

INTERVIEW WITH RUTH HARTZ

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**Transcending Trauma Project
Council for Relationships
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INTERVIEW WITH RUTH HARTZ

INTERVIEWER: This is an interview with Ruth; she's a survivor, a hidden child. It's Friday, June 3, 1994.

What is your name? Do you just want to leave it as Ruth?

RUTH: Yes. My name is Ruth.

INT: And can I ask your age?

RUTH: 56.

INT: And your place of birth, Ruth?

RUTH: I was born in Haifa, which is now Israel. Then, it was Palestine.

INT: And your marital status? Are you married?

RUTH: I'm married.

INT: And how many years have you been married?

RUTH: 35 years this year.

INT: A long time, huh? And your level of education?

RUTH: I have a degree, Bachelor's, Biochemistry from the Sorbonne in France, and I also have teaching certificates from St. Joe's College and a certificate in French Literature from Bryn Mawr.

INT: Oh, quite a variety. Are you employed at this point?

RUTH: I'm self-employed. I'm a consultant.

INT: Have you done teaching in the past?

RUTH: I've taught French for 22 years at the Springside School, and seven of those years I've been the head of the Foreign Language department.

INT: At Springside?

RUTH: At Springside, yes.

INT: And right now you're no longer doing that?

RUTH: No, I left Springside two years ago, and got the book published finally, and started to do some adult teaching and young children's programs in foreign languages. But since the book came out, I've been giving a lot of presentations, and trying to teach the lessons of the Holocaust to area schools. And I hope to expand on that.

INT: Are you enjoying that?

RUTH: Yes. It's very rewarding.

INT: Oh, I can imagine.

RUTH: I mean, some days it's a little straining. But the children in particular that are so responsive and make me feel that there's hope.

INT: When you say "hope," what do you mean by that?

RUTH: Well, "hope" that the lessons will be handed down to the younger generation and hopefully that they will learn about prejudice and be more conscious of it. And be more sensitive to it.

INT: It sounds like good work.

RUTH: Yes.

INT: And the level of education of your spouse?

RUTH: My spouse has a degree in chemical engineering, and he has a business degree from the Wharton School.

INT: And is he working as an engineer at this point?

RUTH: He has his own firm. He's a business consultant and deals in mergers and acquisition of medium-sized companies.

INT: Wonderful, okay. You've told me some about your work experience, and your husband's work experience. Do you have any children, Ruth?

RUTH: I have two children.

INT: And their ages?

RUTH: I have a daughter 32 and a son, thirty. Both married. And my daughter has two children, so we have grandchildren.

INT: Ah! And that's nice, right?

RUTH: Yes.

INT: How old are your grandchildren?

RUTH: A grandson who is five years old, and a baby girl who is four months.

INT: Wonderful. Do they live in the area?

RUTH: They live in northern Jersey. We just found out they'll be transferred to Salt Lake City, but it's a very good opportunity, and we're happy for them.

INT: Good. It'll just be a little harder to make contact.

RUTH: But, I'm a globe trotter, so it doesn't bother me. (laughs)

INT: Good, good. And you have a daughter and a son, did you say?

RUTH: Right.

INT: And he is married.

RUTH: He is also married.

INT: But no children?

RUTH: No children. He lives in Atlanta.

INT: Is your daughter, is she employed?

RUTH: Yes. She's employed. She's a bank examiner and audits for First Fidelity.

INT: So she's very busy between the two kids and the job and everything.

RUTH: Yes. She has a very good job.

INT: Your religious affiliation.

RUTH: Well, ever since I married my husband we've been members of Rodeph Shalom, a Reform congregation in Philadelphia.

INT: And you're comfortable with that?

RUTH: Yes. I'm very comfortable. But our daughter, I think because of my background, became much more religious, and she's kosher, and they belong to a

Conservative synagogue. They were actually married at Beth Sholom, which is a Conservative synagogue.

INT: And she chose to do that, you think, more than her husband?

RUTH: Her husband was brought up in a kosher home, and so he is Conservative, but I think she is definitely abiding by kashrut. To the letter, much more so than her husband.

INT: How about that.

RUTH: And they are very observant, and very active in their congregation.

INT: So it's obviously very important to them.

RUTH: Right.

INT: Organizations. Do you belong to any organizations?

RUTH: Yes. I belong to the Alliance Francaise. I am a member of Hadassah. My mother's a life member; my daughter's a life member. So, I'm not a life member yet, but I decided that the middle generation couldn't be without an affiliation. And I have various professional organizations. The American Association of Teachers of French and a few others. Modern Language Associations. That's more or less my affiliation. And the Franco-American Chamber of Commerce.

INT: So a lot.

RUTH: Yes, but I'm not super active.

INT: You started to tell me about your Holocaust-related activities. Can you tell me any more about what you're doing with the Holocaust? Describe anymore?

RUTH: Okay. The book came out in late December, and I really think that we had a very difficult time finding a publisher, and I don't know if you want to know the background of the book, because I had a collaborator, and she was one of my former students. Or will that come in later questions?

INT: No, I don't believe it will.

RUTH: Okay. Just, in a nutshell, I decided to write the book when the first denial account came out in the late seventies, early eighties. And I didn't quite know how to go about it, because I had been so young, and my father being the only survivor, had been too psychologically damaged to ever talk about that period. But I felt that it was very important for my children to know. So, to make a long story short, I decided that I had to do a lot of research, because we were always taken from one place to another. I was always taken from one place to another, and sometimes we were literally seconds from

being caught, and that's all I knew, but there was a whole network going on in southern France at the time. And so at the same time, one of the students whom I had taught at Springside early in my career, a young Catholic woman, approached me, and said she wanted to write a novel (she had graduated by then in creative writing), about a young man who had been in hiding in France during World War II, and he was Jewish. I said, "Stacy, did you know, that I was a hidden child?" Well, she had no idea. I began to tell her what was forming in my mind that I'd like to write down my memoirs of that period. And would she be interested in working with me. Well, here was a teacher asking the help of her student, so she was extremely flattered, and she decided to collaborate with me instead of writing her novel. And the reason she approached me is because she wanted a grant to do some research in France for the historical background. She wanted the historical background to be exact. So while we were talking, I said, "Stacy, you're a young Catholic woman. What made you so interested in the Holocaust?" And she said before she came to Springside, she went to a Catholic school. And she had a religion teacher who was a nun who had no nails. And the girls, being so curious -- and they were in the fifth grade then -- said, "Sister, why don't you have any nails?" She said, "Well, one day I will tell you." So one day she did tell them. That during the war she was married, she was not a nun, and she was in the underground, and her husband was the head of a resistance network, and the Gestapo tortured her by pulling out every one of her nails for hiding Jewish children, also for being active in the underground, and they wanted to know where her husband was. Of course, she never revealed it, they released her, but later on found her husband, shot him, she then made her way to France, where she joined the Assumption Order of the nuns, and that's how she became a nun and came over to this country.

Well, you can imagine this fifth grader, as a very sensitive, intelligent young girl, became very interested. Never heard the word Holocaust at that time, but then read everything she could, you know, starting with Anne Frank. So she had become quite an expert. And here, neither one of us had any idea...

INT: That the other one was involved in this.

RUTH: Right. And so we started to write and she had to find my voice, and we started with the convent chapter, the chapter in the convent, because that's what I remembered the most vividly. And then we had a manuscript. And we gave it to some people whose opinion we respected, and they felt that it was publishable, it was so well-written. We should try to publish it. So it took about three, four years to find a publisher. It was first in the hands of one publisher, a University press, but they wanted to make it into a very scholarly book, so everything is very well-annotated, very well-researched, but after a while it lost its spirit and its impact, because there were so many notes, and so much historical background additions, and they wanted even more, that we decided to pull it out. So we finally did get it published. It's a small press, and it came out in late December. But I still felt, because of everything we went through, and not being known, that only my friends and family members would be interested, and I probably would be giving out a lot of books, which I did, for Chanukah, to the family, and I didn't think that there would be such an interest in my story, because I thought, it's not a big deal. But

apparently it did hit a chord in a lot of people out there, and it's now at the end of its second printing, and it's going to a third printing. And by word of mouth people asked me to speak in synagogues, and to various organizations. Also some Catholic institutions, and there's a tremendous interest out there for the book, because it's very accessible to younger children. And being an educator, I realized how interested they are. And so I've been speaking a lot in April, which is Yom HaShoah month. Sometimes I had four engagements a day. This is without seeking them out. And my husband is very supportive, and has become sort of my agent. He has the wherewithal in his office, his secretary to send out numerous letters. So we started to do that. The response has been very positive.

INT: That's terrific.

RUTH: And I think it's very important. I realize how important it is for youngsters to know, and whoever wants to listen, I'm willing to go and speak up. Stacy now works at Coastal University at South Carolina. And she's the assistant to the dean of the school of education, who happens to be Jewish, so she's very interested in prejudice, of which there's a lot in South Carolina. And so they made a videotape of the book called "Speak Up. Lessons From a Hidden Child." And she made five hundred copies of the video, and she would like to sell it to as many schools as possible. And it's very affordable. It's almost non-profit. Just the cost of making the video. It's just been adopted in the Cheltenham School District, as a reader in the eighth grade.

INT: That's terrific.

RUTH: And at Germantown Academy. And I'm frankly overwhelmed by all this.

INT: It sounds like you're very busy.

RUTH: I had no idea and people were always teasing me: "Oh, well, it's the next Ann Frank." I said, "Sure," you know. Which of course it isn't.

INT: I started to read it and it's very interesting.

RUTH: Yes, Stacy gets the full credit, and she deserves it. She has really captured my voice. But other than that, other than some reflections, it's really through the eyes of a child. And I think that's why children are really favoring it.

INT: Oh, absolutely. It's wonderful. And it sounds like you are very busy.

RUTH: It's sort of a mission.

INT: But you're hoping to continue it for quite some time.

RUTH: So I'll see. I said I would give it a year first of all.

The publisher expects you to do some promoting. But at this point we are trying to get it into as many schools as possible, especially since some states have made it a mandate to teach the Holocaust. Like New Jersey, Florida, California, New York.

INT: I didn't realize that.

RUTH: Pennsylvania is another story. (laughs) But I have been asked to be a committee member of the Holocaust Education Task Force for Pennsylvania. 25 members statewide. So it's developed an entirely new world for me.

INT: So before you became involved with the book and the thinking, you were not really involved with any Holocaust organizations.

RUTH: Not really. No.

INT: So this has really opened up a whole new world for you.

RUTH: I was very active in the International French School in Bryn Mawr. I'm a founding member. And I started an adult school, which has gone very well. First of all, because of the weather this winter and also because of the book, I stopped teaching, thinking that I would pick up again in the spring. But as I explained to you, the book has sort of taken a life of its own right now. I have to take it by the horns, so to speak, and I have to see which direction I want to go with it.

INT: It's very exciting.

RUTH: We send out letters.

INT: It sounds very exciting, though.

RUTH: I hope I wasn't too long with it. (laughs)

INT: No, not at all. The more information we get, the more helpful it is.

You had said that your place of birth was in Israel.

RUTH: Right.

INT: And prior to the war, you were how old when the war broke out?

RUTH: I was under two.

INT: You were under two, when it broke out. Okay. Did you relocate? Where did you go after...

RUTH: My parents came from Germany. When Hitler came to power, my father saw the writing on the wall. They were very well-integrated Jews. Very different. Not the "Our Crowd" type of German Jews. They weren't super wealthy. They lived in a small town. And they were in the textile business. They made a decent living and were very well accepted by the non-Jews. They lived in harmony. They had never known any persecution.

INT: In Germany. Do you know the town?

RUTH: Yeah, it was near Mainz. Ironically, since we're now Reform Jews, that's where the Reform movement started, in Mainz, Germany. They were not Reform Jews. They were observant Jews. So they were not assimilated in the sense that they were only Jewish but not affiliated, or practicing. They were kosher, they were practicing Jews, they were very active in the synagogue in Ingelheim, (my mother's from Ingelheim). When they married, my father moved in with my mother's family, because they had the textile business. And that's why my father is the only survivor, because when Hitler came to power, and the media wasn't what it is today, all the raving and ranting went on in the big cities in the beginning. And sure, they read the paper, but they thought he [Hitler] was a madman, and he's not going to prevail. And so they [family members] didn't want to leave. My parents had just gotten married. My father could see there was no future. Of course, they were stripped of their citizenship with the Nuremberg Laws in 1935. They were taken away their means of survival. They closed the store. But to show you how well-meaning the people were in the village, they came at night and bought from them, continued to buy, so they thought there would be a crisis, but it would pass. It's not like the Polish or Russian Jews, who lived through massacres throughout the ages and terrible pogroms. Not that there wasn't anti-Semitism in Germany, there certainly was in the nineteenth century. But my parents generally, that particular generation did not remember. Had never experienced any persecution [before Hitler]. So my father wanted to emigrate to the United States.

INT: So once he saw that things were very serious, he decided that we need to take some action.

RUTH: Right. And he had an uncle in New York who got all the papers together and an affidavit, which meant that he had agreed to support them [my parents] financially, but the quotas were very strict, and so the papers never came, but I think the very wealthy people, probably, were able to get papers. Same old story, you know. Money buys a lot of things. And even his uncle had just emigrated a few years before and was just getting his feet on the ground. I mean, I'm just surmising that, because in everything I've read, I know that people of means were able to leave more easily, even though there were very strict quotas.

So they [my parents] decided to make their way to what was then Palestine. And that's where I was born.

INT: And you're the oldest child, only child?

RUTH: I'm the only child. I was a twin, and my mother had a very difficult pregnancy, and the twin died after a few days. The climatic conditions were very harsh for my mother in Palestine. The general conditions were very harsh then with the Arab guerilla warfare. And here they had lived a relatively comfortable life in Germany. So she became very ill. She had a brother in Paris, and that's how they [my parents] decided to make their way to Paris, hoping that they would still get the papers to come to the United States. But in all fairness to France, because during the war they were abominable, before the war it was one of the few countries in Western Europe that was open to the Jews. And they had no trouble, with their status, you know, to go from Palestine to France.

INT: How old were you, Ruth, at the time?

RUTH: And they came in, right after Munich, late '38, I think. Or early '39.

INT: That they went to France.

RUTH: That they went to France. And then the war broke out in September of 1939. They were caught.

INT: Your parents were caught.

RUTH: My parents were caught in France.

INT: And did they then end up in concentration camps?

RUTH: They ended up in a camp that was for refugees. What France considered "undesirables," because when the war broke out in September of 1939, they were considered stateless, of German origin, so enemies of France. Jewish at that time didn't even mean that much. They were just foreigners. They were refugees. So they put a lot of these Jewish, German, Italians, Spanish refugees -- of which there were many in France because it had been open to a lot of refugees -- in a camp. France had set up concentration camps later on. But they were refugee camps at the beginning, which they later turned into the infamous concentration camps.

In that camp my father found out that he could join the French Foreign Legion, and my mother and me would be released. He did that. And he did that. Because they needed men. They needed men for the army. But for the French Foreign Legion, he needed some training in North Africa. That's where they were posted. So he [my father] went to Morocco. And so my parents were separated, because my father went to Morocco, and my mother made her way to southern France.

INT: Were you with your mother?

RUTH: You have to know a little bit the history of France to understand what happened to us. France lost the war after six months, and signed a treaty with Hitler. A man by the name of Phillipe Petain signed a collaboration treaty with Hitler. He was a staunch anti-Semite, and agreed to collaborate with all the anti-Jewish, Nazi laws. And then all these refugee camps became concentration camps. They were manned by the French police, and Germany occupied northern France at the beginning of the war, and southern France was unoccupied. So at the beginning of the war only the Jews in northern France had to wear the yellow star and they were rounded up. By then, luckily, my mother had made her way to southern France, and that's where the book begins, in Toulouse, in southern France.

INT: So you were with her then, or she was with you for...

RUTH: Yes. With my aunt. She hooked up with my aunt and my uncle...

INT: Who lived in southern France?

RUTH: No, her brother who lived in Paris, but they [he and his family] also left after the war broke out and made their way south. After a long episode, and a lot of hardship.

INT: Do you remember that time?

RUTH: No. I only remember from the time I was four, because I went to kindergarten. That's when the book begins...

INT: Starts at that point, yeah.

RUTH: There is a manuscript with a hundred pages longer in my mother's voice, to give the family background. The publisher felt that it took away from the drama and the impact of the book. She felt it would be stronger without it. And I think she made a wise decision.

INT: When your memories, going back to the age of four, what were the conditions like for you at that time?

RUTH: Well, at the beginning I remember going to school. Well, that's when I started going into hiding, because we quickly acquired false papers. But my cousin Jeanette gave me the name Renee. "Your Name is Renee," is the title of the book. And I knew then that I had to pretend to be somebody else. I had to hide my true identity.

INT: That's when you became aware of that.

RUTH: And I became **very** aware of that. That I could never say that I was Jewish. I could never say where I lived. I shouldn't make any friends. And I should talk to as few people as possible, and when I talked, I should learn to lie.

INT: Boy, that must have been scary. For a four-year-old to understand?

RUTH: So that's why my memories are so vivid. And I had no friends, I didn't trust anybody. This lady who follows me after school, and I was so scared.

INT: You can still feel that, and that fear, huh, of that time?

RUTH: Yes. And the only place I felt safe was with my cousin who was older. And we often hid in churches because there nobody would know that we were Jewish. And I always felt very secure inside a church.

INT: And that went on for how long, Ruth?

RUTH: What, Toulouse?

INT: That situation.

RUTH: For about a year until somebody told my father that they were going to round up all the Jews one night. And that man worked at City Hall. It was very kind of him. He didn't just know that we were Jewish, but had an inkling, because we didn't tell anybody. You know, we were given one room in a building by the authorities. But there were lots of refugees. And by then I think my father had acquired false papers. With a false first name, a false last name, and an identity card that didn't say "Jew" on it. That meant sure rounding up and being deported.

So when he came he said, "I saw the ordinance, they're going to round up all the Jews tonight probably within the hour. And I know there's a train leaving, probably the last train. You'd better get everything together and run to the station." And my father said, "But I have a brother in the city. I want to tell him." He said, "Well, hopefully someone will tell him, also, because if you do that, you may miss the last train."

INT: What a choice!

RUTH: So we went to the station and his brother was taken that night. They did not take his wife and children. His wife was taken later. Apparently that night, for whatever reason, they took some families, but a lot of men.

INT: And this cousin, his brother, this was not the uncle that...

RUTH: No, that was on my father's side.

INT: Okay, and this was your mother's brother, right?

RUTH: Right.

INT: And did they...

RUTH: But I did get to know him, and I was very fond of him, and he's sort of a central character in my story.

INT: Was he ever found before? Did he survive, or...

RUTH: No, he was sent to Auschwitz.

INT: You were obviously very close with your cousin. You have one cousin, or two cousins that you lived with?

RUTH: Well, I have my cousin, who was a girl, an older girl, Jeanette. She had a brother. But you know, a male cousin, I didn't have the same relationship. And I had cousins on my mother's side. Two girls. One was a year older, one was two years younger, so she was really just a baby. But we were reunited later in the country. It's a little complicated. They made their way to a little village.

INT: So you took the train that evening?

RUTH: So we took the train that evening, tons of refugees, apparently, on that train.

INT: Anyone who knew about it.

RUTH: And I do remember that. I remember the train stopping in the middle of the night, with all these hundreds of people walking on the road, in the middle of the road. They were afraid to walk on the side. Didn't know what they might encounter. And just walking into farms, because farmers had been told that there were lots of refugees, and as part of the war effort, they had to take a lot of people, and this was before France lost the war. And so they took in a lot of refugees.

INT: Were you taken in?

RUTH: So we were taken in by a farm. And they told us to go to this little village. And they thought they might be able to help us. They only kept us one or two nights.

INT: This was, your mother was with you and your cousins?

RUTH: Both my parents. My father had been released because France lost the war, so they released all the men. They either were made prisoners of war, or they were released. In that case he was released.

INT: So you were together as a family. Do you remember...

