

Of nowhere. The house had no electric light. We had kerosene lights. And the water, the lady from the house had to carry it from the garden, and pump it up, and bring it into the house. So they took me in.

Was this essentially a farmhouse?

It was a farmhouse.

A farmhouse, OK.

But the gentleman of the house was a coal miner. A lot of these people that were helping us were coal miners. And I remember distinctly-- well, we got very little water. Very little water. A little carafe like this would give me enough water to wash myself for the week.

For the week?

Yes.

So really just dab yourself almost with a towel.

But it didn't make any difference. I felt safe in that house. One day, I don't know if we were not careful, whatever happens. All of a sudden, the German soldiers were in the house. They were in the house. They came in the house, and I didn't have a choice to run upstairs.

I ran into the next room, which was closed by glass doors. And behind the glass doors, there was a table, a round table with a long tablecloth to the floor. And all I did was go and sit in there.

Hiding under the table?

Hiding under the table. Well, I don't know how long-- just think she knew where I was. And she entertained them. She talked to them. She made them sandwiches and whatever.

Knowing you are there?

Knowing I'm there. Brave people, absolutely. A cough or a sneeze would have just-- would have been too much. They would have probably come in and said, what's in there? What's behind the door?

So after they left, you guess what happened. Said, it's getting too dangerous for us. You have to go away.

Well, we went again from house to house. You always happy if you have a place to go to. And they sent me to another house that was in front of the coal sled because they were all coal miners. Well, the Germans were still there, and they shot over our house towards the Americans that came across. They came with the infantry in their tanks.

And we hope-- I was so scared that I sat in a potato bin until, I guess, we were liberated. I was too scared to come out because I was afraid that the Germans would throw the Americans back, and then they knew that I was Jewish. So I didn't come out of that potato bin until the gentleman from the underground came and said, well, your parents are already back in Valkenburg. We are liberated, and you can go home.

Ruth, we're going to come back to that in just a few minutes, but let's talk a little bit more about that two-year period, approximately, where you were hidden in all those many homes that you went to from home to home and some of the things that you've said to me when we've talked before. You said, for example, that it was just imperative that you not get sick. Why was that so important that you couldn't get ill?

Well, you couldn't get ill because you couldn't get a doctor. How could you know that if you get a doctor that he

wouldn't go to the Germans and tell them right away that there is a Jewish person? I heard after the war that a friend of my brother's got an appendectomy in the house where he was, and they couldn't get a doctor, and he died.

He died right there. They buried him in the backyard. And then after the war, I guess they gave him a burial. So you had to be careful with your own health because there was just nobody else to help you.

And also, say a little bit about what it meant to the people that hid you to feed you. There were real challenges because of rationing, and it was important, if I remember right, that to ensure that they didn't bring attention to themselves when they went to market they had to be very careful. Will you say some about that?

Oh, yes. That was in the house-- this one house. They didn't have giant or other grocery stores. These were all little, little grocery stores. So when she went shopping, maybe on Fridays she went into this little town to do her shopping, she really could not buy more. Because they would say, how come all of a sudden you need more sugar, or you need more of this and that? And you don't know how careful the people had to be so the neighbors wouldn't-- these people wouldn't see anything.

And the same thing was hanging out the clothing. I don't know how often or how less we had our sheets changed because the neighbors see, do you wash more clothes? Do you wash more often? Every little step had to be watched.

So an alert observer, a storekeeper could notice just the slightest variation.

Just like this.

And that also meant, of course, that if they couldn't buy more food, then they had to spread their own food that much further.

Right. Absolutely.

And you had to eat whatever--

Well, we had a lot of potatoes.

A lot of potatoes.

That's OK.

And whatever they could get their hands on.

Anything.

Horse meat, I think you remember you telling me that.

Yes, anything. Anything will do.

I was struck, Ruth, by something you said to me one time, and you just mentioned that during that time, of course, there was really never anything purchased for you that would be personal in nature, a gift to recognize a birthday. That just wasn't part of life at all for you during that time.

I don't remember even celebrating a birthday or anything. Nothing. You were lucky that you lived from day to day.

Do you remember your own feelings during that time not knowing, as you said, not knowing your mom and dad were, do you remember how frightened you were, or did you reach a different place where you just basically getting to the next day? What was it like for you, I guess, from an emotional standpoint?

Well, you really lived from day to day. Because I had to be brave, and I couldn't be frightened. I had to think to get through one day to the next to survive.

As you said, you didn't know your mom and dad were. Did you know they were OK?

Yes because the gentleman from the underground said, your parents are OK. But I really didn't even ask him because why should I put the pressure on him?

Was it always the same man from the underground?

Yes, same man.

Same person--

Same person. He took care of us from A to Z. And then after the war, he disappeared.

You were describing, Ruth, that your liberation, there's fighting in your town, literally firing over the house that you're in. And you're hiding in the potato bin. Three days later, the man shows up again and convinces you you're liberated.

Oh, yeah.

So now you're free. I guess the Americans have occupied the town. I think this is the fall of 1944. What did you do then? You found out your parents were back in Valkenburg.

