

Good afternoon, and welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson, and I am the host of the museum's public program First Person. Thank you for joining us. We are in our ninth year of First Person. Our first person today is Mrs. Ruth Greifer, whom we shall meet shortly.

First Person is a series of weekly conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their first-hand accounts of their experience during the Holocaust. Each First Person guest presently serves as a volunteer here at the museum. With few exceptions, we will have a First Person program each Wednesday through August 27. We will also have First Person programs on Tuesdays in June and July.

The museum's website, at www.ushmm.org-- that's www.ushmm.org-- provides a list of the upcoming First Person guests. When you go to the website, just click on First Person.

This 2008 season of first person is made possible through the generosity of the Louis and Dora Smith Foundation, to whom we are grateful for again sponsoring First Person.

Ruth Greifer will share with us her First Person account of her experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 45 minutes. If time allows, we will have an opportunity for you to ask Ruth some questions.

Before you are introduced to her, I have a few announcements and requests of you. First, if possible, please stay seated with us throughout our one-hour program. That will minimize any disruptions for Ruth while she speaks.

Second, if we have our question and answer period, and you have a question, we ask that you make your question as brief as possible. I will repeat the question so everyone in the room, including Ruth, hears the question, and then she'll respond to it.

Like to ask any of you who may have a cell phone or pager that's not yet been turned off to do so now. And also would like to let those of you who may be holding passes for the permanent exhibition today, know that they are good for the entire afternoon. So you can stay with us and still go to the permanent exhibition.

In January, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum announced that it will be providing information to Holocaust survivors and their families from the International Tracing Service, or ITS, archive. Located in Germany, the archive was the largest closed Holocaust archive in the world, containing information on approximately 17.5 million victims of the-- of the Nazis, both Jews and non-Jews. 17.5 million people. The ITS material is being transferred in digital form to the museum in a series of installments, the first of which arrived in August 2007. More information on the ITS collection can be found on the museum's website, or by visiting the museum's Benjamin and Vladka Registry of Holocaust Survivors located in the Wexner Learning Center on the second floor.

The Holocaust was the state-sponsored systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945. Jews were the primary victims. 6 million were murdered. Gypsies, the handicapped, and Poles were also targeted for destruction or decimation for racial, ethnic, or national reasons. Millions more, including homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Soviet prisoners of war, and political dissidents also suffered grievous oppression and death under Nazi tyranny.

What you are about to hear from Ruth Greifer is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with Ruth's introduction. And we begin with this 1932 photograph of Ruth Elisabeth Dahl at age 10, along with her mother Sophia and her older siblings Edith and Carl.

This map shows Europe, and the arrow points to Germany. On this map of Germany, the arrow points to Geilenkirchen, Germany, where Ruth was born. Her father, Isidor, was a respected cattle dealer in the area. Note how close Geilenkirchen is to the border with the Netherlands.

In this photo, Adolf Hitler poses with members of his first cabinet in the chancellery on January 30, 1933. The townspeople of Geilenkirchen supported the Nazi regime, and no one helped their Jewish neighbors.

This map shows the Netherlands, and the arrow points to Valkenburg, where Ruth and her family moved in 1938. Her father was forced to close his business and sell their home at a considerable loss. Her father, Isidor, returned to cattle dealing in the Netherlands.

On May 10, 1940, Germany invaded the Netherlands. Here we see German troops parachuting into the Netherlands, which was quickly overrun and surrendered to Germany on May 14.

In the summer of 1942, the Nazis began rounding up Jews for deportation. Ruth and her parents went into hiding with the help of the Dutch resistance.

And we close our slide presentation with this photograph of Ruth at age 18 taken in 1940.

Ruth immigrated to the United States in 1948. She moved to Pittsburgh, where she found work as a seamstress. She would meet her future husband, Bernie, at a Jewish Y where she went to play bridge. They would be married in 1951.

Bernie would go on to a career as a research chemist. After earning his doctorate degree from the Carnegie Institute of Technology, now Carnegie Mellon, Ruth and Bernie moved to Alexandria, Virginia, just across the Potomac River from Washington, DC, in 1957. They continue to live in Alexandria today.