RUTH: Apparently -- I couldn't find anything in my research -- but I think that a lot of men who were released from the French Foreign Legion were sometimes directly arrested and sent into the concentration camps set up in France, from there, they had these cattle

trains to the extermination camps. So it was just incredibly lucky, or my father was very smart, not just following the crowd. He was able to make it. He didn't go to the camp. He never said that he escaped. Like...

(END TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO)

INT: Do you remember -- again, you were so young -- but do you remember, you said you had memories of the train and that. Do you remember the feelings? I mean, your parents must have been, everyone must have been panicked.

RUTH: Right. I remember silence.

INT: Just no one knew what to do or think or say, or any of that kind of thing?

RUTH: Yes, yes. I think being a hidden child meant not only losing your identity, but remaining silent for long periods of time.

INT: You learned that pretty quick, huh?

RUTH: Yeah. Intuitively. And being able to live in confined spaces without speaking up.

INT: And just kind of follow whatever the few people you trusted told you to do. Just kind of follow and pray a lot, huh? How vulnerable.

Did you, were there any grandparents that were involved in all this, Ruth, at that point?

RUTH: My father's family stayed in Germany, so we didn't know what was happening. We found out after the war.

INT: They were captured?

RUTH: Oh, yeah. They all died in Auschwitz. My father lost more than fifty members. His mother, two sisters, of course his brother in France. Cousins, nieces, nephews. I'm talking fifty members of his almost immediate family. I'm not talking about second and third cousins who also perished. My mother's sister was taken and perished in Auschwitz. Her parents, for whatever reason, were sent to Theresienstadt, Terezin? Terezin was in Czechoslovakia. And after D Day, the Red Cross visited that camp, because they said they heard that the conditions were so horrible, and so the Nazis said, fine, come see one of our camps, and you'll see that they are just rumors, the stories are not true. And they're false rumors. So they visited that particular camp, which was supposed to be "a model camp."

What they did, they put up a facade. When the Red Cross visited, they told them what day. And they had plenty of time to put flower boxes on these facades, and they fed some inmates properly for about ten days, because they were too emaciated. But when the Red Cross came, one of the deals was, and that apparently was not illustrated, but it happened to my grandparents -- they were exchanged against German wounded soldiers. You know, after D Day there were a lot of wounded soldiers. And so they were exchanged. Around June or July of 1944. Probably July. And were sent to Switzerland. So they did survive. I did get to know my maternal grandparents. My grandfather was a walking skeleton. And he only survived six months. Finally he just dropped dead one day on the street. So when I got to know him I literally saw him waste away.

INT: Dying, yeah.

RUTH: My grandmother did recover. She was younger and maybe more resilient. And so I did get to know her. And she died after I was married.

INT: Did she remain there?

RUTH: Oh, we were reunited in France. They came to Paris to live with us. That was how I got to know them.

INT: I see, and that's when. What was she like?

RUTH: But they never talked about their camp experience.

INT: Never talked. What are your memories of what she was like?

RUTH: You know, she only spoke German. Of course, I had heard German, my parents tried to avoid speaking German during the war. It was much too dangerous. They spoke French with a heavy accent. But from the time I became conscious, I was only exposed to French. So it [German] wasn't really my language.

INT: You couldn't really communicate real well.

RUTH: But I could understand her. So yes, we did communicate, and we didn't have the warmest relationship, but she certainly was a kind person, and she told me how they lived before the war. Never a word about the camp.

INT: What do you remember her telling you about her life before the war?

RUTH: Well, that they lived in the country, and they had a garden, with cherry trees. It was just a little after the war, and she was telling me how they picked fruit. They had all the family together on Friday night.

INT: So very fond types of memories of a good life.

RUTH: Yes, she was trying to tell me about the good life they had.

INT: And unable to talk about the pain. Was she a quiet woman after that?

RUTH: Yes. And she had lost a daughter. But she was actually my mother's stepmother. It's a long story. My mother's sister, who perished, was really her half-sister. The grandmother was a step grandmother. But she had really raised my mother. My mother lost her own mother when she was nine, and her father remarried two years later.

INT: Been her mother. And then eventually she passed away. She got older.

RUTH: Right.

INT: Do you know how old she was when she died? Was she like in her seventies?

RUTH: I would say maybe past eighty.

INT: Past eighty, okay. Ruth, after you left, getting back to what you had said about taking the train and going into the countryside, what happened after that? Where did you end up?

RUTH: Well, we ended up in a small village, where a lot of the members were in the Resistance, so we were lucky. But not everybody. And especially the town crier was a collaborator, and denounced Jews for a ridiculous sum of money. Meaning low. But in a way it was lucky because, my father, thanks to the Resistance members found a job. They [my parents] had nothing. They had the clothing on their backs. And that's it. And he was making knives, the famous French (?) knives they made in that area, and he worked by the piece. He would be paid by the piece. Of course, being a businessman, he wasn't exactly trained for manual labor, so he did his best. But everything he made he had to give to the town crier so he wouldn't denounce us. And luckily he never did, but he denounced other people. Luckily, since it was in the countryside, the peasants and the farmers gave us food just to survive. So we were very lucky. We really were saved by the true righteous Gentile rescuers. Of which there were very few.

INT: Did your parents talk to you at all about what was going on and, or were you just kind of, sort of followed them?

RUTH: No, there was sort of a conspiracy of silence, you know. There were always sighs, and...During the war?

INT: During this time, yeah.

RUTH: Oh, sure, because I went to school for awhile, but then it became too dangerous, because there were roundups. And one day the police came for my father.

INT: How old were you then, Ruth, do you know?

RUTH: Five. A little past five.

INT: And you were in this village, still in this village.

RUTH: In this village, and my mother had gone into the next village, I think to see my aunt. So I was alone with the babysitter, but she wasn't a young girl, so that woman could have been my mother. They were the French police. And they pushed her aside. So they knew she wasn't my mother. So they knew everything about us. So they asked me where my father was. And I was of course conditioned to say that I hadn't seen him. And as children talk, "I haven't seen him in a thousand years." And of course I was shaking and started to cry. And they said, "Well, last time you saw him which way did he go?"

And I made a gesture in several directions. You know. So then they questioned me some more. "Well, last time you saw him, which way did he go?" Of course, that's also something I remember extremely vividly. And then he said, "Well, last time you saw him, which way did he go?" And then one said to the other, "Shall we take her?" And the other responded, "Well I know we didn't catch a single one." Apparently they only took the men. So they asked for my father, never asked for my mother. And what they did, they took the children as hostages. So when the parents came to pick them up, they would just take the whole family. So one said to the other, "Well, we haven't caught a single one today. So let's see what the rest of the day brings." And this is not in the book. We changed or deleted it, but, that I remember very vividly, also.

And to show you how short I was. What I remember, my eye level was the buckle of their belt. Which I think I could describe down to the last detail.

INT: Because that's where you stared at, right.

RUTH: That's what I was staring at. And so they left, and of course, a Resistance member had seen them come to our house, and had warned my father, who ran into the field. It was summertime, probably, and the wheat was very high, so he was able to hide in a wheat field. And after that episode they decided, even that night, it was much too dangerous to stay in that room. And so another farmer's family hid us in their cellar. And they actually built a false trap door. And then hopefully the authorities wouldn't be able to find us. They [our rescuers] took tremendous risks. And they decided that that would be okay for my parents, but they said, "I don't know about the little one." I mean, it was very confining, and dark, brought food down. So that's when they had heard that a local convent was taking in Jewish children.

INT: Oh, okay. And that's where you went, too. How about your cousin, Jeanette, is that her name?

RUTH: Jeanette remained in Toulouse, and she never talked too much about it, but from what I gathered, they also went into hiding after the father was taken. And they thought it was safe and went back to the apartment. And one day on the street they took their mother, holding the children's hand. I guess they were like fifteen and sixteen. Took the mother, left the children on the street. That was 1944. But we found that out after the war. We didn't know what was going on.

INT: So they...

RUTH: So they remained in Toulouse, and somehow they had friends who helped them.

INT: Jeanette had friends and...

RUTH: Jeanette had friends, and her boyfriend was in the underground. They were able to manage somehow.

INT: And where is she now? Is she still living?

RUTH: After the war my father offered to take them in, but they also had family on their mother's side, we were related on their father's side. On their mother's side they had a lot of family in New York, and they insisted that they come to New York. Well, by then they were sixteen and eighteen. Maybe seventeen and nineteen. So they decided to make their way to New York. And she [Jeanette] married an Auschwitz survivor. She met him...

INT: In New York?

RUTH: In adult English class, and during the war she must have contracted rheumatic fever, which was never treated. So her entire adult life was very traumatic, because she was very sick. Her heart had been affected. So she had a heart condition, and she passed away about five years ago. She had open heart surgery.

INT: Have you kept in touch with her?

RUTH: Oh, yes, oh yes.

INT: She's been part of your life?

RUTH: Oh, yes, and now we're in touch with her children. I mean, they're busy. The young generation is busier than our generation, so I've tried to call them regularly.

INT: Sure. Are they still in the New York area?

RUTH: One is in the New York area, the other one is in North Carolina. He's the director of the Jewish Community Center in Charlotte.

INT: And how about her brother?

RUTH: Her brother, for whatever reason, we drifted apart. His wife wasn't interested, apparently, in me.

INT: And now they're in this country, also?

RUTH: Toronto. So it's a shame, but, things happen. Maybe it's from the beginning we just never hit it off.

INT: Sort of like that sibling rivalry almost, between the two of you?

RUTH: It's silly, because you grow up as an adult. He couldn't talk either about his experience. Neither did Jeanette that much. But she told me about being in Toulouse and how rough it was for her.

INT: Later on she was able to talk about that?

RUTH: Yes. Yes. She was involved in Resistance activities.

INT: When you were separated from your family and you went to the convent, that must have been...

RUTH: That was very traumatic.

INT: To hear that you're going one place and they're staying in another.

RUTH: First of all, I went in with my false identity. So I was that other person. Only the Mother Superior knew who was Jewish. And the nuns I came in contact with, didn't know. I mean, they were training us in catechism and everything else.

INT: They called you Renee?

RUTH: Yes. They didn't know.

INT: That's the name that stuck with you?

RUTH: Even the Mother Superior didn't know my true identity. I found out later in my research the true identity of these hidden children was smuggled to Switzerland. There was a whole network who literally memorized these children's names. There were no papers. You couldn't be caught at the border with papers. So they memorized the children's true identity, and the minute they arrived in Switzerland, they would inscribe them, and I found a whole folder on me.

INT: Do you remember what it said?

RUTH: When I did research for the book, about ten years ago. I had no idea.

INT: What you were supposed to be.

RUTH: Ruth Kapp. And my real name, and all the papers were signed, and were transcribed.

INT: That's how you really learned about your background, then?

RUTH: No, no, no, because my parents survived. But a lot of children whose parents did not survive and who were very young, yes, found out this way, or maybe some of them found out much, much later as to who they really were. So you see, there was a convent, and a lot of the children were orphaned. Or at least had lost one parent. And parents had visitation rights on Sunday. So the nuns assumed if your parents aren't visiting, you're an orphan. So they told me, "Your parents are dead." That's exactly how they put it to me. (French) and then, "You'll get with it, and we'll take care of you. And you're very lucky to be here with us, and we'll take good care of you. And don't worry." Well, tell that to a five year old.

INT: Who thinks her parents just died. Well, did you know?

RUTH: So I was crying, so I didn't learn my lessons, so they were harsh. But they didn't treat me any differently than anybody else. Number one, they didn't know, and I'm sure they wouldn't have.

INT: But that's just how they treated the children.

RUTH: The children who didn't obey.

INT: Who cares that you're crying.

RUTH: Yes. They had a lot of children, I guess, I can't remember how many we were in a class. I know we were in neat rows and they were passing by, and they had a ruler, if you didn't do what they told you, they hit you with a ruler. You put your hands up this way, and you got a few smacks. You know, it did not hurt that much, it was more psychologically traumatic than physically. I mean, it stung at times. But I wasn't the only one getting it. So it was not like I was singled out.

INT: They just didn't have time for a child's tears. They didn't want to have to deal with that part of it.

RUTH: There was a lot of that going on. And it was a tremendous risk on the Mother's Superior's part, because the Gestapo came to the convent, and that's how I knew who the other Jewish children were, because she huddled them all together, and it was in the evening, apparently, and took us in the chapel, and lifted the rug, and under the rug there

was a trap door and that opened the door, and we could hear the conversation. "What do you mean, I'm hiding Jewish children!" (laughs)

INT: You must have thought your parents were really dead.

RUTH: Oh yes, absolutely. I was convinced they were dead.

INT: Sure. So you went through that whole, not only being misplaced, but then thinking you had actually lost them, that they hadn't survived. And then having no one to talk to about it.

RUTH: Right. Well, I was taken with two other children, and I knew that they too were Jewish, or half Jewish, because their mother had taken me. In fact, when we wrote, when we started to write down, when Stacy started to write down after interviewing me at length, she said, "What do you remember the most vividly?" Of course, the police episode, and also being taken to the convent. Because my mother said, "You're going on a vacation. On a short vacation." She packed everything I had, which wasn't much. But I thought it was strange. And then...

INT: Do you remember saying, "I don't want to go"?

RUTH: (Pause) I just remember being very silent.

INT: Just keeping it all in.

RUTH: Not making waves, not raising my voice. I may have. I don't remember.

INT: But for you it was probably crying inside, and nothing coming out, that kind of thing.

RUTH: And this lady came, I hardly knew her. She was married to a Jew, Madame Kahn. She may have been half Jewish herself. But was very French. She had bright red hair, and very outgoing, and that I remember and very energetic. And I said, "I remember being taken to that convent. And then she couldn't take us in, it was too dangerous. And she left us on the street." And I said, "I think that's what I remember. Being left alone in the street." At age five and a half. And this lady comes out in this black robe and black veil and whisks us into this stone foreboding building. These things you don't forget.

INT: Oh, I'm sure you don't. I'm sure you don't. The other children that you knew that were Jewish or half Jewish, did you talk when you were in the convent, or it still was that silence, or did you find secret times?

RUTH: We probably did, but Emmy, the little girl, had had a stomachache, and I asked to visit her in the infirmary. So they gave me permission once. And then I realized that she was well-treated. She got an egg. We never had eggs, I mean, food was scarce, too.

So I pretended a stomachache. Of course, it wasn't hard, because everything ached anyway in my body. To be sent to the infirmary. So I remember staying one night, or one or two days.

INT: To try to be pampered a little, huh, to get that egg or whatever.

RUTH: Yeah.

INT: How long were you in the convent for?

RUTH: About five and a half months.

INT: So it wasn't too long of a period of time. Was the Mother Superior, was she someone that you thought was special to the girls, or...

RUTH: We hardly saw her.

INT: So it wasn't like she was a warmth, or anything, brought any of that, she just was very kind in what she did, but...

RUTH: We didn't see her. And she had a tremendous responsibility.

INT: Like you said, took a tremendous amount of risks. But wasn't particularly nurturing, or any of those kinds of...there wasn't anybody there who was really like that.

RUTH: It probably would have been too obvious, even if she wanted to.

INT: Where did you go after that?

RUTH: Well, after that, that was about fifty years ago, it was just before D Day, apparently the resistance members felt that the Nazis were retreating, were leaving the area. Naturally they still had the French police who, you know, rounded up, kept rounding people up. For some reason they felt it was safer. Which it wasn't, and in my research I found out. But they felt, so Madame Kahn came, picked us up before they actually landed, before we were liberated. So I was reunited. And my parents were still living in the cellar, but a little more in the open.

INT: You were reunited with them. Boy, having thought they were dead all those months, and then seeing them. Do you remember how that felt, Ruth?

RUTH: Oh, yes, it felt wonderful, and at the same time, strange. Because I had a rosary, I was a devout Catholic by then. You know, you're very impressionable at that age.

INT: Yeah, it's a whole new thing. And I imagine for you, you never knew where you were going to be. It was like any day, someone could come and tell you to do something different, or go someplace else.

RUTH: Right.

INT: Do you remember thinking about that, just having this overall, I don't know if it would be fear, or worry, or...

RUTH: I only knew that I was in constant fear. And then of course, well after D Day, they started to bomb the area. The bigger city near where we were was bombed. You could see the flames.

INT: What city was that, do you know?

RUTH: Albi. A-l-b-i.

INT: And do you remember the name of the village where you were?

RUTH: Sure. Arthes. (spells it)

INT: Thank you for spelling them for me. That makes it easier! (laughs) And you remained there until...

RUTH: Until '47. And then my parents made their way to Paris. My uncle started a business. He had been a partner in a rainwear manufacturer.

INT: Now this uncle is your...

RUTH: My mother's brother.

INT: Okay, the one you had.

RUTH: And then he said, "Would you like to be a salesman for our company?" So we made our way to Paris.

INT: And how long did you stay there?

RUTH: Oh, until I was an adult. Then I came over to the U.S.

INT: That's where you finished, you said you went to the university there.

RUTH: I was educated there.

INT: What was it like for you there, as far as economics? Were you poor at that point?

RUTH: Very poor. I guess it was the American Joint which had sent some money over for the survivors, and we were given one table, three chairs, three plates, three glasses, and three forks, three knives and three spoons. And that's what we had. Maybe a little more for me. I know I had sheets. I'm not even sure my parents had sheets at first.

INT: What were your parents like...

RUTH: But they had some, maybe from the country. I mean we had some very, very bare necessities.

INT: What were your parents like at that point?

RUTH: At that point they were very nervous, not knowing what happened to them. I guess by then they received a letter from the Red Cross, three months after the end of the war. And they knew that so many were murdered. So they just wanted to start all over and make a life for themselves. They [family members] sent me to school. Of course. And I used my name Renee at school. So many people had collaborated, which I didn't know at the time, but for some reason I could hear the other children calling somebody else, "Sale Juive," dirty Jew, and sure enough, they found out I was. So I was always harassed and heckled after school.

INT: Did you have any friends?

RUTH: I had very few friends. I joined a Jewish scout troop, and that's where I felt secure again.

INT: And that's where you met some people.

RUTH: Yes, that's where I met some friends. I was eight. Yes, I was about eight at the time. My father didn't care if I had a religious upbringing, because you know, I didn't know what Jewish was. I only knew it meant arrest and death. I didn't know anything about Judaism. So my mother wanted me to have some instruction, and there was nothing organized, there were so few people left. So few children left. I thought that I was the only one. So she [my mother] did find a rabbi who had been in the army. Or was a chaplain. And he gave me a few lessons. He became Chief Rabbi of France later on. But I was the only child, then two other joined, and then they started to come out.

INT: So your father at that point, had he kind of disassociated with his religion then, whereas before...

RUTH: Yes, he lost his faith.

INT: He lost his faith. Angry at G-d, and did you...

RUTH: No, he said "There's no G-d."

INT: If there was a G-d, this wouldn't have happened.

RUTH: Right.

INT: So he was very...

RUTH: He didn't have the same reaction as an Elie Wiesel, for example.

INT: And your mother was different, though, in that sense? She was interested in you to keep more faith?

RUTH: She wanted me to have a Jewish identity more than anything else.

INT: And he was too angry to want that.

RUTH: He couldn't care less.

INT: Was there anyone that was very special to you during that time, those years of schooling, and in your life?

RUTH: Special besides my parents? It was hard for me because my cousins on my mother's side, you know, her brother's children, the two girls, for some reason because their father was able to smuggle some money into Switzerland, were pretty comfortable, compared to us. And my own cousins even made fun of me, about my tattered clothes. And they had much prettier dresses. And my mother very often would unravel -- and she did that during the war -- her own sweaters, or cut a dress from her skirts. And they were ashamed of me. And also, I had quite a southern accent. My older cousin was born in Paris, my younger one was born in '39, just a month before the war, so she was still very little. So she imitated her older sister, who acted like the big deal. I mean, she's changed, but at the time that hurt me very much. And they made fun of me. So when we went out together she said, "Don't speak so loud, because of your accent. You sound terrible." So I had a cousin telling me how terrible I sounded, and at school, I was a dirty Jew. (laughs) And I was an only child, so I was used to playing by myself and being alone a lot.

