

-TITLE-RUTH TANNER
-I_DATE-1/29/90
-SOURCE-SAN FRANCISCO HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
-RESTRICTIONS-
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-CORPORATE_NAME-
-KEY_WORDS-
-NOTES-
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0:00:43 Ruth was born in Vienna in 1929. Her maiden name was Kimmell. Her family consisted of mother father sister and herself. Her father was a men and ladies millinery manufacturer. His factory was in Vienna and he also had half a dozen retail stores.

0:02:14 Ruth's father was very religious and she attended Sunday school. They were allowed to go to school on Saturday but not allowed to write. Although she was 10 years old when she left Vienna and does not remember all of her relatives, she does remember her aunts and uncles.

0:03:13 Ruth remembers a lot of anti-Semitism prior to 1938 and 1939. When she went to school the children would throw stones and call them dirty jews. She does not recall tension at home with regard to that. She does remember her father showing her a photo of Hitler in a dictionary and telling her about him but no talk of leaving Vienna. Her mother told her, after they left Vienna, that he did try to leave Vienna by crossing the border to Switzerland before 1938 but did not succeed due to inclement weather.

In 1939 Ruth left Vienna. In 1938 Jewish men were being rounded up to be sent to concentration camps.

0:05:16 Ruth's father was not allowed to escape from Vienna. Since Ruth's father had a bilateral hernia. Her parents decided that this was a good time to operate and arrangements were made for the surgery. They thought that while in hospital the political situation would straiten itself up.

Ruth remembers when Hitler came in 1938 they were moved out of their house to a dark basement apartment and that the keys to their residence, factory and stores were taken away from them.

Before Ruth's father went into hospital her parents decided that if they could not leave the country they would make arrangements for the children to go to Israel by way of the underground which a lot of families were doing. At least the children would be safe.

Ruth's father went into the hospital and died of complications. He died six months before they came to the US.

0:07:41 It was terrifying for the mother and for a long time did not want to tell them that he died. She said that he would follow them. Ruth found out that he died at the funeral. Her mother did not want them to see him but Ruth insisted that she wanted to see her father before he was buried.

0:08:27 One other reason why they could not leave Vienna as a family was that her father was born in Poland, and there was a quota system that existed, which put Polish people at the bottom of the list. When the father died the mother became head of the family and since she was Viennese they were allowed to leave the country immediately.

0:09:24 Ruth had an aunt who was a US citizen living in the US and she sponsored them. They were not allowed to bring anything with them except used clothes and a very small amount of money, something like 10 dollars.

0:10:07 Day to day life during 1938-1939 was not pleasant. Ruth remembers that their neighbors no longer spoke to them. Even their immediate neighbors with whom they used to be friendly. They were taken out of public school and put in a separate school. Even if you had just a smattering of Jewishness in you, you were taken out of public school.

Life was no longer the same for them. They did not have familiar surroundings just bare essential. Ruth remembers that when the anschluss occurred there was some shooting going on outside and Ruth's mother put a piece of furniture in front of the window and she put mattresses on the floor. Ruth's mother would get food from the grocery store.

0:11:29 Ruth did not know ahead of time that she would be moving to another school. All she knows is that one day they just went to another school.

Ruth's aunts and uncles on her father's side were around after her father's death. Ruth does not know what happened to them because she never saw them again.

In 1939 her father died. Six months prior to their leaving. They left in August of 1939. Ruth remembers that it was a week or two before they closed things off and would not allow Jews out anymore and rounded them off to concentration camps so that they missed that very closely. She remembers being on an ocean liner with her mother and sister.

0:13:15 Ruth had an aunt in Philadelphia and they came there. After arriving in America they lived with the aunt for a short time. None of them spoke English.

Ruth's mother decided for one reason or another that she needed to leave the aunt's house. She made arrangements for Ruth and her sister to enter a Jewish orphanage. Ruth's mother went to school to learn to speak English she also took a job in a factory. Ruth saw her mother on weekends she was fairly close by.

Life in the orphanage was pretty awful. They hated it. Ruth was ten years old at the time and was in the orphanage for 4 years together with her sister who was 17 months older. There was one other refugee, a boy, in the orphanage, Ruth does not remember being particularly friendly with him.

0:15:14 Ruth went to school in September. She lived with American children. Most of the children in the orphanage had either one parent or none at all. When she went to school the teacher assigned each of them a student who would help them get around and help them with their work. Ruth's sister made better progress than Ruth so Ruth was put back a year. Ruth's teacher could not understand her, so they put Ruth in a class where the teacher was Jewish and who spoke to Ruth in Yiddish and Ruth would respond in German and that is how Ruth learned to speak English. Until age 14 Ruth lived in the orphanage all year round. At that time Ruth's mother had established herself somewhat, she had gotten herself a place to live, she spoke the language and decided to take us out. That was about the time that we started to go to High School.