Ruth and Bernie have three daughters and five grandchildren. Their youngest daughter, Amy, lives in the Washington DC area, Helen lives in New Jersey, and their oldest daughter, Ruth, is a doctor of optometry in Florida. Ruth began volunteering here in the museum when it first opened. In addition to participating in First Person, she has spoken publicly many times about her Holocaust experience.

And I am very pleased to let that her husband Bernie is also with us today. Bernie, if you wouldn't mind a little wave, so people know you're here.

[APPLAUSE]

And with that, I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our first person, Mrs. Ruth Greifer.

[APPLAUSE]

[BACKGROUND NOISES] There we go. OK.

Ruth, thank you very much for joining us and for your willingness to be our "first person" today.

You're welcome.

Ruth, your journey to the Netherlands, and then later into hiding, began in 1938 when you were just 16 years of age.

Right.

You described to me, when we first met, that your early life in Germany was a wonderful life. Perhaps we could begin today with you telling us about what your early life was like, what it was like for your family and your community before the war began.

Well, my family was my mother and father and brother and sister. And before the war, everything was, before Hitler came to power, everything was fine. We were free to do everything. But once Hitler came to power, I remember I couldn't go to the movies anymore. I couldn't swim anymore. They didn't let us do anything. And so we felt already that we were different.

Ruth, even before that began, tell us a little bit about-- tell us about your parents, your hometown. What was it like when

it was a happier time.

OK. My parents, mother was Sophia and my father was Isidor. And he was a cattle dealer. But there were a lot of cattle dealers in our town. There were the Gottschalks and the Baums.

And we had a beautiful synagogue, where the women sat upstairs at that time and the men downstairs. And my father, I think he went to synagogue every morning.

But in Germany, the synagogues were all burned up later. Because I was thinking, in our synagogue there was a couple that lived there for nothing, to clean. They didn't have to pay. And to clean and to take care of the synagogue. And I was wondering, when the synagogue burned, everything was burnt that they owned also. I was thinking about that.

Ruth-- and we're going to come back and talk about that a little bit, Ruth. Your brother was 11 years older than you, I believe. And your sister was eight years. So you were the baby in the family.

I was the baby on the family.

What kinds of things did you do as a kid? You said you had a normal life.

I remember, when I went to bed, he put me on his back, piggy back, and took me upstairs. [LAUGHS]

And your father was a veteran of the German army from World War I, wasn't he.

World War I. Absolutely. Absolutely.

Tell us about your extended family. You had a good-sized family?

Oh, yes. My father came from a family of 11. And I had a lot of aunts. Four aunts, and the rest were all men. And of course, I remember them well, Uncle Otto, and all of them.

And they're all gone now. Most of them were taken away, because they lived in Germany. And whoever lived in Germany is gone.

Ruth, when you were a child, you attended Catholic school.

Oh, yes.

Why was that, and tell us what that was like for you.

I guess my dad could afford it, because public school was for nothing. And we went, my sister also, we all went to Catholic school.

Do you remember that?

Oh, yeah.

You do. OK.

Right.

You began to tell us, once Hitler came to power in 1933, things changed very dramatically.

Oh, yeah.

Tell us what some of those changes were.

When Hitler came to power, we couldn't go anywhere. And--

I think one of the things you told me is the swimming pools were no longer available to you.

No, no, no. Nothing.

Nothing.

Nothing.

And did you begin to experience bad treatment from other kids?

No, no, no, no, not that bad. No. They just wouldn't speak to me anymore. They ignored me completely.

And you began to, just because you were so restricted, your time was more and more at home.

Right. Right.

Ruth, in 1938, things would get even worse for you and your family and other Jews in Geilenkirchen. Tell us what led to your family's decision to go to the Netherlands, and what it was like for you to pick up the entire family and move to another country-- even though it was close.

Well, my mother was born in Maastricht. And--

That's in the Netherlands, right?

That's in the Netherlands. And, well, since my mother was born in Holland, they-- you just don't want to move to Holland. Because my mother was born in Holland, they let us move to Holland.

So if she hadn't been born there, it might not have been so easy to go there.

No, they wouldn't let us. But most of the people that stayed in Germany, like so many in our little town, there were-- I mean, they probably went to Auschwitz or wherever it was. And they just couldn't live.

But because of your mother's birth in Holland, you could go there.

That's right.

Your father, while you were still in Germany, your father lost his business.

Yes, in 1938.