INT: And keeping everything inside, and not really having anyone to share that with.

RUTH: Right. In Scouts I made friends. I felt better.

INT: So things were really tough, then, for your parents after the war. Economically they were very difficult, and there was a lot of anger and that type of thing.

RUTH: Right.

INT: What was your, do you know what your parents' relationship was like, I mean, after the war?

RUTH: Well, you know it's something that I'm only now beginning to wonder. My mother is incredibly emotional. I mean she breaks down in tears from the time I remember. I'm not saying during the war, that I can't remember too well, because we had

reason to cry, so it was different. But after the war, I was thinking, Why can't she control herself better. You know, she would see something on television, she'd break out and really sob. But she wanted to raise me as normally as possible.

(END TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE)

INT: your mother and her feelings and...

RUTH: And how incredibly emotional she was. So even when she sent me away first for a few days, I went with my aunt and uncle. They were rented villas, and they had the means, my parents didn't. I mean, she would cry uncontrollably. I mean, I'll be back. I would leave on Friday, I'll be back Monday. And of course, in retrospect, I understand.

INT: That fear of having to say goodbye to you again.

RUTH: Yes. And now I'm wondering, she's now 91...

INT: She's still living?

RUTH: Yes, she lives alone in Paris. She has help, but...yes, G-d bless her, she didn't want to come here.

INT: How is her health at this point? I mean, she's 91.

RUTH: Well, declining. But all in all, a lot of things have happened to her, and we'll get into that, in the past year, unfortunately, but considering everything, she's pretty good.

INT: Do you remember how it felt when she would cry and you would leave, just even to go to camp, or to go for a few days?

RUTH: Yes, I think as I was growing up, I felt that she should be able to control herself better. It made me very uncomfortable.

INT: Did you feel guilty about leaving, about trying to move on with your activities or life, or...

RUTH: You have to understand that I was raised in the French culture. And at the time, guilt was not French. Maybe now the word guilt has also passed into the French vocabulary.

INT: (laughs) It's not as strong as it is here, huh?

RUTH: The French, whether they're more ingenious, or whether they're more sure of themselves, whatever it is, they just don't believe in being guilty. (laughs) I'm sure I felt guilty. But I really didn't know what it was.

INT: But it felt more like you couldn't understand it, or what she should be doing.

RUTH: Yes. But it's a little bit in the French character not to be guilty. You do something because you want to do it, and you do it now, whatever you do, and it's as right as you feel it is, and that's the way you're trained in school. They develop your character very young. They give you back your grades in order of merit. And you get stripped in front of the class. If you're the last one, everybody knows. You stand up, and the teacher tells you. I don't think they do that anymore. But everybody gets treated that way. And I think it's because in those days they wanted to develop your character.

INT: And make you strong, I guess.

RUTH: Make you stronger, and try better, try harder next time. (laughs)

INT: Was your Dad also emotional, Ruth?

RUTH: No, but I think he had bouts of screaming, couldn't control his temper.

INT: He would all of a sudden just kind of let it out. Over small incidents, even?

RUTH: Yes, and I was, abused is a big word, because I think deep down they loved me and cared for me but, I was often hit, in the face, or on my buttocks. If I didn't do whatever they wanted me to do, they lost control, their own control, very, very quickly, for very little.

INT: Okay. It was hard for them to control their anger.

RUTH: I'm sure that resulted from their traumatic experiences.

INT: Oh, I'm sure, I'm sure. And I guess it was, you were so little before the war, that it was hard to say that they had changed so much afterwards. Were they...

RUTH: But part of it may be their personalities, I don't know. Because my father often said, "We were five children, and we always had to share, and you leave food." when I left the slightest thing on my plate, they were furious.

INT: But again, it's hard to tell if that's because during the war they never had food.

RUTH: But they never told me what it was during the war. Never. It was always, "When I was a child, when I was your age, I had to share, and we were five children." That's the only thing I heard. I never heard...

INT: "Because we couldn't eat during the war."

RUTH: Never.

INT: Neither one of them ever spoke about it at all, huh?

RUTH: No. Only the pleasant episodes, you know.

INT: It sounds like your Mom was very depressed during her life, would you say, during the rest of her adult's life?

RUTH: Yes, and a pessimist. Always saw the dark side of things.

INT: Do you have any memories of that in particular?

RUTH: Oh, I could take any incident.

INT: Anything that was good, you thought.

RUTH: Right. We were going to go on vacation, it's going to rain, or the hotel won't be to our liking. Little things like that. It was always negative.

INT: Your father also?

RUTH: No.

INT: He was more optimistic?

RUTH: Yes, he said, "Well, we'll go to another hotel, you know, if you don't like that one." And then they would fight about very trivial things.

INT: So in a lot of ways it sounds like the household, it was...

RUTH: It was tense.

INT: It was never relaxed after that between Mom's sadness and Dad's anger sometimes.

RUTH: Yes. I would say it was tense.

INT: How did you deal with that?

RUTH: (laughs) I'm not quite sure. Probably by locking myself up in my room, trying to ignore it, delving into my studies.

INT: School was important to you? You did well?

RUTH: School was very important. It was important to them, too. Except my father felt that girls should just take homemaking. Or, at best, learn to be a typist. He couldn't understand why I wanted to go to the Sorbonne. And here it was free, it didn't cost him anything. But then when I was accepted, he was very proud. I took him with me, because the results were posted on the wall. And in those days they had so many candidates and so little space, that they only took ten per cent of the high school population to go on.

INT: Wow. You really, then, pushed beyond his resistance to your, some families you go with it, because that's what you do.

RUTH: Right. Well, I think my mother expected it.

INT: Expected you to go...

RUTH: Beyond.

INT: So they had different viewpoints of what a woman should do, could do, that kind of thing?

RUTH: Right. She worked very hard. She had like a stand in a market selling raincoats. My uncle was in rainwear, my father was a salesman for him, and she sold them on weekends and even mornings, and it was very harsh for her. It was just to stand in a cold, Reading Terminal type market, except it was all clothing. Clothing and maybe some furniture. I mean, not unlike some of the markets we have around here.

INT: But for her then, it was real important that you do different, and you do better for yourself.

RUTH: She used to get up at the crack of dawn and set up.

INT: She didn't want you to live that kind of life at the same time.

RUTH: Right.

INT: How about problem solving between the two of them. Do you have any memories of how they would solve a problem?

RUTH: They would just fight it out. (laughs)

INT: They were both sort of strong-willed, then. It wasn't that your Dad was particularly dominant, as often the father is.

RUTH: My mother's very stubborn. Didn't give in. And I think in many ways, he may have been louder, but I think she stood her ground.

INT: Did you feel close with either one of them, Ruth, growing up?

RUTH: Yes, I think I felt pretty close. I don't know if I would confide everything, but in any normal relationship you don't. I don't know what's normal at this point.

INT: But one thing that you knew, did you ask them questions about the Holocaust, about war time? Or did you know not to?

RUTH: No, only when I thought of writing it down, they just didn't want to tell me. My mother talked a lot about the family before the war. They had saved the albums. I ask children, especially the younger children, if you were given an hour's notice, what would you take with you? Or sometimes we were only given a half an hour's notice.

INT: You ask the children now.

RUTH: My parents took the family albums, because if you've seen the book, the only picture that was taken during the war was the front cover. Because I went to kindergarten, the photographer came in to take pictures of every child, which they saved, luckily. And that's it. That's the only pictures we have. Towards the end of the war, we took a few pictures. But I don't know if they even had a camera. Probably borrowed a camera or somebody else took the photographs. But they took the family album, and a couple with them everywhere.

INT: How about that?

RUTH: So that's how I have pictures of my two aunts. And my father had pictures from the Foreign Legion. His brother had gone there, also.

INT: How old was your father, he is not longer alive, I take it.

RUTH: No, he passed away four years ago.

INT: So he lived to a good,

RUTH: Yes, he was close to 89.

INT: Also in France?

RUTH: Yes, he was born in 1901. He was in his 89th year. He was 88.

INT: And your parents were married all this time?
They lived together, stayed together?

RUTH: Yes, they celebrated, yes. They celebrated their fiftieth and then some. I think they would have been married 56 years.

INT: Wow.

RUTH: The year he died. Now, they'd probably be in their sixtieth year. Yeah, they were probably married in '34.

INT: Was there any affection in your family?

RUTH: Yes, they were affectionate.

INT: They were affectionate with you or with each other?

RUTH: Yes.

INT: And as far as emotional expression, you saw a lot of sadness in your mother. It was more towards that type of emotion.

RUTH: Right.

INT: Do you have memories of her being happy at all?

RUTH: Oh, sure. She has a wonderful sense of humor, and my father is more the naive type. And he used to get furious, this was when I was older, like in my late teens. And we'd tell each other a story or he was telling a story that he didn't think was funny, and it was absolutely hilarious, and then we started to look at each other, and burst out laughing, and laughed uncontrollably, and then he would get so mad. Oh, no, we had a lot of happy times together. She has a very keen sense of humor. She's a very intelligent woman.

I mean I can show you the letter that she just sent me yesterday. Her handwriting is incredible. It's a work of art.

INT: I would like to see it.

RUTH: I have her last letter, 91 years old, and not a shake, not nothing.

INT: How about that. And they never really wanted to come to this country with you?

RUTH: No. They actually were turned down, and by then they had made a life there.

INT: What about being turned down? There was resentment?

RUTH: I think so. And it's hard, I guess, after going through all that. Well, because they could have right after the war, but I don't think it ever came up.

INT: Ruth, your family's view of life, or their philosophy, could you describe that? I know that's a tough...

RUTH: My family?

INT: Your parents. Let's take your mother. Does she have a...

RUTH: Well, like I said, she has a wonderful sense of humor and laughs at things, as much as the next person; I think her view is always on the pessimistic side. She becomes serious.

INT: Things will go wrong again.

How about your father's view of life? His attitude?

RUTH: I think his attitude, and it's only now, as a very mature adult, I mean that experience totally must have changed him, since he was so psychologically damaged and destroyed by it. He just wanted to put it behind him, pick up the pieces and go on. And I think he was very strong. He was determined.

INT: Did it seem like he was able to do that?

RUTH: Yes, he was amazing.

INT: How?

RUTH: Well, you know, he had to be a salesman. He didn't know how to drive. Even before the war, he was just in a village; I don't think they [my parents] had a car. But I remember him having to learn to drive, so he probably didn't have a car. Since they were in a small village, and everything must have been delivered to them. And it was sold from a store. When I say textile business, they sold cloth, it was a retail business, it was not wholesale. Now my grandfather may have done some wholesale, or may have been the middleman, received it from the factory, and then maybe he sold it to some retail store. So he [my father] had to travel constantly. He was on the road. He was given two territories, he was told, you can sell, but not in Paris. Apparently Paris was handled by other members of the family, my uncle and other parts of the family, I won't go into details. And my father was left with being on the road. So he was starting from scratch.

INT: He wasn't afraid to do that, then.

RUTH: He was not afraid.

INT: With all that had happened, he was...

RUTH: Sure, I remember him taking driving lessons. He was absolutely fearless, and a real menace. I remember him going around Place de l'Etoile, which is Charles de Gaulle now in Paris, where twelve avenues converge, and I just closed my eyes and sure enough someone bumped into him. I mean, you can't have bad accidents, because you can't go

fast. So he had to learn to drive, and carry heavy suitcases, because raincoats are heavy, and go into the stores with a heavy accented French. So he started in (?) eastern France, where they speak Alsatian, which is very close to German, so he wouldn't stand out as much, and things were good after the war. Apparently the economy turned around fairly quickly. First, everything was rationed, but little by little, the free trade started, and people needed things, and started buying, and it picked up fairly quickly, so he made clients very quickly, and some of them remained friends.

And then he opened up Normandy. Normandy was a totally different area. Someone with a German accent was very suspicious. The Normans remember D Day and being occupied by the Germans, and they resented the Germans terribly. So if they had the slightest suspicion that he might be German it would not be good. And yet he made some great, great clients in Normandy. Very fine people, big stores.

INT: So people liked him.

RUTH: They liked him very much, he knew how to tell a good joke, and he was very jovial.

INT: So he was very personable, then, as a salesman, kind of?

RUTH: He was very personable. Yes. I see him differently, as his daughter. But...

INT: How do you see him?

RUTH: Well, as I said, I saw my parents fight a lot, and I always had that in back of my mind, but he had a very strong and very pleasant personality. And really, for my American friends, was typically French. He was short, he enjoyed the good life. He loved good food. He loved wine. He was a Bon Vivant, and you would never have thought that he went through what he went through. Because he covered up somehow, whatever you consider it in psychology, I don't know. But he put it, whether it was a front, or part of it was his personality, or part of it was his survival...

INT: He coped. And the only time that it was really shown, then was more in the family life, when he sometimes lost his anger, or that kind of thing. But not really a depressed man, it didn't seem like, even in the family. It was more of a temper kind of outburst type of thing.

So if you were to describe him with five adjectives, how would you describe him?

RUTH: From my point of view?

INT: Your point of view.

RUTH: Five adjectives. (pause) That's a very complex question. Because it depends on what persona I see him as.

INT: How about how you see him really, knowing him? Knowing him as his daughter.

RUTH: I think he was responsible, sincere, and I guess jovial, warm, and (how many adjectives do I have, four?) And on the negative side, short-tempered. That was all-consuming at times. But he did have these other qualities.

INT: That were real positives about him.

RUTH: Yes. I can give you an anecdote if you want, but if you think it's going to take too long. Just to describe him. (laughs) I mean, he also had a sense of humor, it was much broader, and my mother had a very fine sense of humor.

I decided to get married here, because I feared him, and I felt I met this American, we had met in Paris and only very briefly, and I came over to visit my uncle as an adult, and I looked up this man, whom I had met very briefly in Paris, and it became very serious. And my parents said that they didn't see any objection, but please come home. But I was so afraid of my father, that I felt that if I go home, he will never let me return. So I prevailed upon them to come here for the wedding. I was pretty determined, also. And after a lot of back and forth, and tremendous heartache on my part and on their part, they agreed. They came on the United States, which was a ship. A tremendous ship. No one spoke a word of French on that ship. Don't ask me why. It left from Le Havre, you know, regularly. Not one person on that ship understood any French.

So the first day they had dinner, and they brought a menu as long as this table, in those days. So he couldn't understand anything. He understood the word steak, so he picked at random. Well, it wasn't what they liked. So the next day, I guess it was lunch, the man said, apparently, "I'm going to bring everything." They brought him the whole tray. (laughs) And apparently my mother said he had endeared a lot of people, and by then some people knew a little French, and they made so many friends on that ship. He had taken nine trunks, **trunks**, like camp trunks, you know, very European, with the silver and the crystal, and the china, and the champagne for the wedding and everything.

So they arrive in New York. You can imagine, the port authority with nine trunks, in 1959. The customs didn't know what to make of it. So my husband said, "Oh, my G-d, we're going to pay through the nose, all of this." So he starts to ask questions. My father already pushed us aside. My husband and I. "Let me handle it." So he said, "This is for my daughter, who's getting married to an American." So already he endeared even the customs officer. And then he had all this liquor. Not just champagne, he had brought liqueurs, all this wonderful stuff. So he takes a bottle without a label, I don't know, he probably had that planned ahead of time, opened it up and said, "This is for my wife, because she has indigestion." I mean, he is playing the bon vivant. You know, he went like this. Put it under the customs officer's nose, and he just passed the whole thing in no time flat. I think we paid almost nothing.

INT: A real salesman! (laughs)

RUTH: Unbelievable.

INT: So he had this terrific, charm and knack for getting people...

RUTH: He was short and he was smiling, and all our friends asked for him. They adore both my parents, but they were **crazy** about my father.

INT: So that's a typical father story, huh?

RUTH: I think after a while he felt he had a guardian angel over him. He crossed the street without looking, right or left. And then his driving was so horrendous, and he got mad at everybody. And we would be in the car, and he would follow someone who had passed him, even though it wasn't his direction. He was really a character.

INT: So he was entertaining, in a lot of ways.

RUTH: Very entertaining. Like I said, he was short and bouncy, and very endearing.

INT: But for you there was that fear of him?

RUTH: Yes.

INT: Fear of what?

RUTH: Well, fear that he would lose his temper. You know, he didn't strike me often, but when he did, it really...(laughs)

INT: It really hurt, huh?

RUTH: It really hurt. But on the other hand, he was very good to me. If I wanted a pencil, he would give me enough money to buy a dress, I'll keep the rest. Bought a dress, and I got the same amount of money as for the pencil. (laughs) So he was generous.

INT: He was generous, and he showed his love that way, but sometimes it was...

RUTH: But no, he didn't throw money because he felt guilty. I don't think that was the reason. Because he was always there for me.

INT: But he was also very strict at the same time.

RUTH: Right.

INT: Had expectations.

RUTH: And maybe that was my fear. I felt he couldn't deal with certain things. That was my sixth sense.

INT: That he couldn't deal with...

RUTH: Well, especially when I decided to live here, so far away, and married an American.

INT: So do things differently, maybe, than what he wanted, or expected.

RUTH: I felt I couldn't reason with him. I could only get through up to a point.

INT: I hear you. Was your Mom easier to reason with?

RUTH: Well, you could reason with her, and even to this day, but she still did things her way.

INT: So again, that's why your parents had this conflict with them. If you had to describe your Mom with five adjectives, how would you do that? What would you say about her?

RUTH: Introspective, sensitive, emotional, good sense of humor, but that's not an adjective, but it describes a person, and loving. I really think, I always knew deep down that both my parents loved me very much. I never questioned that. And maybe the way they externalized it sometimes, but I never felt that they would abandon me again, or anything like that.

INT: Did your Mom show her love in a different, how did she show her love toward you?

RUTH: She was very warm, you know. Physically, body contact... Just by her gestures and her caring.

INT: When you said, Ruth, a minute ago, "abandon you again," I guess as a child it felt like that.

RUTH: Oh, yeah. Yes.

INT: And when you look back you probably see that they had no choice.

RUTH: The first time they sent me away, the time she cried at the train station, I didn't stay very long, because at that camp I was so unhappy, and I cried, that they came and picked me up.

INT: That was when you were back in France.

RUTH: The third day they came and picked me up.

INT: She was crying so hard, and you were crying so hard?

RUTH: No, I saw her crying at the station, but after I got there, I was so homesick. I was supposed to stay maybe a week, or even two weeks if I liked it. I didn't give it three days.

INT: It was hard to separate from them.

RUTH: They did come and pick me up.

INT: It was hard for both of you to separate.

RUTH: They tried to talk me into staying. The air was good, it was by the seaside, there was a lot of iodine in the air, and I had a vitamin deficiency. A vitamin D deficiency.

INT: So it sounds like they knew what you needed to do to be a healthy individual, but at the same time it was hard to separate for both of you, yeah.

RUTH: I had forgotten about that. But after that it became easier.

INT: Because you knew you were coming back, and that's a real different feel, right, it's like if a child goes off to first grade, if they know that Mom's waiting when they get home.

RUTH: I didn't want that experience again. I didn't even try to make friends or anything. All I remember is being so homesick.

INT: And just wanting to go home.

RUTH: I called my parents, I want to go home.

INT: And then you realized that it was okay to stay, because you would get home, eventually, right?

RUTH: After that, right. But they did take me home. They stayed even two days. Two days I would, I wanted to go home with them.

INT: Okay, I think we're going to have to finish at this point, and then we'll set something (up). Great. Thank you so much.

(END TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE. GO ON TO TAPE THREE)

(TAPE THREE, SIDE ONE)

INT: Interview with Ruth, continued. It's June 7, 1994. (Pause)

I'm going to ask you some more questions about the war time, and when you were young. I don't know how much you'll remember from this, but could you describe a typical day for you before the war?

RUTH: No, I was a baby.

INT: You were very young. And you don't really have any memories of that.

RUTH: Not personal memories.

INT: How about, did you get a sense of what your parents' expectations were about their future before the war began?

RUTH: Well, I think their life had been very stable. Of course, they had just gotten married, but from the minute they met, Hitler was in the picture. I'm talking about my parents individually.