Yes. And there was a family that also came back who had been in hiding. His parents had been deported. And they asked us to come and stay with them, but we didn't have a chair to sit on, a bed to sleep in, or anything.

The Dutch government went and got us furniture because there were the Germans that had been in town and had left. So they gave us furniture for us to exist. And we stayed there. But then we were afraid we didn't hear from anybody, and my father would go and stand at the train station to see if there was anybody coming back. But none.

My brother didn't come back. My aunts didn't come back. None of his family came back. So it was just--

But your father would actually go to the train station and just stand to see if somebody came off the train like Carl?

Right. Nobody came back.

When did you learn about what happened to Carl? When I got in touch with the Red Cross. The Red Cross was telling me about my aunts, and the Red Cross was telling me about my brother.

Now, I asked him if they could tell me which camp he had been, and they could not tell me. They only told me that he died of typhoid. And that was it.

You've gotten the furniture. You said you were able to get some furniture, so you began to, I guess, try to put back together your life at that point. What did your father do at that point in order to try to basically be able to feed you and your mother?

I really don't remember. That I don't remember. But I didn't want to stay in-- I did not want to stay in Holland. That I knew.

But at that time, you had to have blood relatives, again, in America. So I had my sister here, and she sent, what's it called, an affidavit?

An affidavit, mm-hmm.

That I could come over.

With your parents?

No. I left my parents.

And you came over.

I came by myself.

When was that?

That was in 1948.

'48. Can you say a little bit about what your life was like between 1945 and 1948-- 1945 after the war ends and '48, you're still there for three years trying to get out.

Yes. It took a while because I had to be on a quota. And well, my parents, I don't know. One thing I regret, though, that I left my parents in Holland and did what I felt was right for me. Between the '45 and '48, I absolutely don't remember what happened.

Did your parents-- did they want to come to the United States?

No.

They were set on staying.

No, my mother never wanted to come to the United States.

Why? Do you have an insight?

I have no idea.

No idea?

No, but my father came over. Then my father came over, and first he stayed with my sister. And then he stayed with us. And then one day, he made up his mind that he didn't want to go back to my sister, that he wanted to stay with us. And he stayed with us for about 10 years before he died.

What was it like to come to the United States?

It was hard.

Was it?

Yes. I did speak English.

That was that education you described earlier, yes?

Yes, I did speak English. And then we were liberated by the Americans, so that helped. When I came to the United States, I first stayed with my sister for a couple of months to learn the American way, and then I went into Pittsburgh. And I needed a job, and I was going to be a seamstress.

I went in. Once, I didn't find a job. The second time, I found a job. And I lived with a friend of my sister's who lived-- she wanted me to live with her, but she-- I didn't have my own bedroom. She had twin beds in a bedroom, and that's what I did. I shared the bedroom with her, and I made very little money.

And I think I made \$28 a week. For that, I had to put away \$10 for rent and some for food. And if I didn't have enough money on a Sunday night, I ate M&Ms for dinner.

[LAUGHTER]

Ruth, you were able to come to the United States. Your sister was here. You've certainly told us about Carl and your aunts. What about the rest of your extended family? Did others from your family survive?

From my family?

Your extended family.

From my German family? No. Dad came from a family of 11. And one sister was able to go to Brazil, and two brothers went to-- they went to Belgium. And the rest of them were all killed. They were all killed by the Germans because they were elderly, they were Jewish, and they didn't have anywhere to go. So we lost everybody

And all the children that I grew up with. When I moved to Holland, they stayed in Germany. And the girls that I grew up with and their families, they were all killed. So I'm pretty much alone. Oh, yes.

Ruth, before we turn to our audience for them to ask you some questions, not so long ago, you went back to Holland with your children and Bernie, I believe.

No.

No, Bernie stayed put. That must have been a pretty profound experience to go there with your children.

Yes.

Will you tell us a little bit about that?

My children wanted to see where mother comes from. So first, we went to-- we landed in Dusseldorf and went to Germany. And from there, we went to Holland. I wanted to see the grave where my mother was, and I wanted to show them the house where my mother was born.

But we knocked on the door, and I didn't want anything. I just knocked on the door. I wanted to see-- show my children where the grandma was born. And he opened the door and said, I don't have any time for you.

And just shut it like that?

Shut the door. That was it. I was very sad. And from there, we went to-- went to Belgium to see my cousin Carola. And at the time, she was fine. But let me tell you, I just spoke to her, called her up. She survived by herself, and she is very despondent.

She's all by herself. She had never had any children. And I talked to her this weekend. It's very, very sad to talk to her.

I'm sorry to hear that.

Right.

Ruth, tell us about the rest of that trip.

Oh. From when we came home?

When you went back to Holland, and--

Yeah. We went to see my mother's grave. And what they do in Holland now, my mother has a gravestone that stands up. And on the back of the gravestones are all the names of the family that was killed. So the first one is my brother, and then her three sisters. She had another sister that died, and all the names are over there.

And it's all because you were born Jewish. If you were born into a different religion, you wouldn't have to put up with all this stuff.