And by lost, it was taken away from him.

Yeah. So we sold our house, and--

Tell us a little bit about the-- we mentioned in the slides that he had to sell it at a tremendous loss.

Loss, yeah.

Say a little bit about that.

The neighbor from across the street. Well, if you have to sell a house, and people take advantage of you. And so we had lived in a big, big house, and a very comfortable house. But when you have to sell it, you don't get half the price. But the neighbor from across the street bought our house.

A physician, and he offered you a very small price for it.

That's it.

Yeah. And before you moved, wasn't your house stoned one time?

Oh, yes, they did. What happened, my father had a plaque with his name on it. And one day, it was stoned. So that was time that we had to move to Holland.

That's when you decided to go.

Right.

So now your family is picking up. You've lost your home. You're now moving to the Netherlands. What happened once you got to the Netherlands? You had to start over.

We had to start over again.

What did your father do?

Well, my father, he was brave. He started all over. He had to go for new clients and for new people. So anyway-- but that's what it was.

Was he able to get much of a start.

Oh, yeah. Yeah. But then one day the Germans already took our neighbors away. And it was a family of a grandma, a son, and a couple. And it was so sad.

That was after you'd been in the Netherlands.

That's for a while, yeah.

Before we go to that period, you had told me that for you, you remembered that the move to Holland was-- Holland was really a tremendous adjustment for you.

Yeah. Well--

Can you say a little about that? Well, because I tell you, now, because I used to visit my grandparents in Holland, and my aunts. And so it wasn't such a big adjustment, anyway.

OK.

Yeah.

When you moved to Holland with your mother and father, your sister stayed behind.

Yeah, my sister stayed behind. And her husband was in Dachau, which is another concentration camp. But for her to come to America, they let her-- they let him out of Dachau, and because her husband had family in New York. And so that's why they let my brother-in-law out of Dachau to come to New York.

And your brother-in-law went to Dachau following Kristallnacht.

Oh, yes.

Tell us about Kristallnacht, or the Night of Broken Glass, and tell us, Ruth, what you can about what that meant for your family, what you recall of Kristallnacht.

Well, Kristallnacht, they burned all the synagogues in Germany. And that's what I was thinking of, because of the couple that lived in our synagogue. They lost everything also.

And Jewish businesses were vandalized.

Oh, everything, yeah.

And tell us what happened to your grandmother on Kristallnacht, which took place in November of 1938.

My grandmother lived in Solingen, in Germany. And they lived-- she lived with my Tante Jenny. Anyway, at that time, they came in that house. And they destroyed everything-- every chair, every crystal, everything in that house.

But then, when they saw my grandmother, they left her alone. They left her alone.

If I remember, what you told me that she was in her bedroom.

Oh, yes.

And so they destroyed everything in the house--

Except in her room.

--except my grandmother's bedroom. That's right.

Ruth, but when Kristallnacht occurred, and that happened to your grandmother, you were already in the Netherlands.

Yes.

Do you remember getting word about what had happened at that time.

Yes, we did. We did. We got word. But we already were in Holland.

Right. And your sister had stayed behind because she was married. And that's when your-- her husband, your brother-in-law, was sent to Dachau.

That's right.

OK. And what you're explaining to us, when he was released, that's when they decided to try and go to the United States.

That's right. So I had my sister in the United States.

And she got to the United States in 1939?

Right.

OK. What about your brother Carl? What became of Carl at that time?

My brother Carl, I had two maiden aunts in Holland. And he said, I'm going to go with them wherever they have to go. My Tante Irma and Matilda went to Auschwitz. And they, of course, didn't live very long. But my brother Carl went from concentration camp to concentration camp. And he, on the death march, he got typhoid and he died.

And Ruth, when the family, it was you and Carl, and your parents had gone to Netherlands. And then Carl, as you were just explaining, he left to go live with your aunts. And then, of course, would end up going with them to the camps.

Right.

So it was really, at that point then, it was you and your parents living in the Netherlands. And then, of course, in May 1940, Germany invaded the Netherlands. And you describe that day to me, may 10, 1940, as a remarkable day.

Right.

Tell us about that day. You were there. What happened?

I remember the Germans walking down the street. And so they-- I remember distinctly. And first, after a while, they came to get me. And I screamed so loud, and they wouldn't take me.