INT: As children and growing up.

RUTH: And growing up. You know, my mother was a secretary in a walnut oil factory, and my father was a salesman for various houses. But then when he married he joined my grandfather's business. Textile business. But then the Nuremberg Laws came out, and they weren't allowed to work. So they were very affected, immediately, in their young adult lives.

INT: So I'm sure their expectations were that things would continue and they'd be successful, and carry on.

RUTH: Sure. You know, they were comfortable, they weren't wealthy. But they were well-accepted. They had, I think, a strong family life. A strong circle of friends, which revolved around the synagogue. So it was a nice comfortable (life) for both of them.

INT: So they both appeared to be pretty involved with their religion prior to the war.

RUTH: Right.

INT: Did they ever talk about any anti-Semitism before the war? Any experiences of that?

RUTH: They happen to have lived in small towns, and from what I gathered, in both little towns they were well-accepted. I mean, I'm sure there was anti-Semitism, but they didn't tell me about it. They were well-integrated, and that's why when the Nuremberg

Laws were passed, the people told them that, (the non-Jewish people) "We will still buy from you. And Hitler's a madman, and he will not prevail." So, even then...

INT: That was the original feeling.

RUTH: Oh, I'm sure there were anti-Semites, no question. But they never told me about it. They weren't personally persecuted, until, of course, Hitler came and put a Nazi mayor in town. And then the picture changed.

INT: How old were you when the persecution began?

RUTH: I wasn't born.

INT: You weren't born yet. So that was even before.

RUTH: No, my parents then left for Palestine, and that's where I was born. So all these years in Germany, I wasn't born.

INT: And do you know their response to the events in Europe? At first no one thought that this would continue. That he would not prevail.

RUTH: Right. That was their response. You know, they didn't live in large cities where there were these gatherings, and these terrific acts of anti-Semitism and mass hysteria. They were not exposed to that, and the media I guess, was not what it is today. I'm sure they read the newspapers or heard the radio accounts, but it's still not the same as being bombarded all the time.

INT: So initially they really didn't think...

RUTH: Yes, they left before Kristallnacht, so.

INT: Do you know what happened that made them start, when did they start to really take it seriously, and...

RUTH: Well, after the Nuremberg Laws, because they were stripped of their citizenship, they closed the stores. And then they knew that there were acts of anti-Semitism, you know, in Mainz, which was the next, the nearest big city. And Frankfurt. But you know, they didn't tell me that much about it.

INT: About that time period, huh? But that's when they decided they needed to get out.

RUTH: My father decided. He couldn't talk to the rest of his family, that's why he's the only survivor.

INT: Did he mention trying to talk them all into moving?

RUTH: Yes. He did mention that.

INT: Okay, so then they moved to Palestine, and then they stayed just a couple years, correct?

RUTH: Right.

INT: And that's where you were born.

RUTH: Right.

INT: So your parents were there for how long?

RUTH: Maybe two and a half years. Maybe close to three years. They left in '36.

INT: They left in '36. And what made them decide to...

RUTH: Well, they wanted to come to the United States. Oh, leave Palestine? I was born, I was a twin, and my mother had had a very difficult pregnancy, (clock interrupts) and she had a difficult pregnancy, and the climatic conditions were very harsh on her, having come from a much colder climate, she really couldn't take the heat. And there were Arab guerilla warfare going on all the time. And she had a brother in Paris, so they [my parents] decided to make their way to Paris, hoping that the papers would come to emigrate to the United States. So that's why they left.

INT: And when you left to go to the convent, when you were separated, do you remember any special messages that they gave you?

RUTH: No, there was a lie. See, they told me that I was going on a vacation. And they packed everything I had, which wasn't much, but I thought it was strange, when my mother told me, "You're going on a short vacation, and Madame Kahn's going to take you, and we're going to stay here, because it's too dangerous to be out in the open," that's all they said.

INT: So that's how they left you, with this thought of going on a vacation. But even as a child you remember being suspicious?

RUTH: Yes. I remember real well. I didn't believe it for a minute. (laughs)

INT: You didn't believe it? But did you ask? You don't remember asking?

RUTH: I don't remember that, but they said I have to go, because if not, I'd have to live in this dark room all the time in the cellar, and it would be better for me, and I would have some fresh air. And that's the reason I was given. Because the police had come just prior to that. That's why they sent me to a convent. The police had come to get my father. But luckily they didn't take me.

INT: And that's when your parents needed to really go into hiding.

RUTH: Right. That's when they felt, they had to go into hiding, and then they felt that I would be safer in a convent.

INT: How did they hook up, do you know how they...

RUTH: It was all a coincidence. They heard that there was this convent, you know, through local resistance members. I did the research, because there was a whole network going on in the south of France. There was actually an archbishop in Toulouse who would preach from the pulpit that institutions take in Jewish children.

INT: And you found this out, though, through your research on the book.

RUTH: Yes. That there was a whole network going on. They only knew somebody who knew somebody. They didn't know that it was organized. The Underground.

INT: Ruth, I may have asked you this last time, but did you develop any special bonds with anybody during the war time, during the war experience?

RUTH: I don't think so.

INT: You described it as more keeping to yourself.

RUTH: Yes. Now the two children who went with me in the convent, you know, their mother took us. And Emmy was sort of my friend, and my only friend, but I don't remember a strong bond between us.

INT: What happened with that friendship? Did you lose contact?

RUTH: Yes. After the war they went back to Alsace, which was eastern France, and we lost touch.

INT: And you never, you don't know what happened to her since. Did you have a chance?

RUTH: No, my father visited the Kahn family after the war. I know the father died of a heart attack, and the mother may still be living. But I know that the children married.

INT: They're still in France, as far as you know?

RUTH: Oh, yes, I'm sure.

INT: They didn't come to this country.

RUTH: No. But now I wouldn't have any idea.

INT: How did you experience the death during the war? How was it to see? What do you remember?

RUTH: Remember, I didn't see that many people die. I saw them being taken away. You mean, if somebody died of a natural death?

INT: No, I'm talking more because of the...

RUTH: I just saw them being taken away. And...

INT: Did you have any idea as a child what that meant for them to be taken away?

RUTH: Well, I was told they were probably being taken to the Nazi camps, which were very harsh and cruel. They didn't call them death camps. They didn't know. We didn't know about extermination camps.

INT: They just knew that they were harsh and cruel.

RUTH: Right.

INT: Was it your parents that told you about that, would describe them to you, or did you kind of picture them?

RUTH: Yes, yes, and everybody seemed to know that. It sort of was a given. And there were many camps near the village. You know, France had set up concentration camps all over. They were refugee camps before the war. Especially in southern France, they had come from Spain. There was a civil war in Spain. And when Franco came to power, a lot of the Republicans fled to France in great numbers, so they set up refugee camps before the war. Which, while they were not pleasant, were not harsh and cruel. People weren't brutalized or starved to death or things like that. But then they were all set up. It was very easy when the Vichy government came to power, to just make concentration camps out of them, with horrific conditions, and of course, much greater numbers. And from there, people were sent on trains. And that was known. They were talking about trains going to the east, to Eastern Europe.

INT: To go to these...

RUTH: To go to even worse camps. That the French did not keep them. And they sent them in cattle cars. Now, I don't remember the word "cattle car," even though it was in French. But we knew that the conditions were horrific.

INT: Did you see friends' parents, other children that you knew, their parents being taken?

RUTH: Not personally.

INT: Not personally.

RUTH: No. Well, once, there was an incident in the book. You know, there was a raid in an apartment building. And people were taken on a truck, and it was filled with people, and I remember seeing them being taken away. I remember some crying, or sobbing, but not hysteria.

INT: Amongst the people.

RUTH: It was just very heavy silence.

INT: And do you have any memory of what you felt like at the time, watching these people?

RUTH: Just...

INT: Scared to death.

RUTH: Scared to death and sure that we would be next.

INT: Just again that fear that it would happen to you. How did you cope with the experiences that you were going through?

RUTH: That's hard to tell, because I was so young. It's very hard today for me to answer that question. I think I just had dolls that I talked to. I made up these fictitious friends. Because, you know, I couldn't trust anyone around me.

INT: So they were kind of your escape into your own imaginary world.

RUTH: I think so.

INT: Which is exactly what happens when a lot of children go through hard situations in their lives. So you remember doing that, then, having imaginary...

RUTH: Yeah. I had dolls, or rags that I'd pretend were dolls. And, just talking to them. But being an only child, and growing up alone, you know, made me more self-sufficient, maybe. I don't know. On the positive side. (laughs)

INT: You find your own outlets for that kind of thing. How about your parents? I mean, they went through so much, and so much fear and hiding and all that, that allowed them to survive through all this?

RUTH: Well, how do you answer such a question, you know? Each one has their own defense mechanism. You mean, after the war, how they picked up their lives?

INT: How about during the war? Do you think they were just so programmed to survive?

RUTH: Right. I think during the war was just a matter of trying to make it, and escape. And absolutely do your utmost not to be caught.

INT: So that was just how to survive, and not even deal with any of the emotions, I'm sure.

RUTH: No.

INT: You didn't want to have to do that. Yeah. You had said that your Mom managed to keep her faith, her religion. Do you know if it changed, there, for her?

RUTH: Faith might be a big word, because I'm sure she's had her doubts. I know she's had her doubts, but then, she's seemed to swing back and forth.

INT: But your father was very different.

RUTH: Yes.

INT: And as far as you knew, he came from a fairly religious family?

RUTH: He came from an almost Orthodox family. But even as a young man, I think, he lived in a larger city when he left home, and he didn't keep kosher as a young man, and I think he was on his own. And he was not a devout Jew. I'm sure he observed the holidays, and he was always home for that. But I don't think he was all that religious.

INT: How about after the war? Did your family observe holidays?

RUTH: Not at the beginning, but then we started again, and they sent me to a Jewish Scout Group, and that's where I learned a lot about Judaism.

INT: But in the home it was very minimal?

RUTH: Very minimal. Didn't light candles, or say a prayer, or go to synagogue. There wasn't any synagogue. But after the war the Jewish community did get organized again. But it took five, six years, maybe.

INT: So you don't really have any memories of sitting down for holidays?

RUTH: Oh, yes. We had Passover, and Rosh Hashanah. We always went to synagogue. Now synagogue there is a hodge-podge, and totally disorganized. No two people have the same book. They don't give out books that are the same for everybody. So everybody brought their own prayer books. The women and men were separated, and

yet they played the organ, so you can't call them Orthodox, you can't call them Conservative. And ironically, the large synagogues in Paris after the war were situated in streets that had very Christian names, and that's how they named the synagogue, instead of calling them Beth, whatever, whether they were afraid to or what, I don't know. So we went to the Nazareth synagogue, because it happened to be in Our Lady of Nazareth Street. So it was called "Our Lady of Nazareth Synagogue."

INT: You definitely never would suspect it was a synagogue. (laughs)

RUTH: And what they called the Rothschild Synagogue, you know Rothschild gives a lot of money, it's "Our Lady of Victory," and that's what the synagogue was called. A beautiful building. I don't know when they were built, in the eighteenth century, gorgeous stained glass work. But it was called, "Our Lady of Victory synagogue." You belonged either to Our Lady of Victory, or Our Lady of Nazareth. They were the two large synagogues after the war.

INT: So once the synagogues started to become part of your community, your parents did tend to...

RUTH: Yeah, the High Holidays. And Passover at home. Sometimes with my aunt and uncle.

INT: Were they usually joyous occasions, the holidays? Did they feel like they were...sometimes they are very solemn amongst Holocaust survivors.

RUTH: Like I said, all I remember is these services didn't make sense to me. There was a choir. There was the rabbi trying to preach, but nobody was listening. I mean, you went to synagogue to catch up with the news. With other people. My mother was just constantly chatting. Once in a while she would say a prayer. Very strange. So when I turned maybe sixteen or seventeen, I joined the Liberal Movement. They had a Liberal synagogue in Paris. I mean, you joined that, and that started to make sense. And since my Hebrew was minimal, a lot of the prayers there were in English.

INT: That was something you wanted to do? You wanted to become more involved or learn more about the Jewish faith?

RUTH: Yes, I was interested. Oh, sure, and I picked up quite a bit. As I said, at Scouts, and...as I said, a rabbi tried to give me some instruction, but I was the only student, so we stopped that. So there wasn't any formal training for children when I was little. Don't forget, I was already seven. So it took three or four years before we got it more organized. And by then, you know, I was in the Lycee (high school) and I had to study a lot of other things. And we had Saturday school [public]. We had school Saturday morning.

INT: Not on Sundays, but on Saturdays, six days a week you had school?

RUTH: Yes, so it was five days, but, actually, my day was Thursday, then they changed it to Wednesday in the early sixties because it was all based on a Christian population, and they would go to catechism on Wednesday afternoon or Thursday afternoon. And that's when I had my violin lessons. That's when the Jewish children took other instruction, and extra-curricular activities. But we had to go to school on Saturday morning. I mean, they believe in separation of church and state, but it's still structured all around the Catholic faith, absolutely. The French are very hypocritical when it comes to that. And now that they have a lot of Moslems, they can't just observe all the holidays, so they observe the Christian holidays. You know, Pentecost is a holiday, Ascension is a holiday. I mean, national ones. And yet, they all profess to be secular. (laughs)

INT: So when you grew up at that time, then, the Jewish community where you were living it started to become more and more and more Jewish people, were in your community, or...very few Jewish people?

RUTH: Well, before the war there was a thriving Jewish community in a certain section of Paris. Now some survivors, I guess, settled there after the war. But most people were scattered. And...

INT: So again, it was kind of isolating for you in a lot of ways.

RUTH: Yes, except, as I said, when you went to an organized Jewish event. Yeah. Then Hadassah became active again. My mother's a life member. It's called WIZO in France. Women's International Zionist Organization. WIZO. And all these things started to get organized again. And then a lot of Jews came from North Africa. But that's a different story, because they had different traditions. But they're now the majority.

INT: As far as the Liberation, that time period, what do you remember with your family?

RUTH: Well, I remember absolute elation, dancing and singing in the streets. The soldiers, there were some Russian soldiers; there were some American [soldiers] in the village. And everybody was dancing and singing and eating and drinking together. It was very happy.

INT: Yes, I can imagine. How about your feelings right after Liberation? What did you do right after it, what did your family do, I guess? Here, they had to pick up the pieces again.

RUTH: Yes. We stayed in the village maybe another year. To get ourselves together. My father probably continued to work in that knife factory. Didn't have to pay off the town crier. And then made preparations to move to Paris.

INT: So that year was spent doing that, making those preparations.

RUTH: Yes. And it's funny, I don't remember, I went to school, I must have, but I don't remember that as much as being at school during the war.

INT: That year, you mean.

RUTH: Yes, I must have gone to school, but that's not as vivid as going to school during the war years.

INT: Why do you think that is, do you know?

RUTH: Well, I still was fearful and untrusting, but not as much. So I was very distracted, yes, I do remember now, it's coming back to me. I tend to talk to a lot of people, because I couldn't talk during the war, so I didn't pay attention, and didn't do my lessons, and very often had to stay after school. Because they were very strict, and if you didn't do your lessons, then you did them after school. But I was sometimes the only one left, and the teacher had to stay with me until I copied, and sometimes I'd write, "I will not talk in class," you know, fifty times in all the tenses.

INT: So that was real different, you were acting real different in school than you had before the war.

RUTH: Yes, I think I went to the other extreme. Well, and see, it was a very small village, so it was a one room schoolhouse. So they had rows. Grade one, two, three, or whatever grade I was in. So on my right I had the older children, and I was always much more interested in them. And on the left I had the younger children. And she [the teacher] gave assignments to each row, but it was one teacher for all these levels. It was incredible. But most of these children were from farms, and I imagine didn't go on. Then compulsory education was up to fourteen, age fourteen. So most of them didn't go on.

INT: Probably beyond that they just worked on the farm after that, or whatever.

RUTH: A little bit like the Amish.

INT: But you kind of perceive yourself, as that was your time when you were just feeling like you could finally let it out. You could be more of a kid, it sounds like, in a lot of, you had to be so strong and tough in those years before.

RUTH: That's right. So I got into trouble.

INT: So you got into trouble. (laughs)

RUTH: I remember staying after school just about every day. And I don't know if I still have my report cards. Always good grades but "bavarde", which means "chatty".
(laughs)

INT: Was the teacher's comment.

RUTH: The teacher's comment. Chatty.

INT: As far as the losses that your parents went through, how did they cope with that? Did they ever talk about their siblings, and their parents?

RUTH: My mother did, and she knew my father's sisters, (and I had known my father's brother a little bit), and his mother, how fine she was. They were apparently wonderful people. She told me about her sister, and how wonderful she was. Don't forget, her parents came back. Her parents survived, I don't know if I told you that.

INT: I don't know if you did.

RUTH: My mother's parents had stayed in Germany with their daughter, it was actually a stepdaughter, stepsister, my mother had lost her own mother when she was nine years old. She had developed an infection. It was before penicillin, so she died. And my grandfather remarried, and they had a child. And my mother said she was very, very fond of her because she practically raised her. People had maids, but not to raise the children, just to clean and do the laundry. There was a big age difference between my mother and her younger sister. I think she said maybe sixteen, or maybe fourteen years difference. There was a large difference. And she became extremely fond of her. She was such a sweet girl, she said.

So when they were arrested, this young woman was immediately sent to Auschwitz. Her parents, for whatever reason, were sent to Theresienstadt, Terezin, in Czechoslovakia. And that camp was a holding camp. And that was the only camp that the Red Cross visited after D Day. Literally after D Day. I think two days afterwards. Because what happened, I think the Germans put pressure on the Red Cross saying that, well, the Red Cross may have heard how horrible the extermination camps were, and the Nazis said, well, no, you come visit one of our camps. Terezin, and the Germans picked it, and the Red Cross abided by that. So what they did is they had maybe a weeks' notice. They put on a facade, they put flower boxes in the front, and then started to feed a certain number of prisoners so that they didn't look too emaciated, and so the Red Cross visited, but when the Red Cross visited it was after D Day and they wanted to exchange some German wounded soldiers against some inmates. And apparently, they did pass the paper [sign-up sheet] around, would some people be interested in being exchanged. Most of them were very skeptical, and felt it meant they would be in the next convoy. From there, there were cattle trains going to Auschwitz, or Birkenau, or Buchenwald. That was known. And they knew. My grandparents knew that these other camps were extermination camps.

INT: But they were willing to take the risk.

RUTH: But they decided: What do we have to lose? Well, the others felt, well, they had heard about D Day somehow, and said, well, maybe we'll be liberated. So they didn't

want to sign up. So very few people signed up. And it was true, they were exchanged, and sent to Switzerland in '44. If not, they probably would not have survived. Because the war went on for another year. It was over only in May of 1945.

INT: And did they remain in Switzerland?

RUTH: Well, then they had to do some research to find my parents, and didn't have any idea whether they had survived or not. So they were reunited. The Red Cross did the research, so they came to Paris, and my grandfather was really a walking skeleton. I did get to know him, but he lived only another six (months).

(END TAPE THREE, SIDE ONE. GO ON TO TAPE FOUR)

(TAPE FOUR, SIDE ONE)

RUTH: And my grandmother did recover. Never talked about the camp. Not in front of me. And I think my mother; even today it's hard for me to ask her. She breaks down. So I don't.

INT: Did they ever talk about her sister? I mean, did they ever find out what happened to their daughter?

RUTH: I think by then they had received a notice from the Red Cross, and all the members who had perished, and she was on there. And where they perished.

INT: Do you know where?

RUTH: Auschwitz.

INT: So that was very devastating, I'm sure, that they lost their daughter and your mother lost her sister.

RUTH: Right.

INT: So their coping skills was a lot like, really not saying it. They didn't say anything about it.

RUTH: Right. It was not a pleasant atmosphere. I mean, you'd think they'd be delighted to be reunited, but it was a very difficult situation. First of all we had small quarters. They came to live with us. And...I think my grandfather, my mother's father, even before the war; there may have been some contention between my father and him. You know, they were in the same business, and he was very bossy. And things were tense all the time. And I guess financial reasons were hard, you know. They didn't have anything. So I remember that it was not a pleasant atmosphere at home. It was very tense all the time. My father had to find work.

