

Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

P.O. Box 25506, San Mateo, CA 94402

Name of interviewee: Callmann, Ruth

Date of interview: 3/6/1996

Summary: Ruth was born in Berlin in November of 1918. She grew up in a middle class area of Berlin. She was very close to her family; she spent much quality time with them. Ruth speaks a lot about the days that her family spent swimming and vacationing. Ruth attended a Protestant grammar school and at the time anti-Semitism became evident. Ruth was the only Jewish child who attended this school and she gives details and tells stories about how lucky she was to be accepted by her friends even though she was Jewish.

The year 1933 is when Ruth began to feel the negative implications of being Jewish. Her parents warned her of the bad things that could happen. Her father was taken to jail for being a practicing physician and Ruth was in charge of hiding her father in a suburb of Berlin at one point. Ruth recalls the synagogue in the center of Berlin being smashed and completely demolished. In 1935, the Nuremberg Laws affected Ruth and her family: one example of this was that they could not longer hire a maid. In 1938, her father began to lose work because he was a physician and the Nazis made it illegal for Jewish doctors to treat non-Jews.

Her father had to leave for Tientsin, a harbor, like Shanghai, in order to survive economically. With help from the International Committee, Ruth traveled by ship with her brother, mother, and grandmother to Tientsin to ensure their safety in 1939. Shortly after arriving, the family moved to Shanghai.

Ruth felt that she was able to live a relatively normal life in Shanghai. Even though her family was living in a Ghetto, the Ghetto was safe and clean in comparison to the ghettos in Germany at this time. She worked at a leather factory and was lucky enough to get a pass from a friend that allowed her to leave the district in which she lived. Ruth survived a bombing on July 17, 1945 that was caused by the extra ammunition from American fighting planes coming back from bombing Tokyo during WWII.

Ruth was able to leave Shanghai and moved to the United States on August 25, 1947. At this time Ruth lived in San Francisco with her brother. Because she was an illegal alien, she was lucky that she got a job working for Jewish programs for the military from 1947-1992. Ruth found her home in New York and continues to live in the U.S. today.