And they came to get my mother. And she screamed so loud, and they wouldn't take her. And they never came after my father. But we were so scared that--

Anyway, a lot of people disappeared. And so my-- somebody told my father, if you go to the post office, there is a Mr. Janson. And maybe he can help you. So my father went to the post office and said to Mr. Janson, maybe I can help you to go into hiding.

Ruth, if you don't mind--

Yeah.

--if you wouldn't mind, I'd like to ask you just a couple more questions about some events that occurred before that, if that's OK.

Yeah.

So now the Germans have come in. And your life in the Netherlands had been relatively normal for you. But that wasn't the case in Germany. So had you been hearing and learning about what had happened to your relatives that were still in Germany by the time the Germans came into the Netherlands?

All my relatives in Germany. My father came of a family of 11. They were all taken. And you know what happened the them.

So did you know that at that time in the Netherlands?

Yes.

You knew that.

Yes.

And once the Germans came in, just as you had experienced in Germany, now the Nazis are imposing all new restrictions on Jews in the Netherlands.

Oh, yeah, right.

Tell us about some of those.

OK. When I lived in the Netherlands, every Jew-- if I had to leave the door, I had to wear a Jewish star, to know that I was Jewish. And this is what it looks like. It says "Jood." That's in Dutch.

Well, who wants to be, when you're young, who wants to go out of the door and have to wear something like this? It's scary. And to relive it, it's so long ago. Why do you have to be different than everybody else? Why do you have to wear that when you go out of the door just to feel different? And that's when I was young, when I lived in Holland.

And Ruth, that is the very star that you had, isn't it?

That's the very star, yes. I kept it.

Your mother was very concerned that that not come off.

That's right.

Tell us what she did to make sure it didn't come off.

She put lining on it. And she put here, she put safety pins so that it wouldn't come off. My mother did that.

And besides being forced to wear the yellow star, you had a curfew imposed on you.

Oh, yes, absolutely.

Bicycles were taken away.

Right. Everything. The bicycles were taken away. Radios were taken away. Everything that we owned was taken away.

And it wasn't as though a bicycle was just a plaything--

But in Holland everybody has a bicycle.

It's a necessity.

And a necessity, because everybody has a bicycle. I used to ride from Valkenburg to Maastricht even on my bicycle.

To see your aunts?

Yeah, to see my aunts.

Radios were taken away.

Everything.

Everything.

So you didn't know what was going on.

So you would live under those circumstances for two years under the German occupation. And then, in the summer of 1942, the first German trains began deporting Jews to the death camps.

That's right.

And that's when your family, that's when your parents decided to go into hiding. And you began to tell us about that. So continue where you were a little while ago, telling us about how they went about deciding to go into hiding, and how they were able to make that possible.

Well, this Mr. Janson came to our house.

And he was the man you were referred to go too.

Right. He came to our house, and he said I have, for your daughter, I don't have any problem. But for an elderly couple, it's very difficult to find somebody who would keep them.

An elderly couple, he meant your parents.

My parents, right. So anyway, Mr. Janson came. And he said, I have a place to go. But all you can take with you is a suitcase. You leave everything behind.

And I went to the first house. And she said she was going to get company.

Before you go there, tell us about, actually, when Mr. Janson arranged for it, and what the family did to even begin the journey to go into hiding. You had to pack-- he told you to pack a one little small suitcase each.

One suitcase. That's all we could take. Leave everything behind.

He told you to take off your stars.

Yes. And I think I gave it to him, or somebody, who saved it for me.

Who saved it for you.

Yeah.

And then you had to get rid of all your papers.

Everything.

So you were-- so you're going out on the street very vulnerable.

Absolutely. So anyway, we met him. And all we could take was our suitcase. So anyway--

Was that late at night, or how did he arrange for you to leave?

Early in the morning.

Early in the morning.

Yeah. So we left everything behind. And we went to the first house, where the lady said she was going to get company, which is true. And then my parents left after one day, and never to be seen. But they survived. I never knew where they were, and they never knew where I was.

So you had that one night together in that first house.

That's all.

And then they disappeared, as far as you were concerned.

Yes. But they survived.

Anyway, I was in the first house, where they served rabbit. Well, I never eaten rabbit, so I didn't get anything. But the last time they served rabbit, I would eat the rabbit, because I was hungry.