INT: Your grandfather passed away shortly afterwards.

RUTH: Right, he did.

INT: And your grandmother? Did she stay with you many years, or...

RUTH: Yes, she stayed, and then went to a home. But I think she went to the home after I got married. Before then she lived on her own.

INT: She did. She eventually.

RUTH: Yes, my parents moved. I'm talking the first six months, after we were reunited with them. My grandfather was emaciated, he wasn't all **that** sick. He was not always in bed. We really thought he was recovering. And...very sad. I mean, he never smiled. And he just died of a heart attack. So it's not like he wasted away.

INT: But I'm sure his heart had...

RUTH: Oh, sure.

INT: And your grandmother was very sad. You remember a lot of sadness. And obviously there was this tension in the home.

RUTH: Yes, a lot of sadness all the time. I dreaded to come home sometimes. No, there was some bright moments.

INT: But you remember this overall...

RUTH: Yes. And after he died I think my parents moved out and my grandmother got her own apartment.

INT: Did things change, then, as far as the atmosphere of the home?

RUTH: Yes, I think it was a little more "normal," whatever that means.

INT: People smiled a little more, there wasn't as much of a weight?

RUTH: Yes. And my father started to, he has a wonderful sense of humor, and really, looking back, he was very, very well-liked. And started to enjoy life, at least on the surface. You just couldn't talk about the war years, but other than that...I mean he had a good sense of humor, but a broad sense of humor, and sometimes he would be so funny that he didn't realize. And my mother and I would look at each other and started to giggle. And he would get mad because we were giggling and making fun. Yes, we did have some very hilarious episodes.

INT: And that seemed to, after your grandparents left, that part sort of came in.

RUTH: Yes, that helped a lot. I'm not sure I can pinpoint it like that, but...

INT: Did your grandmother die many years after this...

RUTH: Yes. I was already married. In fact...

INT: She lived well into her seventies, then.

RUTH: Oh, yes, maybe early eighties. Yes, she died in the early sixties. I think my daughter was a baby. Because I remember she had, for some reason, still saved a golden coin. Whether it was a Napoleon coin that she had. And she gave it to me, to the baby when she was born. She wanted her to have it.

INT: Do you remember visiting her often? Keeping in touch with her?

RUTH: In Paris? Oh, yes. I saw her regularly.

INT: Did she always seem to have that kind of sadness to her?

RUTH: Yes, I would say. By then she was all alone. But she had a few friends, and they went out and met in cafes. So she did make the effort to go out. She wasn't depressed all the time. There's a difference between being sad and being depressed.

INT: How did you see the difference in her?

RUTH: Well, I knew she did things. She wasn't depressed to the point of staying home and not wanting to go out. And she always came for family affairs, and as I said, had developed a small circle of her contemporaries, and they tried to meet in the city. She lived in the city. She took buses or subways.

INT: So at that time she started to relive her life. How about your dad? Did he have any, with his losses, he went through so many, did he ever talk about them, or how did he cope with them?

RUTH: He had a circle of friends, and they had bonded, from the French Foreign Legion, and they became his family after the war. And when they got together it's like old army buddies, you know. They each had a number, you know, an army number, and they always greeted each other by their number. "Matricule," meaning, what was your matriculation number. And they would rattle it off because none of them had forgotten, and they were about five or six of them. And they became very close, and we went on outings on Sundays. And each one had had losses, I'm sure. I don't know the exact details, even to this day. But...so there was like a new circle of friends.

INT: Ruth, you told me a little bit about what made you settle in the United States. Obviously it was your husband, he was American. Did he not think about, did you want to settle in the United States? Was that, did you ever talk about let's stay in France?

RUTH: Well, at the time when I met my husband, there was the Algerian War going on. And I was a student at the Sorbonne, and a lot of young men had enlisted, and a couple of very close friends had been killed in Algeria. And I don't know if it was subliminal, but my mother always said, "The only safe country for the Jews is the United States." Even Israel, you know, they didn't feel was all that safe. They still felt it was precarious. So I don't know if it was subconscious in my mind, and maybe there's more of a future for me here, but on the other hand, I was young and somewhat carefree. A little foolish, probably. (laughs) Didn't think of all the consequences. And decided that...

INT: He was on a visit there?

RUTH: Yes. Yes. We had some common friends. But I only saw him for one night. Only when I came to New York to be with that uncle who had signed the affidavit for me, (and he's the one who was going to have my parents come over before the war, but there were strict quotas, so the papers never came). Then I looked him up again.

INT: That was very brave of you.

RUTH: Yes! (laughs) My first mistake. (laughter) We did correspond.

INT: In between.

RUTH: Yes. It was a year after I met him. Well, he sent me cards: Visit America first. Every day he sent a card. And I remember I was on vacation for about three weeks in Italy, and I came home to 21 cards! (laughs)

INT: Wow! How about that!

RUTH: It was really funny. All about Philadelphia, the Amish country, and Atlantic City. He had bought all these cards, apparently, and mailed them.

INT: So he knew you were very interested, then, in finding out about this country and possibly coming.

RUTH: I guess. I know that when my friend called me about meeting these two Americans, I didn't want to, because we considered them [Americans] rude and...they were dressed in Hawaiian shirts; when they were tourists, with their cameras on their bellies, well now everybody does it. And we didn't want to be caught dead with those. But then when we actually saw them [my husband and his friends], they had no camera, and they were dressed in navy suits. So that was my downfall. (laughs)

INT: So then when you came here to stay with your uncle, you looked him up and you started to date at that point?

RUTH: To go out. Yes. And it became serious.

INT: Just out of curiosity, what was it about him, or what was the attraction?

RUTH: Well, how do you analyze something like that when you fall in love with someone? Maybe now, looking back, or maybe even then, he is thirteen years older than I am. And I was very young, I was only 21. But he, on his side, he felt I was extremely mature for my age. But I was still 21 in retrospect.

INT: You had already graduated from the Sorbonne.

RUTH: Yes, well, one step. I did want to go on. Yes, I did have a diploma from the Sorbonne. And I caught up, I even skipped a year after the war. I had no trouble, with my studies. Well, I had the normal trouble, but I was able to attend some very good schools, and got my baccalaureate, it's very different in Europe. It's with the baccalaureate that you can go to the University. But today like seventy to seventy-five percent of the students are admitted. **Then**, it was only ten percent. So it was an incredibly difficult exam, because they didn't have room. The studies are free there. So they only accept a certain number off the top, until they run out of places for them. And that was very different than the American system.

INT: Is it a four-year program that you attended?

RUTH: Yes. The equivalent of four American years, yeah. Because the baccalaureate then is already considered like a junior high exam, (especially then). And then I had two more years.

INT: So you were planning on going on there.

RUTH: Yes, I was planning to go on. I actually graduated in biochemistry and was interested in genetics.

INT: Did you go back to France after you started to date your husband?

RUTH: No, because I was afraid that my father wouldn't let me go.

INT: You never went back.

RUTH: No, I prevailed upon my parents to come here for the wedding. And they finally felt they had no choice, so they did. And then we went back as a couple, and then they had an actual party for us. The year after.

INT: So they really did not know him at all.

RUTH: No.

INT: Had they ever met him?

RUTH: No.

INT: They hadn't. How long were you planning, originally, to stay in this country?

RUTH: Oh, just for the summer. It was a summer trip.

INT: And little did you know how many years later you'd still be here.

RUTH: Right.

INT: Now we're going to get into more of your life now. Could you describe your spouse and your marriage?

RUTH: Could I describe my spouse? In three adjectives? (laughter) (Pause) Well, from the beginning on, or the way he is now, the way I perceive him as an individual?

INT: Well, I think both.

RUTH: Well, let me tell you way back then, when I was so young. I mean, he may have been, (and I'm not into psychology or into Freud, or into anything), a father figure, you know, someone a little more solid. Maybe I felt I would be more secure with a man like that.

INT: Do you think you were looking for that at the time?

RUTH: I have no idea what I was looking for. How do you know? (laughs) I certainly wasn't looking to get married at that point. But don't forget this was, we're talking the very late fifties. If you weren't married at 25, it was a disaster. Things have totally changed. You were considered an old maid if you weren't married at 25. So 21, while it was young by today's standards, it was almost the time to look around. So, well, he already had a situation, a profession. He had some stability. He struck me as being extremely cultured. And he is. Patient. Kind. Polite, I mean it almost sounds like I had the wool over my eyes. But...

INT: And that obviously felt real good to you to have someone that seemed more settled as opposed to someone who was less settled at that point in your life.

RUTH: Right.

INT: Is that because you felt you were ready to get more settled yourself, become more settled?

RUTH: Yes, maybe I felt a certain stability there that I hadn't had, may not find over there, yes.

INT: How was your English at that point?

RUTH: Not as good as it is today, naturally. Especially I didn't study English. I didn't major in English.

INT: Was he very fluent in French?

RUTH: No! (laughter) No, no, no, and that's why I really met him in Paris, because my friend felt that my English was as good as anybody she knew.

INT: Was that hard, then, to learn all that you wanted, and...

RUTH: Well, I was fascinated, always fascinated by the English languages. I love languages. And when my grandparents lived with us, they spoke German. So I was exposed to French and German. And I never had any trouble with English, because it is a blend of French and German. So I wanted something more challenging in school, I guess. And I was the type of student who could go either way. I wasn't strongly in the humanities. My grades were solid B's. I was as good in math and science as I was in English, French, and we had philosophy courses. So I wasn't skewed in a certain direction.

INT: Ruth, did your parents say anything about you marrying an American? How did they feel about it? Did they...

RUTH: I don't think they had any objection to me marrying an American. The objection was, please come home and take your time and think about it, and make sure it's the right thing. I mean, what normal parents would do. They didn't act irrational in any way. And you know, it was another devastating step in their lives, I'm sure. To have me so far. And ironically, but I told them, "You always wanted to live here. Now you can come." Well, no, by then, my father almost was tempted, but my mother felt, they didn't want us back then, and now we made a life for ourselves in France, and we're staying in France. And it would have been hard at that age.

INT: Do you remember having doubts getting married?

RUTH: Oh, yes.

INT: Especially, I would suspect, being torn...

RUTH: Once I had made up my mind, and we were getting closer to the date, that's when I almost broke down. And my parents were here, and there was all this tension

about the ceremony, and all the details, and the culture shock encountered by the two families, even though Harry's parents were very nice, very understanding.

INT: But it was the tension, you were starting to feel that maybe you wouldn't be happy here?

RUTH: I don't know, I just felt, you know, I hope I'm doing the right thing. You know, like a week before the wedding! (laughs) But I'm sure that's not unusual.

INT: No, no, I don't think it is.

RUTH: So it's just that in my case it may have been exacerbated.

INT: But I think it would have been that much harder because you really were changing a lot about your life, and leaving your parents.

RUTH: Right. And when it finally dawned on me, it really shook me up.

INT: Did the two of you ever think about living in France at all?

RUTH: Well, I wanted to, but Harry absolutely not, as much as he loved France. For him it's a nice place to visit, but he wouldn't consider living there. Now, you know, you make conditions, but what happens to conditions, or agreements (laughs) unless you do it in front of an attorney. But I always said, "I will have to go back every year. I don't care where I get the money." We were just getting started. Well, he was, as I said, already established, but you never know what can happen. I said, "I don't care what happens, I'm going to go back to France." I knew from the beginning, that I had to go back. And I tried to reconnect, and see my friends.

INT: Have you kept up?

RUTH: Yes, almost. I mean, when my son was born, for whatever reasons, having two children is a lot harder than one, I didn't go to France, my parents came here. So I always had their presence. But I couldn't go for about four years. And I think around age thirty, I had a minor breakdown. There's no question about it.

INT: What was it? Do you know?

RUTH: It was physical, from the stress, probably. I couldn't, I literally could not focus, could not drive, everything was swimming in front of my eyes. I thought I had a brain tumor. Well, the doctors thought I had a brain tumor. I had an encephalogram. And for about two whole years I know I didn't drive. I had a family doctor who's a woman, and she's the one who really helped me. She first sent me to a psychiatrist. After one session I said, I don't want to go back to him!

INT: He wasn't right for you, huh?

RUTH: No.

INT: Do you know what it was in your life that caused you to feel so bad?

RUTH: There was no individual, it was not a particular event, I can't pin it down to a particular event, or a particular circumstance, except that it probably all accumulated, and I had this violent physical reaction. But it wasn't physical. It was neurological. I did go to a neurologist. I don't think I was ever on tranquilizers. That's another thing. I hate taking medicine, even an aspirin. But I did take something, and it wasn't valium, I know that. I refused to take tranquilizers. Especially this is what I didn't like about this country. The pill popping.

INT: You weren't used to that.

RUTH: That was going on and the minute you had the slightest little problem you just took something, and made you feel good.

INT: So you figure you had to really work out what, do you think it was the pressures of your past and your childhood?

RUTH: Well, probably, and I've already delved into it.

INT: So it was a lot. Did you miss your parents a lot, Ruth, and seeing them just on occasion?

RUTH: I missed them, but, I remember when I had that episode, we went to France that year. In fact my parents kindly invited us to Switzerland. And said the children could go to a little children's home, and we would be free, and I could rest and all that. But I didn't get better. And I was going to stay with my parents. So everything I wanted, or we wanted, was there, and yet, didn't help. And I was going to stay on with the children and my parents, after Harry returned home. And I couldn't. I mean, I just didn't feel right.

INT: About leaving him, you mean.

RUTH: I just physically, I felt awful. So I returned with him and the children.

INT: Do you think it was the pressures of motherhood? Were you at home a lot with the kids, were you working at the time?

RUTH: I think maybe by then I was home a lot. I had some classes at the library here in Elkins Park. So I was giving some French classes. But I hadn't returned to work, I had used my skills as a biochemist, and worked in research at Wyeth Laboratories before I had children. It was a wonderful job. But they didn't have day care, they didn't have anything set up, and one thing, I didn't want to give my child to somebody else. Whether it's because of my past, or not. I could not bring myself to do that.

INT: People did it a lot.

RUTH: This is what people did. They took a housekeeper and went off to work. I couldn't do that. So I stayed home with her [my daughter], but it wasn't unusual then. A lot of women did that. And a lot of very intelligent women. So we had a book group, we still meet, and we had stimulating things. But then I had Eric three years later, and it's only when he went into kindergarten that I started part-time teaching. Then I backed into teaching. But by then I had started to give some French lessons sort of flying by the seat of my pants, (laughs) because I wasn't trained as a teacher. I decided to go back to St. Joe's College and get a certification.

INT: In education?

RUTH: In education, right. French and even Science. I had enough science credits, that I'm actually qualified. You have to do a certain number of hours, I guess, to get the permanent certificate. I have a permanent certificate in French. Not in science.

INT: How were decisions made in your marriage?

RUTH: I guess we always tried to work it out. (laughs)

INT: Tried to talk to each other. One of you tends to be stronger than the other.

RUTH: I would say my husband is probably stronger, but he's also reasonable. So...as long as it made sense, I went along. And vice versa. But naturally we had conflicts. Sure, we went in opposite directions.

INT: Different than how you saw your parents' problem solve and make decisions?

RUTH: Yes. Very different.

INT: They never really did.

RUTH: My husband actually came from a family, (he's an only child), where his parents never raised their voice. It was the exact opposite. So conflict to him is something he almost can't deal with. So he'll do anything to avoid it. I have to tell him there's nothing wrong. I raise my voice with the children; I yelled at them, he couldn't deal with that.

INT: So he tends to kind of distance himself?

RUTH: Yes.

INT: Ruth, as far as having children, did war experience affect your desire to have children? Did you want children?

RUTH: Yes, I did want children.

INT: Do you think the war...

RUTH: I probably would have liked more, but because of my episodes, no I just wanted to prove that they couldn't destroy us.

INT: Do you remember thinking about that?

RUTH: Maybe not consciously, but....

INT: But you think that might have been part of it for you.

RUTH: But I think it was important for me to continue and have descendants.

INT: How about fears for children? Fears for your children?

RUTH: Yes, I would say I was a protective mother.

INT: Do you think that again had anything to do with your war experiences?

RUTH: Who knows by then?

INT: It's hard to say, huh?

RUTH: Yes.

INT: How have you dealt with the war with your children? I mean, they're grownups now. Were you very open with them?

RUTH: Yes, I was open. I was emotionally in hiding for a very long time. They did know about what happened, and they were very affected by it as they grew up. And they talked about it as young as thirteen, in their Bat Mitzvah or Bar Mitzvah speech. And when I decided to write down my memoirs, I did it for them, originally. It wasn't with the idea of having a book someday. But that's so they would know, they would have a manuscript and hopefully pass it on to their children, and to the generations to come, because when the first denial accounts came out in the late seventies and early eighties, I was so appalled, that something snapped in me, that I decided that I really have to write this down. Because once we go, then it's just going to be these lies against these accounts that show that it really did happen.

INT: Had you told them a lot about, as they grew up, from a young age?

RUTH: A lot maybe not. But yes, I told them what I knew. And also I knew that I wanted to delve more into it, because I didn't know that much about it.

INT: When you say that they were very affected by it, can you tell me more about that?

RUTH: Well, like my daughter became much more Conservative. We belong to a Reform synagogue. She was very interested in Judaism, and always said, "I wanted to prove that Hitler was wrong."

INT: So for her it was a real drive to be more religious.

RUTH: So she was very motivated and to this day she keeps kosher, and is very active in her synagogue.

INT: Even more than you?

RUTH: Oh, much more! No comparison. And the Reform movement didn't give her enough. So she became Conservative long before she met her husband, who happens to come from a Conservative home.

INT: How about your son? Is he also?

RUTH: Well, not religion-wise. I know he dated some non-Jewish girls, but never became serious -- and said to his father, he never told me that -- "I could never bring myself to do something like that, to marry a non-Jewish girl."

INT: So that identity in your family is very important, even though he may not be very super religious as far as the practices.

RUTH: Very strong Jewish identity. And their college essays were all about what happened to the family. Both of them.

INT: How about that. So you certainly had a big influence on them.

RUTH: Yes, I guess so.

INT: And that's more...

(END TAPE FOUR, SIDE ONE. GO ON TO TAPE FIVE)

(TAPE FIVE, SIDE ONE)

RUTH: But people are human, and some have similar qualities, and some of the same trepidations, or the same outlooks, and same motivations, or different ones. But it's certainly a cultural thing, but it's hard to put your finger on it.

INT: Hard to describe?

RUTH: Yes, it is hard to describe. And more and more so in the United States, I think.

INT: Philosophy of life, or...

RUTH: Because there's just so many of them. So, I think you can always find somebody who has the same outlook as you.

INT: Because it's such a variety, yeah.

RUTH: And maybe Europeans are a little more mature. They certainly consider themselves superior, right or wrong. I find myself defending the Americans over there and defending the French here. But I enjoy that. As an educator, I think that's fine.

INT: It makes it interesting.

RUTH: Yes. That makes it interesting. And I think I can step back and be a little more analytical.

INT: How do you think you've adapted to America?

RUTH: I think I've adapted pretty well.

INT: Yeah, it seems that way.

RUTH: I came maybe young enough to have adapted. But the fact that I go back and forth a lot helps, too. And there are certain things that I'm much more comfortable over there with. For example, you'll be amused by that as a psychologist. Our idea of fun when we were young teenagers was to sit in a cafe and make fun of other people. But even your best friend could say, "My Gosh! What did you do to your hair?" You know, "It's terrible!" (laughs) "And this dress doesn't look good at all on you." And that's the way they even educate you in school. Now this may have changed since I went to school, but when I went to school when they returned essays or exams, they would start with the best and end with the worst, and you had to stand up in front of the class and be stripped by the teacher. I'm not sure they do that anymore. Because I'm sure they don't. But you know, it wasn't the worst thing in the world.

INT: It made you tough?

RUTH: I think so. And you know that the next person was going to get the same treatment.