Ruth, why don't we now, if you don't mind, let's turn to our audience. I'm sure they're going to have some questions to ask of you. And when you ask your question, bear with me because I'll repeat the question before Ruth answers. So we have a question, our brave person right off the bat. OK.

After you moved to the United States, did you see your mother again?

The question is, after you moved to the United States, did you see your mother again?

No. My mother died and was buried in Holland. No. Never did.

OK. We have a young lady back here, I believe.

Do you feel that your family was very fortunate to [INAUDIBLE]?

The question is, do you feel that your family, meaning you, and your mother, and father were very fortunate in surviving? Is that--

Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. If we wouldn't have gone into hiding, my dear, I wouldn't be sitting here. They killed every Jew that was there. Absolutely.

OK, young person in the red.

Was it hard for you to trust that underground man who was moving you house to house?

The question is, was it hard for you to trust that underground man who moved you from house to house?

Let me tell you, my dear, I had no other choice. He was the only straw that we had to depend on. If we wouldn't have-- if we wouldn't have had him, I wouldn't be sitting here today. There's a gentleman--

Good question. Oh, yes, sir.

Pertaining to the underground man, do you know who he was, and was he a member of an organization or a family friend?

No.

The question, is the underground man, do you know who was? Was he a family friend, or was he part of an organization?

I don't know. He was not a family friend, and I don't know if he belonged to an organization. Because the only way I saw him, and then after the war, he disappeared.

You did-- Ruth, say a little bit about that. When you say he disappeared, how did you know that he disappeared?

We tried to get in touch with him. Because we want-- my mother wanted to talk to him, thank him. But we were not able to get in touch with him.

And yet he made it all the way through.

He made it all the way through, yes.

That's most sad that you could not locate him.

I couldn't ask for anything finer.

Have you ever speculated as to what might have happened, or no?

No, no.

No, OK. Who else has got a question out there? Mrs. Glaser.

You had mentioned about the Germans coming, and it seemed like they would go randomly they would pick up some families and yet overlooked your family. Can you speculate why some families were taken before others?

The question is when the Germans started the deportations, it seemed to be random. They would get a family here, another one there. And why was it-- can you speculate as to why your family wasn't taken and deported?

No. They took people-- at the time, they took-- like, they came to our house and they didn't take us. But they took my next door neighbor. But they didn't take all the people-- all the Jewish people in the town. They did it in spurts, and I don't know why that was. I have no idea.

Got another one, OK.

Do you know why the Germans didn't take you the first time they came over?

The question is, the first time they came to your door, do you know why they didn't take you?

No.

No. Just good fortune?

Good fortune. That's all I can tell you. It's a good fortune that I'm sitting here. [LAUGHS] Absolutely.

Ruth, do you know what became of any of the families that hid you during that time?

I am in touch with the daughter of the house that didn't have electricity and light. She was an only child. She also left Holland. She lives near Toronto.

I speak with her all the time. She was a nurse, and she was a nurse in-- she's a retired nurse. She lives in Scarborough, which is near Toronto, and we talk on the phone. I ask her to come and visit. She has a big dog, and she wouldn't leave the dog with anybody.

[LAUGHTER]

So I guess you have to go there.

I said, Katie, leave the dog. Come and visit. I'll take you to the museum. She won't come.

Ruth, how did-- oh, I'll ask my question later. Young lady in the middle.

How did you stay in touch with the underground man?

Question is, how did you stay in touch with the underground man so that he knew to come and get you to take you to the next place?

I didn't stay in touch. It was the people that I was in hiding with who was in touch with the underground man.

So they knew.

Not me.

Right. So you really totally dependent on others to make those connections for you.

Absolutely.

Right here, sir. Can you share whether the experience made you more religious, or less religious, or whether it had any impact upon your convictions in that area?

The question is, did your experience-- what impact did it have on your religious beliefs? Did it make you more religious? Did it change them in any way?

No. I was raised religious. I am the same. I have the-- I need to belong to a synagogue, and we do belong to a synagogue. I give-- my children got a Jewish education, but I have the need to belong.

Got a question right here.

After the war, when you came out of hiding, was it hard to make the transition back to normal life?

The question is, when you came out of hiding when the war was over, was it hard to make a transition back to normal life?

No. I don't think so because you always get used to something better than what you just left.

The ability to go out in the sunshine, and--

[LAUGHS] Yes.

--and all of that. When did you meet Bernie?

Where, or--

When did you meet him?

In Pittsburgh.

In Pittsburgh, OK. Was a good find.

[LAUGHS] I was working in Pittsburgh as a seamstress, right? And yes, that's right. And you were working for Gulf Research.

And like I said, I need to belong. I need to belong to the YM and WHA, and I signed up to learn how to play bridge.



And he signed up to learn how to play bridge, and that's how we met.

A bridge to each other.

[LAUGHTER]

Ruth, how did you get in touch with the daughter of the family in the farmhouse that's in Toronto? How did you connect with her?

How did I-- how did I connect with Katie? I don't remember. How did she get-- well, she must have been in touch with us because her mother once came to visit. And she drove-- before she had the dog, before she came to visit with