0:16:54 They stayed in Philadelphia and went to public high school. While in the orphanage they went to Sunday school but after they left the orphanage Ruth's mother was not so strict about religion. She was disillusioned because of what fate had dealt them.

0:17:38 Ruth had always understood what was taking place because they were so persecuted as children in school, in the streets, and had begun to question the validity of Judaism around age 13, 14. Ruth does not recall specific incidents of persecution but in general remembers other children spitting at them, throwing stones at them or calling them dirty Jews. Ruth remembers that she never responded to these assaults, and does not remember whether her sister did or did not.

0:19:21 Ruth was not particularly fond of school but knew she had to finish high school. Life at home was rather dismal since they did not have any money. Ruth worked from about age 15, until she completed high school. Ruth worked as a clerk wrapping packages in a store so that she could buy her own clothes. She did not want to ask her mother for anything. Ruth knew how hard she struggled.

They lived in a mixed neighborhood not a particularly good neighborhood. They lived in an apartment above a store. Ruth grew up with a terrible inferiority complex about where she lived.

0:20:36 Ruth and her sister were the only ones in the orphanage who spoke the same language so they communicated, they had no one else to speak to. The head of the orphanage spoke some German, he was Jewish and he understood them.

0:21:16 When Ruth began to date she hated her dates coming to pick her up because she lived above a store. They moved once during that period when Ruth was in High School.

Ruth learned to speak English within 6 months of her arrival in this country because they were so totally immersed in school as well as at home because there was no one there to speak German.

After High school Ruth's mother said that she could not afford to send them to College. It was very important for Ruth to get an education. Ruth's sister was very determined and said that she was going to College anyway. Ruth's mother wanted her to go to secretarial school but Ruth did not want to do that. Ruth did not know what she wanted to study in College so went into nurses training which her mother said she could afford. While in the nurses training course Ruth lived in the dorm with the student nurses. That was also in Philadelphia.

0:23:22 After that Ruth worked for about 3 years. After working for 1 year, Ruth met a man in whom she was interested but who was more interested in her than she in him and she ended up by marrying him. This man is the father of Ruth's two sons.

Ruth and her husband lived in many places in the US and ended up by settling in California by accepting a transfer. Ruth's husband name is Mitchell Tanner. He was a landscape architect. Ruth has been in California since 1973. Prior to San Francisco Ruth lived in Sacramento from 1968 to 1973.

0:24:53 Ruth's sons were not raised Jewish. It was a conscious decision. Ruth had two reasons for doing that. One of those reasons was that she was married to an anti-Semitic Jew and the other reason was not wanting her children to be persecuted. They were as good as anybody else or even better.

0:25:33 Ruth was concerned because her ex-husband worked for the Federal Government and if they were to be sent to some place which was very rural she did not know how that would work so she decided that she wanted them to choose for themselves. Her older son is very much interested in the Jewish faith. He participates on the High Holidays and while in College participated in Hillel. Ruth now regrets that decision not to give them some background of their heritage.

0:27:07 Before the Anschluss Ruth's life was very happy and intact because she had her whole family together, her mother, father and her sister. They would go on outings, holidays and such which afterwards did not exist. She had some continuity in her life, prior to coming to a new country and living in an orphanage and not having an extended family.

0:28:18 As a result of her experiences Ruth became very disillusioned with humanity. She sees a great deal of cruelty, human beings being so cruel to one another. She sees this as an adult as well. Man's inhumanity to man. Life is very cruel.

Ruth's experiences made her very sensitive and had influenced the way she raised her children. She sheltered them. Her oldest son accuses her of that. Regrettably, Ruth has not seen her sister in 20 years. Ruth's sister lives in the bay area. Ruth would have to think about what her philosophy of life is vis a vis her experiences.

0:31.06: Ruth mentions that her father (? it is not clear about whom she is talking) was not a Zionist but wanted a land of their own because they were so terribly persecuted. She herself has not been to Israel but had taken a conflict resolution in the Mid. East class which was taught by an Israeli lady and things there are really bad. She said that she herself might have ended in Israel. She told of a friend she had who lived in Sacramento and went to Israel and she did not know whether her parents were alive and found out 30 years later that they were living in Switzerland. Ruth has no relatives. She did have an aunt who went to live in England when Ruth came to America. She filled Ruth in on some things she did not know. The Nazis came and hit her over the head with a knuckle one day. As a result she had a brain tumor. She was all right after an operation. The aunt told Ruth things about Ruth's father. After all he died when Ruth was nine [NOTE: THIS IS INCONSISTENT WITH HER PREVIOUS CLAIM THAT SHE CAME TO THE US SIX MONTHS AFTER HER FATHERS DEATH AT WHICH TIME SHE WAS 11.] The aunt told her a little bit about where they came from and what their childhood was like. The aunt told her that they lived on a farm in Poland and that there were two brothers (one of them Ruth's father). The other brother went to Canada. He was murdered in Canada but Ruth has no details on that. The aunts husband was actually in a concentration camp for one year, but somehow the aunt managed to get him out. The aunt and uncle came to England as domestics as there was no one to sponsor them. In 1969 Ruth saw this aunt for the first time since 1939. Ruth has no other living relatives.