INT: Eventually, right? Eventually someone else would be the worst or the best.

RUTH: Now I could never -- and I did at the beginning, and I lost a few friends -- be so blunt to an American friend. You compliment people, and they say thank you. Well, they would compliment me and say, "Oh, no, oh, you look lovely today. Or what did you do to your hair?" I say, "I don't think so!" (laughs). It's very cultural. Here you're

supposed to say, "Oh, thank you." And as you know someone better of course you can say, "No, I don't think so. I blow-dried it for two hours and it's still frizzy." Whatever.

INT: But still you don't say to people, even your best friend, "That dress looks horrible on you!"

RUTH: Obviously I want to make a point and I exaggerate. I'm not sure you would do it as adults, either. Don't forget, I grew up in France as a teenager, and I think, even as I saw some of my friends, I would never say it even today.

INT: But there is that difference.

RUTH: Yes, it's a pastime, to strip people down.

INT: And your support systems in the United States. Of course, here it was your husband...

RUTH: Right. And his parents were very nice to me.

INT: They took you...

RUTH: They treated me very well. Very fine people.

INT: And then your uncle, also, was he a big support system?

RUTH: Oh, the one in New York? Not really, as it turned out. He was elderly. Very old world. Extremely old-fashioned. And I spent very little time with him and his wife. His wife couldn't stand him either! (laughter)

INT: Oh, my, that's a problem! Was there anyone else at the beginning when you first came here that was a good support system for you?

RUTH: Yes, my husband's friends, being a little older, really took me under their wing, and protected me. I was like a little sister. And his one friend, to this day, I call her my sister. My older sister.

INT: So a lot of good friends had hooked up with you.

RUTH: Yes, I was very lucky. Extremely lucky.

INT: So as far as help from the community and everything, these people were real helpful, plus you had your husband.

RUTH: Sure, because whatever I needed, I could call them. I need this and that. And where do I get a doctor, where do I get the best kind of meat. No matter how trivial or how important, I always had someone I could turn to.

INT: So you had a lot of trust in your community and the American world, then.

RUTH: Yes.

INT: This seemed a trustworthy place for you?

RUTH: And as it turned out it was very unusual. The wonderful circle of friends that he had.

INT: But that allowed that trusting part of you to come through.

RUTH: Right. And they weren't superficial. If I may generalize, or stereotype, which I hate to do. Of all people, I should be the last one to stereotype. But there is something a little superficial about Americans. You know, like they will compliment you and invite you to their house, and they don't mean it. The French person tells you, "Come to my house." They will call you the following week, or within days, and make a date, time, and everything else. They mean it. They don't say it lightly. Or they'll say, "Oh, I'll meet you in a cafe sometimes." You know, neutral turf. They invite you to their house, and you're a friend forever.

INT: But here people can just say "Come" very casually.

RUTH: You come and go; it's maybe a way of life.

INT: But you were able to hook in with people that you felt real good about, and trusting.

RUTH: Right.

INT: How about as far as Jewish people? Are most of your friends Jewish?

RUTH: Yes, most of them are Jewish. But I have a few Gentile friends.

INT: Any particular conflict of values between how you were raised in Europe and here? Other than the ones you've already talked about.

RUTH: I think values, good, solid values, should be the same everywhere, and aren't. And aren't. You know. The good old Ten Commandments, and honesty, and reliability. And responsibility.

INT: Were you glad that your children were raised in America?

RUTH: Yes. They're very American, but they also are very comfortable with the French. Don't forget that being French makes a difference in this country. You're sort of put not necessarily on a pedestal, but already it sets you aside as being well-educated, and

having a certain culture, having good taste in most things. Rightly or wrongly. And so you're made to feel very important. At the beginning I didn't know why. They thought I was an outstanding cook. I didn't even know how to boil an egg! I couldn't make a three-minute egg for my husband no matter what. You know, in those days when you had a soft-boiled egg for breakfast every day? You probably don't remember.

INT: No, I did. Because my father used to make me eat them! (laughter)

RUTH: Couldn't do it. Couldn't do it.

INT: Isn't that something. But people assumed because you were French...

RUTH: I started with "Larousse Gastronomique," And I made Crepe Suzette and Canard a l'Orange and having watched my mother I may have had more of a knack.

INT: Were there hardships for you and your husband at the beginning, or he was established and that didn't...?

RUTH: You mean outside hardships? Yes. You know, yes, there were always hardships. We're comfortable; we're not wealthy by a long shot. And it was harder then, given that I travelled a lot. And that's why I felt an obligation about bringing in an income, because I knew that my travelling and my demands were costly. And I try to be considerate. Sure, there were many hardships. Professionally, he [my husband] lost his job a couple times, like in any professional life. There were some periods of insecurity.

INT: But at the time that you married he was a working man.

RUTH: Yes, by then he was no longer a student.

INT: He was already like in his thirties at that time?

RUTH: Right. Right.

INT: So he was pretty well established in that sense. That stability that you mentioned.

RUTH: He had a job, and into a career.

INT: And as far as your being able to use your skills that you learned in Europe, while obviously they were a big part of your professional life.

RUTH: Sure. Language.

INT: Were there any regrets that you didn't go back for more education there, like you had planned, or were you comfortable with what you did?

RUTH: Well, I did go, I got certified, I went to Bryn Mawr to get a literature certificate. They wanted me to go on for a Ph.D. As it turned out I'm not as literary, you know, as they thought I was. I love good books. I love to read. I think I can analyze a text as well as the next person. Maybe I can't express it quite as well. But I would have been probably much better off in something like the sciences, and I'm sorry I didn't pursue that. I didn't develop that part of me. Or maybe economy.

INT: What do you think, when you started here, you were in the sciences, is that correct, in your first position?

RUTH: Yes, because that's what I was studying at the time. But see, even in Europe I wanted to go to a business school. And I didn't. Maybe I had to pass an exam, and I hadn't passed it. Now, I could have prepared it another year, and it probably would have changed my path. But you know, you go through life getting interested in other things, and I don't think that's unusual, either. But then you don't quite have the track record, and that makes it hard.

INT: And then, there's always other factors, like family and different things that influence your decision.

RUTH: Geographical location.

INT: This is just a question, and it might be a real hard one to answer, but do you think that if the war hadn't happened, your life would have been very different?

RUTH: Oh, I'm sure. Extremely different. My parents would have stayed in Germany, where they had lived for generations.

INT: And you suspect maybe you would have too.

RUTH: Well, of course. How does **anyone** know how the world would have been without World War II? I think this country would have been totally different, too.

INT: When you think about it, how much your, your experiences would have been so different, and you so different.

RUTH: And the number of people around. You know, 30 million people died in World War II. And so many young. We don't know what geniuses were exterminated, or killed on the battlefield, who would have changed the course of civilization. We'll never know that.

INT: Well, let me, do we have five more minutes?

RUTH: Five more is fine.

INT: Ruth, who do you talk about your difficulties with, and your decisions, and your feelings?

RUTH: I think, like I said before, various people. And some of them I keep to myself.

INT: Is that still a part of you that you keep a lot in?

RUTH: I think my biggest confidant is probably my husband. But up to a point. (laughs) And so, then I pick certain friends that I know I can trust. Probably my friend in London because we've known each other since we were fourteen years old, and we've confided everything, but it's true that the geographical distance, does make a difference. But when we see each other, we pick up exactly where we left. And we catch up.

INT: Do you think out of everybody in the world, when you look, she's the person that probably knows you the best?

RUTH: I would think so, yes. But I think every human being is very, very complex, and I don't know if anyone knows you really well.

INT: Do you still tend to find that you keep a lot in? You were so programmed to do that as a kid. Do you still keep a lot of things inside?

RUTH: No, not on an emotional basis, I don't think. Well, yeah, some of it, like everybody else. But I think my trust in other people is extremely affected. I don't trust anybody. Especially strangers, unless I've known them for a very long time, with a proven track record. But anybody else, I don't trust.

INT: So did you find when you came to this country, as far as the support systems that you had, it took a while to trust these people, or...

RUTH: Well, not that long because, you know, I could tell that they had known each other for so long, and you can sense if people are trustworthy or not. I mean, I did come with that baggage. More so than I think a non-survivor. I knew who I could trust. And I've rarely, rarely made a mistake.

INT: So people really have to prove to you that they're trustworthy before you feel comfortable to that person.

RUTH: But, like everybody else, I've goofed a few times. (laughs). And big ones, too.

INT: Well, we all do. But I think the important thing is that you can trust once...Sometimes I think people are so hurt that they can never, and that makes a big difference.

RUTH: Yes. Well, not the typical survivor, I know, in that sense.

INT: Did you see that different in your parents? The trust, that that was a much harder issue for them?

RUTH: Well, in fact, if anything, they thought I was **too** trustworthy as I was growing up. The minute I brought home a friend, "Who is she, what is she doing there, what did you tell her?" So I rarely brought anyone home. So I trusted a little more even as I was growing up, than they ever did. Even for me.

INT: So even as a kid, you remember, which I think is also, what you hear from a lot of survivors that their families were always skeptical about people coming into the home.

RUTH: Right. Even though my friends were Jewish, sometimes they were from my scout troop. They only trust the family. And maybe the friends that my father made in the Foreign Legion. They were like family after the war since they all had lost so many people. And I remember one summer I was so lonely, I didn't want to go alone on vacation. And I prevailed upon them to take someone along. It took a lot of persuasion. A girlfriend. And it took me months to convince them. And it's not until I started to cry, and I didn't want to go, I acted out. (Phone interruption)

(GO TO SIDE TWO)

(PAUSE)

INT: A Jewish identity and how your children really seem to have a strong sense of identity.

RUTH: Right. They do.

INT: And your husband came from a Reform type of family?

RUTH: No, he was just by choice. His parents had gone to a Conservative synagogue.

INT: You'd mentioned a little how your daughter looks at your war experiences to kind of prove that they were wrong during that time. Does she talk much about it?

RUTH: Oh, yes. She's very proud. She arranges presentations of them, her way. So I've spoken to her Hadassah group, at synagogue, and schools. I'm going back on Friday, to the elementary school. Yes. Because there are many survivors in the Northern Jersey and the New York areas. So I always felt, well, my story is nothing compared to what other people went through. Oh, no, they're interested. She wants me to come.

INT: So again, it's real important that she let this be known among her community.

RUTH: Absolutely.

INT: What has been your philosophy of child-rearing?

RUTH: Giving them a strong identity. Developing their character. I try, I had limits. I didn't just give them anything they wanted. I tried to instill a strong sense of responsibility. And whatever you call it, good old-fashioned values, whatever that means. That was very important to me. That material things are nice, but certainly on a priority scale, very unimportant.

INT: But it was those values, and you spent a lot of energy trying to instill them as best as we do. How about your attitude towards discipline?

RUTH: Well, that's what I mean. With discipline, they did have limitations, and as they went to school, they were never allowed to watch television during the week. It was absolutely verboten. not many, you know, how should I say, limitations, but those that I had, I stuck by.

INT: That you thought was important.

RUTH: This is not up for discussion. And that's it.

INT: So it was clear who was the parent.

RUTH: Yes. They didn't punch into a marshmallow. And my husband feels the same way. He's a product of the Depression.

INT: So there's certain things that you value.

RUTH: Absolutely.

INT: How about your attitude towards school?

RUTH: Well, I believe in a good, strong education. That's an absolute priority.

INT: It was important that they take it seriously?

RUTH: Yes. Now, our daughter was a very fine student, and she says that today, because I never tried to make them feel bad when they came home with a B or a Ca, but she claims that we were disappointed, and I always had to strive for the A. And I say, I think that's something that maybe you perceived, but you know, of course we were very happy when you had good grades. And we didn't bribe them, or anything, and get whatever you want. We were very happy and very proud. But you know how adults now make up these things about their childhood? I mean, I don't remember. I mean I always, we always tried to be very encouraging. Our son was not as much of a student in his younger years. He absolutely blossomed in college. And he literally had stomachaches, because he felt he wasn't as good as his sister, and he didn't want to disappoint us. But he only did that to himself. We always were very proud of him, always encouraged him. We didn't like them to goof off, that's for sure.

INT: But you had limits, and you wanted them to take it seriously. Do the best they can.

RUTH: Exactly. And they picked friends who had similar upbringing. They never brought home...

INT: Did they grow up in this area?

RUTH: Yes. They went to Cheltenham. My son had a lot of friends. My daughter, not as many. She thought that a lot, especially the girls, were very spoiled and superficial. But that was maybe her perception, or maybe the particular year she was in. But then in college she blossomed social-wise.

INT: Where did she go to school?

RUTH: University of Pennsylvania. The whole family went. We have a Pennsylvania connection. My husband went to the Moore school, the school of Engineering. And our children both went undergrad, and graduate. He went to Wharton, got his M.B.A. there. My daughter got her M.B.A. at N.Y.U.

INT: Academically, they certainly were achievers, then. They did well.

RUTH: Yes. Yes.

INT: How about your attitude towards possessions?

RUTH: Like I say, some things are nice to have, but if I don't have them, it doesn't bother me in the least. I have a nice little Acura, it's five years old. Well, maybe you'd like a new one? I said, Why? Why? The whole winter it started, it has a steering wheel and four wheels, and it gets me where I want to go, and that's fine.

INT: So you're happy as long as...

RUTH: But he is very conservative, and that's the way he is, and I respect that. I tend, I would tend to be a little more foolish, to sort of live it up. But we travel a lot, and we enjoy things. We don't become paranoid about hoarding everything.

INT: But he's [your husband's] a product of the Depression, you said. That has a big influence.

RUTH: And don't tell him, because he doesn't like to hear that.

INT: Yes. But that does have a big influence on your outlook towards money.

RUTH: I think so. And he's [my husband's] a collector, he loves books and he loves certain things. Now he's building up a video collection. And he has them all categorized.

So I said, well, we'll go to a house where we'll have a great room, like they call it, and we'll have an audio-visual center. No, no, no, that's not what he meant. He likes them stacked away all over the place. (laughs)

INT: He still works full time.

RUTH: He has his own firm, so he's flexible. But he's been wonderful with the book, very encouraging. I should never say that to the feminists of this world, but...

INT: Well, it's nice when your spouse supports you.

RUTH: Oh, but you know what I said, behind every great woman, there's a man!

INT: That's right. That's right, absolutely.

RUTH: The book would not be published. Maybe I shouldn't put it on tape, if it wasn't for him. Because we had a publisher, and they finally made so many demands on that manuscript, that it would not have been what we wanted, that we pulled it out. And I said, let's forget it. We have a manuscript, it's wonderful, I felt a little badly for Stacy, who wouldn't get royalties, because she had spent all this time writing. He said, I'm not giving up! He went to the small presses.

INT: I think it's nice in the marriage when you have that kind of support.

RUTH: And now he's literally my agent. I couldn't afford someone of his caliber, quite frankly. Because he's a consultant, and he's all set up with his secretary to send out 150 letters at a time, and I'm not very good at computers, so I've been spoiled.

INT: You can't just sell them in a book store, right? You have to do a lot of promotions, and it takes a long time, and a lot of work. I know what you mean.

RUTH: Right now, maybe not this month, but up until now, one third of his time is spent promoting the book. Because all I have to do is write to so and so and various paragraphs. I don't have to compose the letters. Which would take too much of my time, and I couldn't reach as many people.

INT: How about your attitude towards work and goals?

RUTH: Well, maybe that has affected me in a certain way. I'm not sure if I was somewhat of an underachiever, whether it was circumstances. Like I say, I had this wonderful job, and I backed into teaching. And believe me, I don't regret anything. I mean, the quality of life I've had has been wonderful. I don't live in a chateau, or anything like that, nor do I need it.

INT: But you've had some great experiences in your life.

RUTH: I've had some wonderful experiences. I think we've raised two wonderful children, and now we have two grandchildren, and we feel very fulfilled. Now professionally, I taught at Springside for 22 years, and when I left they actually named a whole section of the library after me for Holocaust Studies. And to me, that's the greatest achievement of all. And it was a **total** surprise. You know, it's an all-girls school, and originally was a finishing school, and of course it's changed tremendously over the years. But who would have thought that the Springside School would have a Holocaust Studies section?

INT: It was overwhelming. And did you teach...

RUTH: I was always known as Renee professionally. But the library is getting bigger and bigger, and they're always adding books, and people donated money. There's a fund, and there must be money available for it.

INT: So when you hooked up with them 22 years ago, your children were...

RUTH: My son was in first grade when I started full-time. He was in kindergarten, and I started part time. So when he was away...I was always home for them. That was very important to me. I mean always is a big word, but I mean.

INT: And what did you teach there? Was it French?

RUTH: French. And for seven years I was the head of the language department, foreign language department. Not even the last years, because then I started to ease off a little bit. In other words I was not as strongly motivated professionally as I was for raising a family and doing maybe things that I enjoyed. Rather than drive myself crazy. And to this day, I could have stayed, and I could do a little more, but now I have to promote the book, and I make presentations, and once in a while I have pangs of guilt, because also financially I could have done a lot better than teaching in a private school. Because I had an offer from public school, but I didn't want any part of it. I had to be there at 7:00. Because the beginner's salary was laughable. It was laughable anyway at that time. Things have changed, luckily. But they gave me a few years' experience because I was a native. I don't know why. I guess at the time they really needed someone badly. And they gave me like five years' experience. So they didn't start me at the beginning. Because when they told me the beginner's salary, they must have seen my face! So I was lucky to start a little higher. So when Cheltenham offered me a job, I would have had to take a cut in salary, believe it or not. But, I would have ended up at the end of my time, with a much, much higher salary, because financially they negotiated such very high salaries lately.

INT: Was this rewarding, though, for you, professionally?

RUTH: Oh, yes, because obviously I met my collaborator, who was one of my students. I've had some wonderful experiences. And it was my second home for a while. Very nice teachers. And to this day, I have my library and I think, I would **never** have had

that, I think, in a public school. It would have been totally different. Even though Cheltenham is certainly a very fine high school, and I probably would have had some nice colleagues and nice experiences, because my children had a very good experience. Except the foreign language department. And I wouldn't have been happy because it hasn't improved. I have a friend, who was there for years, and she was an extraordinary teacher, and each time she made suggestions, they never followed them. So it would have been a struggle. So I had a lot more influence and more control. But now Spanish took over, and that was another reason. I saw French really diminished, and that hurt.

INT: So a lot of it was you had yourself, and you had your children, and you had to piece all this whole puzzle together of what would work best, so this worked well for you, as opposed to a job that maybe financially would have been more rewarding, but time-wise would have taken away from the other things.

RUTH: Yes. Exactly.

INT: It's always a balance, huh?

RUTH: It's always a very delicate balance. But I think as you get older you realize that my kind of priorities are really more important. Because so many women, I think, today, give up everything for a career, for status, for success, whatever that means, in their job, and then, as you know the biological clock runs out and you didn't meet the right kind of people, and I think emotionally that must be devastating. To be sitting on a pinnacle career-wise, and to have no other satisfaction. Even though they may not admit to it. But I see it. Now maybe, I'm trying to, how should I say, rationalize, what happened to me.

INT: It certainly, the other thing is that...

RUTH: I don't know if you can have it all. I guess some people do.

INT: Because you can't be home for your kids and also be at a job.

RUTH: I know a couple of young women who seem to have it all. But then again, I don't know them intimately.

INT: And you don't know what a struggle it is that they're trying to do it all, right?

RUTH: Right.

INT: Ruth, how about your attitude towards fun?

RUTH: Fun? I love to have fun. Yes.

INT: So that's not hard. And your Dad didn't have a problem having fun.

RUTH: No, I must say, no. And my husband has a tremendous sense of humor, and I laugh at his jokes even though I know them by heart. It's just the way he tells them, and we have a wonderful time. I think humor is extremely important in mental health. And in anything you do. You couldn't teach some of these teenagers if you didn't have a sense of humor. You'd go crazy! (laughs) And the same with your children, and the same with family. In anything. If you look at the lighter side of things and make light of it when it's appropriate, you're much better off.

INT: Absolutely. You stand back, right? Actually, I think you've answered, have you balanced your needs and the needs of your children. You were there a lot for them, it sounds like. That was real important, that you be there for them.

