and taught them

English. Her parents couldn't send her money so they sent nail polish for her to sell in order for her to get spending money.

**Track 2** - Her mother's oldest brother Carl Rubinstein who lived in Seattle, Washington sponsored Ruth to come to the US. He and his 2 brothers had left Germany, had gone to Argentina, then to Westminster, British Columbia and finally to Seattle. Her parents couldn't come to the US because of the Romanian quota but Ruth could because she was born in Germany and came under the German quota. Carl was a very wealthy man from starting the canned salmon industry in the Northwest and was known as the Salmon King. His income in 1935 during the depression was \$350,000. (Later in his life his cousin Helene Rubinstein who started the cosmetics company came to visit him. When he took her to his warehouse filled with salmon she said "Your business is certainly smelly." He replied "So is yours !"). Ruth left in December 1939 on the Holland American Line boat, the Veendam, after having to go through Germany and Holland because of confusion over the boat reservation. Her uncle met her in New York having waited 6 weeks in the city for her. Ruth and Carl went by Pullman car and got preferred VIP treatment. She thought her parents would be coming to the US and received only two 25 word exchanges from them through the Red Cross. Her parents had Cuban visas and were in contact with Washington, DC lawyers to whom they had paid \$10,000 but nothing happened after December 7, 1941. They offered to pay it back but nothing helped. (She says her father died in Auschwitz and her mother in Theresienstadt, but records show her father died in Buchenwald and her mother in Ravensbruck, both in 1943.) She went to high school in Seattle, then to the University of Washington and finished at Berkeley, having majored in sociology. She became a citizen after five years in the US. She went to a judge's chambers who was a friend of her uncle's and it took five minutes. German subjects in the US were under a curfew. Her German Jewish college friends had to be home by 8 PM. After college graduation she then worked for a Jewish newspaper in Seattle and for the Zionist Emergency Council. When the Partition Plan was voted on in November 1947 she worked with Bartley Crum for UNSCOP (United Nations Special Committee on Palestine) in San Francisco. She met Golda Meir in San Francisco who urged her to come to Palestine. In early 1948 she went to Palestine as an advance person to prepare for a mission of wealthy San Francisco Jews who were coming to support the partition plan. She wrote stories from Israel and was there during the War of Independence in 1948. She participated actively and from a roof top exchanged fire with Arabs on the top of the YMCA. She was not scared as she pretended to be a spectator, that she was "not in war, just watching." Golda Meir placed Ruth in the Foreign Press Office where she wrote monthly information packages in English to go to Anglo consulates. She also helped establish the Israel Photographical Archives and urged Israel to publicize income producing industries, such as orange exports. She stayed until July 1950. She returned to the United States and worked for the Department of Defense as a librarian and lived overseas in Okinawa, Taipei and Vietnam and retired from the government after 19 years.

She does not feel German and never did. She always felt like she was floating having a Romanian passport. She felt the Eichmann trial was tedious, that the whole Nazi period was "one big mess." She never wanted to isolate its components. Though the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC is a great educational institution she feels she belongs more to Yad Vashem. She has never felt life was too hard. Challenges were to be met. Though she was a timid, shy child events precipitated her later responses. She feels that behavior is existential, "meet what comes." She has a strong Jewish identity but is not religious. She demonstrated for fair housing

soon after she arrived in Seattle as a teenager. She was always future oriented and did not have contact with other survivors. She feels the Holocaust could happen again, anywhere, anytime. Anti-Semitism is not dead. She does not think about the past as she does not want to relive it.