0:35:53 The boat that brought Ruth to American left from Hamburg. They traveled to Hamburg by train. In 1970 Ruth returned to Vienna and traveling by train from Munich to Vienna she experienced a uniformed man coming into her compartment and she broke out in a sweat. At that point she was an adult and she realized that he was not a Nazi, he just asked for passports. Ruth recalls that on the boat from Hamburg things were quite nice for them. The chef took a liking to her and it was like a weight had been lifted. She felt for the first time like being a child again.

0:38:36 Ruth remembers that when she first came to the orphanage they were required to wash the hair with kerosine and since they came from a rather nice environment that requirement seemed strange to her. The nurse was afraid of lice. In the orphanage they had chores that they needed to do. Clean the bathrooms or help in the dinning room. After that they would go to school.

When they first arrived in school they were a curiosity item. At recess people would gather round and look at them. There were not too many refugees in that area. That was a strange feeling.

In the orphanage the meals were served at big tables. The food was not particularly good. All the children there wanted out of the orphanage. She would see her mother on most weekend. Also on Saturdays they would send the children to the movies. She went to a public school nearby. She had friends and when she learned to speak English things became a lot easier.

0:41:28 Ruth's mother worked as a sawing machine operator in a factory. Ruth was unhappy about that. She did not like the environment her mother was in. Ruth's mother was working piece work and would have to rush in order to make money also people were smoking. It was like a sweat shop. And when Ruth finished her nurse's training they opened schools for practical nurses and Ruth helped her with that and she ultimately became a practical nurse.

0:42:52 Ruth recalls her marriage to an anti-Semitic Jew. She did not discover it right away though. She felt rather restricted and thinks he was ashamed of being Jewish. It was his immaturity. She felt she had no business being married to a man like that. She could not get a divorce. Those were the years when you had to prove adultery. There were a lot of other problems and the way she coped was by ignoring her heritage.

0:44:47 Ruth feels it is important for people to know about this era and that is why she was willing to give this interview. Also for the sake of her children it is important for them to know because they do not know what her life was like.

0:46:14 Ruth wanted her children to have a mother and not be orphans. Had she split from the husband then the children would be latch key kids, like she and her sister were. At age 40 when her older son threatened to commit suicide, she decided to stay in the marriage until she could not handle it anymore. Her younger son put her on a guilt trip telling her that she did not do him any favors, because he was not treated very well by his father.

0:48:05 Ruth does not think that her Holocaust experience has anything to do with the fact that she is not in touch with the sister. Ruth feels sad about it and absolves the sister of any responsibility. She claims it is a creation of the mother who made the sisters as rivals and that her sister did not understand that. The sister would get praised for her accomplishments and Ruth would be praised for her looks. But no matter what you did you could not do it right. To the sister she would say: "why can't you be as social as Ruth," and to Ruth she would say: "why cant you be as good as your sister in school." The sister began to hate Ruth because she was not the good looking one and Ruth was the one who got the attention. The sister was never aware that this rivalry was not created by Ruth. Ruth has not seen the sister after the death of the mother some twenty odd years ago.

0:50:09 Ruth is not experiencing anti-Jewish feelings in her community but someone she had dated said to her that he did not believe that this Holocaust did happen and that it all had been blown out of proportion. But then he was bigoted. He would call Jews kikes and blacks niggers. Every once in a while she comes across anti-Jewish feelings but she sticks up for it and does not allow anyone to get away with it.

0:51:20 The State of Israel represents to Ruth a place where Jews can live without the threat of persecution. She is happy it came about and maybe had it come about sooner she would have been living there. Ruth thinks that before her father died the parents were talking about going to Palestine, to live in what is now Israel.

0:52:40 Ruth is pleased that she would receive a copy of this interview because if nothing else it is a record of her experiences. Often times she thought of writing down her memoirs. She has been encouraged to do so by a friend who also told her about this project. She hopes that her sons will pick up their heritage again. Would like them to know more about it although she did not teach them.
.END.