RUTH: Yes. I also taught at a school where I saw a lot of poor little rich girls. Meaning that the families were incredibly wealthy, they just threw money at them. Not all, you know, but some of them were absolute basket cases. Psychological cases.

INT: Because they didn't have the stability or the nurturing.

RUTH: Exactly, the caring. I saw that over and over. Now maybe as they grew up as adults, they compensated and changed, and some of them I met later, and they seemed fine. But they had very traumatic experiences as youngsters.

INT: So that helped you make a decision what you were going to do.

RUTH: Because in a private school, you were also an advisor to students. I mean, you're not the school psychologist, obviously, but you have to be able to screen those who need more help. And you'd be amazed.

INT: No, actually, I wouldn't.

RUTH: I mean, **you** wouldn't be, because of your profession.

INT: But when you think that people have it all, but when you get to know what's really going on, exactly right. And handling decisions about your children and with your children, was it hard to give them the independence as they grew older. Was that a struggle for you, Ruth? That separation, all those kinds of things?

RUTH: I'm wondering if it's more so, or the same as any other caring mother. I don't know if because of my past, I may be a little more attached to them. My daughter just announced that they're going to be transferred to Salt Lake City, and she was really afraid to tell me. She had these long discussions with her father for a month now, and it's only when they were absolutely sure that they were going to move there, my son-in-law's being transferred, that they told me. I was delighted for them, and she was shocked. Now maybe I'm a little unpredictable. I am, emotionally I may not be even-handed. I may have ups and downs emotionally. Sometimes I react one way to something, and

then sometimes for the similar situation I'll react totally differently. So that may be what throws them.

INT: So she thought that you would really be devastated with her going to a far...

RUTH: Because she just had a new baby, and I go back and forth a lot, and I help her a lot. But in my mind, I want my children to be happy, and maybe they don't quite understand. They may see it as being selfish on my part. I don't know. But...I want them to be very happy, and it's a wonderful opportunity, and I'm not married to Philadelphia. I don't have roots, I think. That's one thing that affected me. Not any one particular place is more important to me than another. And I feel I'm a globetrotter. One place is as good as another.

INT: Do you think that has to do with moving around a lot?

RUTH: Probably, I don't know. I've never analyzed it. That's why I like to remain flexible at this stage in my life. Because I'm still young enough to take advantage, and hopefully healthy enough.

INT: Do you feel like your roots are back in France?

RUTH: Not really, I feel like the wandering Jew, I guess! (laughs) As long as I have my nucleus of people, and I know I have friends, and I know they care for me. My best friend lives in London. She just had a terrible tragedy. But she knows I'm there with her in spirit, and vice versa. I'm terribly affected by it. Sure, it would be nicer if I were close by. I still consider her my best friend and me for her.

INT: So you're feeling that you could go any place, and you're not settled in any particular spot.

RUTH: I'm not sure I'd want to hop and settle every place, but I could spend a month here, a month there.

INT: So it was somewhat difficult to let them become independent, but as you said, like all mothers struggle with that. That separation. But you didn't see yourself as really having a particularly difficult time.

RUTH: I don't think so. My son married a young woman from Atlanta. I also think the mother/son relationship is special, and the fact that I think that he married a southern belle, it's not quite fair. I thought she was more spoiled than she actually is. And I think the relationship is just normal, you know, taking away my only son. (laughs) And that's not her fault.

INT: Do you get to see him very often?

RUTH: Not as often as I would like. And maybe I'm more affected by that, because we were very close. But he calls a lot, and I thought when he got married, that, he said, "Oh, we'll see each other once or twice a year." And I said, "What do you mean?" You know, I thought we'd see each other more often, so...But we do get to see each other. Sure I would rather have my family nearby and have them over Friday night for dinner every week. I think that would make me very happy. But when we do get together, we have some wonderful times together. I mean, I'm also modern, in the sense that I understand. It's another world.

INT: Oh, yes. Children move on.

RUTH: Children move on, and...as long as I can do it. As long as we all stay healthy we will travel. What worries me, is if we have a problem, like in every family there are some health problems. That worries me more than anything.

INT: How did you react to your children's problems?

RUTH: When they had problems?

INT: Going through those years. Did you find yourself over-reacting, or dealing with it head on, or...

RUTH: Maybe with my daughter I over-reacted. She was the first one. I remember getting angry and yelling at her. And she's also very strong-willed. That happens to be her personality. So maybe I did over-react with her more than with my son.

INT: Do you think a lot of that might be her personality...

RUTH: Personality, first-born. I just don't know. You know, not knowing, being fairly young. I had her when I was 24.

INT: Do you see yourself as kind of like your mom was in that look on the black side?

RUTH: Sometimes I do.

INT: You could make it into a catastrophe.

RUTH: Yeah, I think if anything, I may not be even-handed. I over-react over something. That's why maybe to this day she doesn't know how I'm going to react to things. And looking back, maybe I was not consistent with her. Like I said, some things that I had limits with, and she knew that, but the little every day occurrences, she never knew how I might react.

INT: Sometimes the stress would get you and...as we all do.

RUTH: Sometimes I snapped. But I think, I'm not sure that's so abnormal.

INT: No, as we all do.

RUTH: When you get hit with something, right?

INT: Exactly. Did your raising your children, your goals and your ideas change as you got older?

RUTH: No. I always felt that the values I had then I still have today, more so than ever when I see what's going on around me. And I feel, I never really said I should have done this differently.

INT: Well, it sounds like you were there a lot for them.

RUTH: And I don't regret anything.

INT: He was also a very active parent.

RUTH: Yes. Yes.

INT: You're lucky, then.

RUTH: We've been married 35 years. That makes us dinosaurs, right? (laughter)

INT: Well, let me tell you. There aren't too many people anymore that can make it that long.

Were you fearful about your children? Having gone through some of your very fearful experiences? Do you think that, you were more protective of them?

RUTH: Probably, yeah, probably. I certainly didn't want them to have to go through that. But I tried not to show that. I let them live a normal life.

INT: How about the normal kinds of things what kids want to do, and venturing out, and we all sit there sometimes and we worry.

RUTH: Well, of course my husband influenced me, too. Especially for our boy, Eric. Boys are much more daring, climb trees and do crazy things. Like boys do.

INT: So you would keep it inside and let him do what he had to do?

RUTH: Yes. My husband said, "Let him be."

INT: He'll make it, right? How do you want your children and your grandchildren to view you? Tough question.

RUTH: Yes. That is a tough question. Someone who really loves them very deeply. Who cares deeply for them. Someone that they can respect in a sense that they bring them enrichment. I bring them some kind of enrichment.

INT: So it's an important part of their life in that sense. Real positive, and nurturing for them.

RUTH: That's the way I'd like them to see me.

INT: Ruth, it's 11:10 now. Do you want to stop now?

RUTH: Is it a good stopping point?

INT: It probably is a good stopping point.

(Pause)

INT: This is very helpful. I really appreciate your honesty. Okay, now we're kind of getting back to when you came here, some of the questions are going back to that. What was it like for you to come to a new land?

RUTH: It was very exciting. Because I was young. Don't forget, Europeans were used to crossing borders. And I had already seen many countries. You know, I had gone to Switzerland, Italy, England, Belgium, Spain. But America, that was very exciting.

INT: And very different.

RUTH: And very different. We called it the New World, of course, which it is. But it's really a **totally** different world. Some of it was disappointing, but I was extremely excited. And I felt comfortable. I always felt comfortable with English-speaking people. I loved England. Even though I said my best friend lives in London, she happens to be French and married an Englishman, but since divorced. But anyway, most of my French friends who settled either in England or the United States, even though they didn't have happy marriages, and some of them very early on, could have gone back, none of them went back (to France).

INT: How about that.

RUTH: Yeah, which is interesting. That's my particular experience. So I always was attracted to people like me, you know, who liked adventure, who liked living elsewhere.

INT: Did it seem strange? Was it hard for you to assimilate into this environment and culture?

RUTH: Yes. And I think in many ways I'm still considered the outsider wherever I go. I'm a curiosity, and I'm considered an outsider.

INT: Why do you think that is, Ruth?

RUTH: No, I think it's particularly true in Philadelphia, I think, since people have been here forever, the parents knew each other, the grandparents knew each other. And my husband has a close circle of friends, but they've known each other long before me, and even now, I've been here a very long time. I still feel a little bit like an outsider. But it doesn't bother me because, you know, I grew up being alone a lot of the time, and I can't say I have a real close girlfriend, you know. But I don't know how important that is. But I have several. And I go to a certain one for some things, and to another for other things, and I'm not sure that's so unusual.

INT: Yeah, you know which ones you're the most comfortable with ...

RUTH: Discussing a certain topic, yeah.

INT: Do you see yourself as different from American women?

RUTH: I do see myself differently, and I think they see me as being different. To this day.

INT: Can you tell me what that difference is about?

RUTH: Well, you know, this is a heterogeneous country. And European is meaningless. You know, a German person is going to be totally different from a French person, and a French...

(END TAPE FIVE, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE SIX, SIDE ONE)

INT: It's June 20th, 1994. Ruth, what do you see as your successes of your life, and how have you achieved them? That's quite a question.

RUTH: Well, success to me was never measured in obtaining material success. I do feel that I have a very successful marriage. I have two wonderful children, and grandchildren, and that to me is a tremendous success and achievement, and gives me a lot of inside pleasure and fulfillment. Career-wise, I probably always put my family first. So I chose to teach rather than do research, which is the way I started when I first came over. When I had children, I stopped because it did not fit very well with raising a family. So I taught for 22 years at a private girls' school, which also fit my needs because the vacations are a little more flexible, and the hours are a little more flexible than public schools. At least they were at the time, before the public schools got all their contracts. They didn't have them when I was teaching. And now I guess the fact that my memoirs have become a published book, is a tremendous achievement, and I feel that I sort of can face my past, like the circle's complete.

INT: That has helped for you to face your past, as you said, writing that?

RUTH: I think it did, in my case. Even though it was traumatic, it wasn't overly traumatic to delve into it. And I think it's important for everyone to know what their childhood was like. Because up until I delved into it, I really didn't quite know, what kind of childhood I had. It's what you call a lost childhood. And I found it again, it wasn't a happy childhood, but it made me understand a lot of things, that maybe had I known along the way, I would have taken a different direction. But there's a French singer, by the name of Edith Piaf, who says, "Non, Je ne regrette rien. No, I don't regret anything." And I really think I can look back and say that whatever conscious decision that I made, I did not regret it.

INT: How do you think it's helped you, to know that past now? To move on, or has it helped you in that sense?

RUTH: Well, obviously, like my age, I could always move on. But I think it helped because you know what went on, and you're not obsessed by it. And I think it's very, very good to face your past.

INT: So it's given you like a certain kind of peace within yourself, now?

RUTH: Maybe. Maybe.

INT: That's great. Okay. What do you see as the mistakes you've made in your life?

RUTH: Mistakes. Real big mistakes, you're talking about, right?

INT: Yeah.

RUTH: Well, probably, given my ability, maybe I should have achieved a better career. I don't know. But that didn't bother me. So I can't say that I made any major mistakes. I'm not really very unusual that way. I really can't think of any major mistakes.

INT: That you've made.

RUTH: That I've made.

INT: So part of it is, maybe, well, you were juggling the career and the family, and that takes choices, but that you don't really see as a mistake, you saw it as a choice.

RUTH: Right. I'm sorry I didn't do this or that. No, I've never made major mistakes. Lots of minor mistakes. Mistreating this one and that one. Blundering here and there. But nothing too major.

INT: Okay. What has been your role of your faith and tradition in your life since the war? And I know we touched on that a little bit before?

RUTH: Yeah, that's very ambiguous with me. I think, just like my father, I don't believe in a superior being. I never did. I don't think I will. I think getting older you do, just because you see that the end is near, and you want to live on somehow. But Judaism to me is just a tradition. It's a fact that an ancient people, like the Hebrews, have been able to survive despite horrific adverse circumstances throughout the ages. The fact that they are a very learned people, the People of the Book that they value education over everything else, and they've been able to pass that on, for almost 6,000 years. That to me is amazing. But I admire any ancient civilization. And there are so few that survived. And it's probably the only one that really did. And that's what fascinates me about Judaism. Now whether it is because they have it in a form that they have it, you know, in a religious background, but it's certainly much older than any other living religion.

INT: So it's a lot of respect for the tradition, and the survival of the people, as opposed to the actual...

RUTH: And I guess I'm very Jewish in the sense that I celebrate life. And I don't believe in an afterlife for sure, and I don't believe in any order, because I've only known chaos, and I do study it, it's been nothing but chaos. And the people have survived, I really think because of their learned experience, and the fact that they wrote everything down, from the very beginning. They were able to pass on something tangible. And I think Judaism evolves, even though the ultra-Orthodox, they have certainly evolved from the Middle Ages, even though they won't admit it. And that's why I believe in liberalism in Judaism. Just applying it to the times. Because that's really what they've done through the ages.

INT: So that's more your focus when you talk about your tradition. What role has this played in your family?

RUTH: I was very glad that my husband belonged to the Reform movement when I came over. Is that what you mean? And so I joined a synagogue with glee, and I did not keep kosher, or anything like that, so I didn't apply those traditions.

INT: Was it important for you to join a synagogue, though, to have that kind of community?

RUTH: Well, as young people, you also want to join because you want to be part of a certain group. And as I grew up, I only felt protected among Jews, anyway, so that was always important. But it had a great effect on my children. My daughter didn't get enough from Reform Judaism. She went on to become very Conservative and very kosher, and even to this day. Probably always will be. And is giving her child now a Jewish education. I mean, he goes to a Jewish day school.

INT: So actually the actual study of the religion, and the traditions are very important to her.

RUTH: I mean, I understand that it's a trend among young people anyway, right now, you know, to go back to their roots. But our son is still a Reform Jew. He wrote his college essay based on my background, and so was my daughter's. But he was going out with a non-Jewish girl at one time, and we were afraid that it became serious, and he told us, "Don't be afraid. I'll never marry a non-Jewish girl."

INT: So it was very important to him that he do that.

RUTH: Very, very.

INT: Do you know why that is, or it's just a sense of keeping the religion in the family?

RUTH: Yes. I really think that deep down, children of a survivor, didn't want to prove Hitler right. It is well known that when you intermarry, most of the children of those marriages do not go on with Judaism, statistically.

INT: Most of them do not.

RUTH: Even if the spouse converts. But the statistics are not there. It's called the silent Holocaust.

INT: I never heard it phrased like that. It's interesting. So for him it was to preserve the faith. Before you started the book, did you read much Holocaust material?

RUTH: Yes. Yes. I have read "The Diary of Anne Frank" in France. When it first came out. I had read, "The Last of the Just," which is also by a concentration camp survivor who received a prize in France. And the minute I heard about Elie Wiesel. Yes, yes, I have heard quite a bit.

INT: And seen films and...

RUTH: And seen films. When they first came out. Well, maybe not when they first came out after the war. Because I don't know if they showed them in France. They certainly didn't on television, and I wasn't aware of them. I wasn't aware until I came to this country. And not so much in the beginning. There was no interest anywhere in the Holocaust, for a long, long time. Especially among Jews.

INT: Why do you think that is?

RUTH: Because I don't think they wanted to face up to the fact that they were to be exterminated. Especially American Jews. And Israelis.

INT: A lot of denial.

RUTH: I don't like to use the word denial with the Jews, but...

INT: Do you think it's important that Gentiles and the world, and Jewish people know about the Holocaust?

RUTH: It's very important. It's become a mission with me. Starting with the children. If you can't convince adults, start with the children. Because there's so much hatred in the world. You have to somehow educate as many people as possible.

INT: Well, I know your book is in the regular public school system, so you've been going to groups outside of Jewish organizations, to try to promote the book.

RUTH: Absolutely. I'm going to continue next year. I don't know how long I will be doing that, but I feel that I have to give it at least another year, to try to get it into as many schools as possible. So maybe something will develop, and I'll have a new cap. I've really put everything on hold to be able to speak to schools.

INT: And get that message out.

RUTH: To whoever wants to listen.

INT: Does the Holocaust affect your political views?

RUTH: That's a tough question. Certainly, certainly. I would never vote for a candidate who is anti-Israel, or anti-Jewish. I don't think any Jew who is worthy of that name would either, even though there are probably cases.

INT: But that's certainly very important to you.

RUTH: Very.

INT: What do you think about the changes in Europe and Israel. You had just said a few minutes ago Israel had changed a lot. What do you think about the changes that have been made?

RUTH: Now, what do you mean by changes? Politically in Europe, the changes are much greater than in Israel. Israel is a democracy and hopefully we'll have some semblance of peace down the road. It will take a long time. Hopefully it won't become another Ireland. But the changes in Europe are much more worrisome. Because of this swing to the right, to the extreme right. Just yesterday in the New York Times, the magazine section, the cover, the feature article was Tcherinovsky in Russia, who has such appeal. And that's very scary, and that's going on all over Europe, including Italy. I mean there are various reasons. They are not the same reasons as the Germany of the thirties, but it's still extremely worrisome.

INT: How do you perceive society's interest in your war experience? And you have a lot of experience in getting a feel for how people are perceiving you.

RUTH: Well, you never know how people perceive you, deep down, really. You can't put yourself in front and be part of the audience. Wherever I've gone I've had a tremendous reception. And a bigger and warmer reception, almost, in the non-Jewish group. Is it because of Schindler's List this year, is it because the various churches realize that they've been terrifically anti-Semitic and have let an event like the Holocaust happen? I don't know. I'm always afraid that especially in the United States, and since the United States in many ways influences the rest of the world, at least the western world, it may just be a fad. And like I say, and then the pendulum swings in the other direction, just as dangerously. But I've been extremely well-received. Everywhere. Whether they're younger children, or teenagers. Apparently I was in a school in Strath Haven, in Wallingford, where they have some very good students and they have some that they call hoodlums. And apparently they were present at my talk, and they were very nervous. The teachers told me afterwards they were biting their fingernails, because they didn't know how they were going to respond. First of all you could hear a pin drop. They had the entire eleventh grade, which in a large school like that was over 250 students, and they had excellent questions. And the next day, apparently, they had a debriefing, and they were all very interested. Without exception. I had no idea, they didn't want to tell me. I went to a Catholic school where they are expected to behave well. Went to a school in Cherry Hill. Good neighborhood. But apparently there it was the opposite.

INT: And look at all, with the Holocaust museum, and all the groups that are coming out there, of all religions.

RUTH: They're turning people away. If you don't get there at 7:00 in the morning, they have 1500 tickets to give out every day. By 7:30 they are gone. Every day.

INT: You and I know that that's not all Jewish people going to that museum, that's for sure!

RUTH: You rush through four hours and you still don't see everything. I had to rush my friend at the beginning, because if you see every film at the beginning, that's it. You stop there.

INT: That's wonderful. Ruth, what have been your happiest moments since the war?

RUTH: Happiest moments? Life cycle things. Getting married, having children. Being, getting part of the library named after me in Holocaust studies, and now at the reception of the book.

INT: They've been the happiest. So career-wise, they feel real good to you. Great.

RUTH: I'm not sure it's directly related to career. I've had a lot of successes in my career. They were happy times, and I taught French for many years, and regularly my students won the National French contest at the top of their class nationally, and it gave me a lot of pleasure. Not quite as much...Everything that touches me deep down and has a positive effect, makes me very happy, I guess.

INT: Sure. What have been your most difficult moments since the war?

RUTH: Well, it depends when. As I grew up it was still a lot of sadness, a lot of fear, a lot of mistrust. And to this day I don't trust people readily. You said sad?

INT: Difficult.

RUTH: Obviously losing my father. But it wasn't a tragedy in the same way. He was in his late eighties. And you expect that. So it's lucky that I never had after the war such a tragedy in my personal life.

INT: But losing him was of course very difficult. Did you feel like you needed to say more to him? Were there unspoken words between the two of you?

RUTH: No, because he was a very open person. Well, the fact that he never talked about the war, would have been if he had lived to a hundred and twenty. He just didn't talk about it. No, I don't think that it is. The fact that he would have gotten any older would not have changed anything. So I felt that... we had a fairly close relationship. I don't feel that some things were left unsaid.

INT: So except for the war experience there wasn't anything between the two of you that you felt was left unsaid.

RUTH: I mean, we had different feelings. By talking about it, we would have been on track anyway. Without changing anything.

INT: Do you think he understood you, at that point, by the time he was in his eighties? Or at least learned to accept you, maybe.

RUTH: Maybe learned to accept me more than understood. And I think that's true.

INT: I think you're right also.

RUTH: Whether your children are natural or adopted, sometimes you think, did I adopt this child? They think so differently, they act so differently than you do and your spouse does? And accepting it is the main thing.

INT: Yeah, I agree. And you felt that he accepted.

RUTH: Being a mother is rough, I'll tell you! (laughs) I mean we have two, very, very different children.

INT: So it's to accept who they are, really, especially when they become adults.

RUTH: And it's harder, because whereas an adolescent, you figure it's a phase. And then an adult, and they're really out of the house, you don't follow them. It's ironic.

INT: Has your family background influenced how you've lived your life since the war?

RUTH: I guess, subconsciously, probably.

INT: Do you have any idea how? You went through so much? How it's influenced your thoughts or feelings about your lifestyle now or how you've chosen to live it?

RUTH: Well, I think, I have maybe an existential sort of philosophy. Responsible, but existential in a sense in that I feel that each day is a gift. And should be lived to its fullest. Not every single day of the year. But firstly in my plans, I'm a little more carefree than most people, but I have a husband who's just the opposite (laughs).

INT: He's very serious?

RUTH: Well, no, he's not serious in that sense, but he's more conservative, and always thinks about his old age. He's so worried about his old age. And the future is now for me.

INT: So it really has made you more spontaneous, or just living in the here and now is what you're saying.

RUTH: I like to do things now. Not postpone them. That doesn't mean I'm going to do everything this year and there's nothing left for next year, but...

INT: Yeah, within reason, but that's your philosophy.

RUTH: I'm always responsible, certainly. I never did anything irresponsible.

INT: Looking back over the past, how do you feel about your life, your marriage, your children, your family relationships?

RUTH: Well, I'm very fortunate. I'm probably unusual in that way. I'm interested in how you study other people. I found in my spouse someone who understood me, I mean up to a point. Someone who was older, more established, and may not have understood all the traumas, but certainly was a stabilizing influence. Which is what I needed.

INT: When you say understood you, is there anything in particular you're thinking about?

RUTH: Well, just being sympathetic without feeling sorry. There's a fine line. And...understood that I had to go back to France frequently to see my parents. Even though at times it was very difficult both financially and logistically. But as I told you, I still had a crisis around age thirty, which took its toll.

INT: And you think that had a lot to do with your past.

RUTH: I don't know.

INT: The stresses of the present.

RUTH: Probably.

INT: How did you get out of that?

RUTH: Time.

INT: Time more than anything else?

RUTH: Time and a wonderful family woman doctor, who understood me. She first advised me to see a couple of psychiatrists, and I felt they were crazier than I was! (laughter)

INT: You might be right on target with that.

RUTH: I said no way I was going to go to any kind of treatment like that. So she took me on, and I went regularly and talked things out.

INT: She was a regular general practitioner.

RUTH: Was. Now retired.

INT: But she was someone you were able to trust?

RUTH: I trusted her completely.

INT: So did she go through a lot of your past with you?

RUTH: Not really. She knew about it. She thought that maybe it was the fact that I was raised and educated in Europe and that I was a refugee of sorts in this country, or a foreigner, and she felt that maybe I wasn't as fulfilled as I should be in a career wise, intellectually. And she encouraged me to do things, to go out there, seek things that were more interesting.

INT: And did that help?

RUTH: After two years. Yes.

INT: Looking back, how would you describe the mechanisms by which you were able to rebuild your life?

RUTH: You know, I was so young, that that is very hard for me to analyze.

INT: But a lot of strength to rebuild that, because you went through a lot.

RUTH: I think my mother's strength.

INT: Her strength, watching her.

RUTH: Joining the Jewish Scouts. She sent me out there. She encouraged me to come to the States, even though my father was very worried that this would happen, that I would stay. But she always encouraged me. Come on, you can do it. She gave me confidence. On the one hand. On the other hand, little things, that mother/daughter relationship.

INT: But through her support and her encouragement to handle the world, you feel like that really helped you cope with things.

RUTH: I think that helped. She gave me strong values, also, and I think with an experience like that, you do have your priorities lined up automatically. You know what's important deep down.

INT: And what's important to you?

RUTH: Well, surviving, having a family, having a lot of love and caring is more important than anything else in the world.

INT: Yeah, sure.

RUTH: And I experienced that over and over again, having taught the very privileged girls at school. I've seen more poor little rich girls than you'd want to know about it.

INT: Lonely, but, financially there but lonely, very lonely and...

RUTH: Raised by strangers.

INT: How did you cope with the losses of your loved ones?

RUTH: That's also hard to tell. They were never there. I grew up to live with myself. Live alone, as an only child. Live without an extended family. I just, I never feel uncomfortable being alone. On the one hand, but not for long periods of time. I'm

curious, my mother filled me in a little bit as what my aunts and uncles and cousins were like. What my life might have been like in Germany if we had stayed.

INT: So for you, a lot of the losses, you had never really experienced these people being with you.

RUTH: Right. Except the uncle. That's right. And this was a favorite uncle. And that was sort of the focus, the dramatic focus. I cared for him so much. He was my father's brother, and I did get to know him, and I was very fond of him. Because he was much more intellectual than my father, and he read me stories, and he told me stories. He knew so much. And I only knew him before age four, or around age four, only for a few months that I can remember. So I probably blew it up in my mind. Bigger than life.

INT: Was he, was he the uncle you lived with, with your cousin and...

RUTH: No, we lived in Toulouse but not together. And my father didn't have time to warn him when there was a roundup, and he was taken that night. They didn't take his wife and children, because they were French, but they took all the men.

INT: But you remember him as being very important in your life.

RUTH: Yeah, because I saw him almost every day.

INT: Okay. (pause) How did you sustain the energy to work hard towards the future?

RUTH: How does anyone get energy? That's a very difficult question to answer. I have a lot of energy, but I also feel sometimes, like in the Freudian dream, that somebody's putting brakes on it.

INT: What do you mean?

RUTH: That I can't accomplish as much as I would like. Something is holding me back, and I don't know what.

(END TAPE SIX, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE SIX, SIDE TWO)

RUTH: ...responsible positions. I was always asked to head a committee, and then in the French Teachers' Association, they wanted me to run for president. I always shied away. I just felt I couldn't do it, and I don't know why.

INT: Some kind of fear of failure?

RUTH: Fear of failure, yes, of being, yes, fear of failure probably.

INT: Not being good enough.

RUTH: Not being up to it. And not being able to take criticism too well. For the longest while. You reach a certain age, and you'll see (laughs) the big 5-0, ...

INT: That's the turning point!

RUTH: It really is. It's like, I'm not going to take any nonsense from anybody. But by then, you know, a lot of the opportunities are gone, also. They asked me to be on a panel in Washington, you know. With strong language teaching. I always shied away from that.

INT: Again for thinking that maybe you wouldn't be able to...

RUTH: Maybe because of my episode in my thirties, I felt that the tension would be too much. Maybe I'll break down again. I do feel that my nervous system is in a very delicate balance. It doesn't take much to tip it one way or the other.

INT: You still feel that way, Ruth? At times?

RUTH: Yeah. Not as much, but yes. I could go either way. I could go hysterical, or I could remain calm.

INT: How do you cope with that, then? How do you find your balance?

RUTH: Well, that's it, I shy away from anything too controversial, or too demanding.

INT: For fear that that may happen.

RUTH: I think so. When I look back. I didn't know, maybe, at the time. Why did I always find an excuse? I avoided obstacles as much as possible.

INT: Was the book then, something that you really pushed yourself? Did that have the same kind of challenge for you?

RUTH: Well, the fact that I couldn't face it alone, an unusual collaboration, but I just couldn't do it alone. Whether it's because, probably part of it is that I felt my writing isn't good enough. And that's probably true, on an absolute scale. I cannot write like this young woman.

INT: Ruth, what memories are the strongest for you?

RUTH: From the war?

INT: Mm-hm.

RUTH: They're the chapters I started with. In order of strength? Probably being taken to a convent by a strange lady, with her two children, at age just past five, and being left alone on the street. And this lady comes out in black, and being left alone on the street.

INT: That must have been incredibly scary for a five year old.

RUTH: We started with that chapter.

INT: Yes, I did get into some of it, yeah. Are you aware of feeling any guilt?

RUTH: Well, you have to understand that I was raised in a culture that doesn't have much guilt. The French are more homogeneous, guilt is a big Jewish trait.

INT: You're kidding. (laughing)

RUTH: And I'm sure I have my amount of guilt. But the French, in general, do not feel guilty about things. If anything, they have a superiority complex. And that's why they are the way they are. Whatever they do is the best. And in many things, they are. Not always, and they overdo it. So in the educational system, you're brought up not to feel guilty about anything. If you do something, or say something, bear the consequences and move on.

INT: I imagine, though, you were very young during the war, anything from that period that there's guilt, or again, you were a child and...

RUTH: My parents made me feel guilty, when I didn't eat, when they went to all this trouble. But I'm wondering if other Jewish families have done that to their children. All those people starving in China, you're not eating your meal. Don't be wasteful. And I'm not a wasteful person.

INT: Because of the messages you got, don't waste.

RUTH: I don't know if that answered your question quite.

INT: Any shame or anything?

RUTH: For a long time, yes. I was not ashamed to be Jewish, I just didn't admit to it. So I guess deep down you are ashamed when you do that. But no, it's more a survival mechanism.

INT: But that was more when you couldn't say you were Jewish.

RUTH: Right.

INT: But once you could say you were Jewish, were you ashamed of that? Was there any shame in that? Once you were able to finally know that nothing would happen to you?

RUTH: I knew that...yeah. For some reason I did associate being Jewish with something slightly inferior. As I grew up. I found out later that was ludicrous.

INT: But there were a lot of messages around about that, that's for sure. So it took a while to feel comfortable with being Jewish, and knowing it was okay, and you were okay because you were.

RUTH: Yes. Of course, if you wanted to achieve, you had to hide that.

INT: Have you made sense out of life, the predictableness, the randomness. Like you said, your life was far from predictable when you were a child.

RUTH: No, if anything, that it's chaotic. I was very influenced by Camus, especially the Myth of Sisyphus. Sisyphus pushes a rock up the hill, and then it comes tumbling down the hill, and he's condemned for life to do that. Once the rock comes down, he has to push it up again, and on and on and on unto eternity. And that's what Camus calls the absurdity of life. And I've sort of espoused that view. That there is no order. It's very chaotic. And I'm on a very high level there. Maybe I'm not answering your question on a personal level.

INT: I think you are answering.

RUTH: But you still should have an orderly life. You should give order and structure to children. I feel very, very strongly about that. And there's a fine line. There is a limit to what you can or cannot do. And you have to instill that in children. In a loving way. You're always there, and you tell them, no you can't stay up, no you can't watch television every day. There are many no's in life. I had very few no-no's, but the one's I had I stuck to.

INT: So it was important to be structured and have predictability as far as the children.

RUTH: You can't be a marshmallow. Because if you let someone punch you, they'll punch you and punch you.

INT: You'll give an inch, and they'll want a mile.

RUTH: That's the nature of children.

INT: But for you, your own philosophy, that is that things are not as predictable, you kind of have to see the world as being that and go with it? Is that what you're saying?

RUTH: Right, right.

INT: As opposed to being devastated.

RUTH: But then still have some structure within your own life, naturally. And be responsible. I mean, there's a big difference.

INT: I think I understand what you're saying. How would you summarize the impact of the Holocaust on your life?

RUTH: Again, to be satisfied with small things in life. Having someone who cares for you, loves you, and is your sunshine. And to enjoy nature, and visiting beautiful places. Not being driven to become the best, the brightest and the richest.

INT: The inner, the relationship and the love. How would you describe yourself: as hopeful, or pessimistic?

RUTH: I guess I would have to describe myself as pessimistic. I always see the half empty glass. As a student I was always fascinated by every pessimistic view of life of the philosophers like Schopenhauer. It just fascinated me, and I couldn't read enough about that. And that's probably a result of my past experience. And as well as living today, because tomorrow may be total chaos and total disaster.

INT: But when you're faced with something, or when you're thinking of something, your tendency is to see, what could go wrong, or what's the negative of this.

RUTH: I think so. I try not to dwell on it. I've gotten better over the years.

INT: Do you get any flashbacks or nightmares about the war?

RUTH: Yes, I do.

INT: Still, at this point in time.

RUTH: Mm-hm.

INT: Can you describe any of that, or any of those?

RUTH: Well, always running away, begging for food, being in small, dark confined places. But not on a daily basis. Once in a while. When I have a nightmare.

INT: When you have nightmares they tend to be of that nature?

RUTH: Yeah.

INT: Have they gotten less over the years, for you?

RUTH: Probably. I go through stages like everything else.

INT: Do you find that when you're under more stress, when things are more in turmoil in your own life that you tend to get more nightmares?

RUTH: Probably, sometimes. Also loud noises scare me. But that's because we also had air raids. So that part I never describe in the book. After D Day they were bombing all around us, and we went to shelters.

INT: So even now to this day, loud noises kind of take you back?

RUTH: That and thunderstorms.

INT: Your heart starts palpitating right away?

RUTH: A lot of people are scared of loud noises.

INT: Do you generally feel safe or frightened for yourself?

RUTH: I'm very ambiguous about that. The fact that I'm self-sufficient would make you think that I feel safe. Most of the time I'm more frightened than safe.

INT: Do you know what that fear's about?

RUTH: Why I'm fearful?

INT: Or what you're afraid of?

RUTH: Well, I'm only afraid when there's a real reason for it. When I'm alone in the house at night, and hear noises.

INT: Do you get frightened for your spouse or for your children, and about their safety?

RUTH: Oh, yes. And my grandchildren. I'm a typical Jewish mother.

INT: Protective, and worry, worry, worry. Even now that they're adults.

RUTH: Now they've had health problems, off and on. Serious ones.

INT: Your children have, or your spouse?

RUTH: My daughter and my son-in-law. It's a fact. It's not something I fabricate.

INT: But it's hard not to worry about the grandchildren. Are they okay?

RUTH: Yeah.

INT: What have you thought when things have gone wrong in your life?

RUTH: Blame, or...?

INT: Just a general question.

RUTH: That's too general a question. (laughs) It depends what goes on. Well, (I think) I'm not surprised, everything happens to me.

INT: Yes. That's what I was wondering. If it's those kinds of "The everything's" statements.

RUTH: But you know, as I get older and I see how lucky I've been, it all depends on what stage of my life that these things happen. Well, I guess given the law of averages. Maybe it was my turn to have bad experience. Which is the way I think now.

INT: At one time it felt like it was a lot. Everything was happening at one time.

RUTH: That it happened to me.

INT: But you've learned now to look back and average it out, huh?

RUTH: Yes.

INT: How about when things go well in your life?

RUTH: Well, when things go well, I'm ecstatic; I'm like a little child. I tend to be very childish.

INT: You really enjoy that.

RUTH: I can run and jump. Yes. I act, I scream out loud. I'm not reserved when something exciting happens, I really burst out.

INT: Great. Some people are very cautious when things are going well. This can't be true. But you're not like that.

RUTH: I get very excited.

INT: You go with it, right? Good. So it sounds like...

RUTH: I'll get a bottle of champagne.

INT: To celebrate. So the next question is, are you capable of joy and happiness, pleasure?

RUTH: Absolutely.

INT: How about relaxation.

RUTH: Yeah, I feel I can relax.

INT: And are you a worrier? I think you've answered that.

RUTH: Yes. I am a worrier.

INT: Are you prone to feelings of depression, Ruth?

RUTH: Well, I guess, yes, probably. Like I said, it's always a delicate balance.

INT: And that was kind of a state of depression and anxiety for you? Or more of depression?

RUTH: Probably both. But it's certainly not a physical condition.

INT: And you're again, not sure whether that had to do with your war experiences or not, or whether it was just...

RUTH: No. And I can cry as hard as I can laugh.

INT: Does it help when you cry?

RUTH: I think it helps when you cry. I can be hysterical either way. (laughs)

INT: To those extremes, as opposed to that cautious...Were there any secrets in your life, or any secrets you'd like to share with us, or anyone that you found out, maybe from your family that you later found out and were surprised? Anything around secrets, for you personally, or your extended family, or during the wartime.

RUTH: Well, if you would consider that a secret, when I went back to Germany, my parents had never told me, but the village my father came from was practically entirely made up of his family. And the cemetery had my maiden name, on 90 percent of the tombstones. So if that was a secret, I don't know. We were surprised to find that. They had lived there since the sixteenth century. And it sort of developed as one big family.

INT: Anything about your parents that you later learned about, or their experiences during the war?

RUTH: Yes, there was one thing. That's a very traumatic thing. I only found out two years ago. Apparently the mayor in my mother's town in Germany, had sent out regular letters, inviting people to come back and have a little reception for the Jews, who had

lived there before the war. And then one day somebody had apparently copied all the names on the tombstones in the cemetery. So I leafed through the book. Because my mother had lost her mother when she was nine, so actually her mother as I knew her, because she was a survivor, was a stepmother. And so she had a tomb in the cemetery. And next to that stone was a little stone, it was obviously a child, and it said Baby Kapp. (This is my mother's town, now. Where I told you before was my father's town.) This is my mother, where there were many, many more Jewish families, and a variety of names. And it said, Infant. And so I asked my mother. Did you have a baby? And I asked her point blank. She started to cry. And she said yes. She did lose the baby. She had carried a baby full term. And she had labor pains on the day that Hitler came to power. And her doctor was Jewish. And the doctors were told not to show up in the hospital on that day because something might happen to them. So she was delivered by nurses, and it was a breech birth. And it was a perfectly healthy baby. But because there wasn't a doctor around the nurses could not deliver the baby, the baby smothered.

INT: Oh, gosh.

RUTH: And I had never known that. Until two years ago. This was another Holocaust-related tragedy. She told me, I have totally forgotten, I'm not sure. And if she wasn't around I would never have known. I would have been very puzzled. Why would it be next to her mother's tombstone? And when I was in the cemetery, I would have looked, but I would have probably missed it.

INT: How did you feel about that upon hearing it?

RUTH: I have such rage inside when I hear something like that. Unbelievable.

INT: Did you tell your children this story?

RUTH: Yeah.

INT: Yeah?

RUTH: I had it incorporated in the manuscript in my mother's voice, but that was eliminated in the final version, so they have it in the manuscript.

INT: Any false information that you've come across through the years that you were told about the Holocaust, or about you, of course, you had to piece a lot of things together, I should say.

RUTH: Before that, probably the numbers really shocked me. You know, the new numbers started to come out.

INT: Of all the people that had been...

RUTH: It was overwhelming to me.

INT: Of how many people were...

RUTH: Just about everyone in my father's family perished.

INT: How did he deal with all of those losses? Did he ever talk about them?

RUTH: No.

INT: He never said a word?

RUTH: Oh, yeah, he did talk about before the war, and how they lived. He also had two sisters, and his mother, and, wonderful people, hard-working people. Yes, he did tell me a little bit about it. Not for long. When he talked about his sisters and mother, he just talked for a little while and then changed the subject. It was too sad.

INT: And once he started to get the feelings, he kind of shut down and changed the subject, huh?

RUTH: Exactly.

INT: Okay. We're just about done at this point. Are there any other things, Ruth, that you think would be real important to say about yourself, or your family, or the war experience?

RUTH: No, your questions were excellent.

INT: Good, well, I appreciate...

RUTH: I covered everything, I hope.

INT: Yeah, I think you did a great job. I appreciate your honesty in sharing this with you. Okay, I think that that's pretty much it.

(END OF INTERVIEW)