Anyway, then-- and I couldn't stay there very long. I went to another house.

Do you know why you couldn't stay there very long?

Because they were scared.

The family was scared.

Yeah. Every time they would find a Jew in the house, they would kill everybody.

OK. So at some point this family became too scared.

Yes.

So you had to move.

I had to move. Then I went to another house. And I tell you how scary it was. At night, all the bombers came over to bomb Germany. [SIGHS] And they were scared that sometime a bomb would come and hit one of the houses. And then what was going to happen to me?

So I had to move many times. But finally, I did survive, and my parents also survived.

Ruth, tell us-- as you said, you moved a number of times.

Oh, gosh, yes.

Tell us about the house that you went to. I think it was a house of a physician, if I remember, somebody prominent. So you went there. Tell us about that.

They wanted a maid.

And you went. So you were supposedly a maid.

Yes. And the maid said to me, but you don't have maid's knees. And I said, what are maid's knees? She said, they are flat from crawling on the floor. And I said to the lady, I think I have to go again.

[LAUGHTER]

Yeah.

And so you weren't there very long.

I wasn't there very long. No. Then-- where else? Oh, I went many times.

Tell us about the house that you went to--

Without the electricity?

Yes, very rural, wasn't it?

I lived in a house very rural without electricity, which I thought was safe. They had an outhouse. And I thought it was very safe-- until one day the Germans came in. And she fed them. And then I had to leave again.

So being a Jew, let me tell you, was unbelievable. But finally I came home. And my parents were safe. But I never knew where they were. And I didn't know--

Ruth I'd like to talk a little bit more about particularly the rural house, but while you were in hiding. Tell us what-- you said there was an outhouse. It was very rural. But you also said that one of the fears, besides a bomb, things like that, was the fear of being exposed, and particularly in a little rural community, a little tiny village, how important it was that there be no attention brought to that house. What did that-- tell us what that meant to you and to that family?

I tell you, I didn't even have my own bed. I shared my bed with Katie, another woman that lived in the house. Have you ever shared a bed with somebody else? Yeah, I did that too.

I was really struck, Ruth, when you explained to me that for the-- and of course, in those days, in rural communities people bought their groceries mostly on a daily basis, just what you needed to get through to tomorrow. And so to go to the little shop where everybody knew them, they couldn't buy more food than they normally would have, right?

No, absolutely not. And another thing, that they used to hang out the sheets. And they always couldn't hang out more sheets than they usually do.

So everybody in the community around them would know there's, say, three people in the house, if all of a sudden there's four sheets hanging--

No, they couldn't do that.

No. Or buy extra eggs. That's a problem.

No. Mm-mm. No, nothing.

What was life like for you, hidden in that circumstance, in a house. I know you told me some things, like you were given literally a pitcher of water a week for bathing purposes.

That's true. That is true.

Again, partly to-- they were poor, but also not to draw any attention to themselves. But what did-- what did you do? Do you remember what you did on a daily basis living under those circumstances.

Well, sometimes I knitted. What I did, I ripped out what there was and knit it new. So--

You mean just to start over?

To start over. So I tell you, there was nothing.

Nothing.

Nothing. Nothing at all.

And this probably sounded like a silly question when I asked you this, but during that time, holidays came and went, birthdays--

Who knew about holidays? Who knew about birthdays? You just live from day to day. You didn't know what was going on around you. No. Holidays, birthdays, nothing at all.

One of the things that I think the audience will also find interesting is that one of your fears would actually be that a British or an American pilot might get shot down and parachute into the community. And what did that mean to you?

That would mean to me that if they would find me, that would be the end of me.

So the concern, of course, is that if they-- if the Germans knew somebody parachuted down, they'd come and search for them, which meant going house to house, and you might be discovered. So that was another fear that you had.

Well, not only fear for us, because the family that I would live with, if they find a Jew in the house, they would kill us right then and there. But luckily, they didn't find me.

You described one incident where, of course, the Germans at will, if they wanted to come in and do whatever they wanted to do, or take food, whatever, they came into one of the houses you were in one time. And you were caught in another room.

I was not. A sneeze and a cough would have caught me.

So tell us what happened in that particular time.

That particular time they tell me to go again.

No, no, I mean you were in another room, and the Germans came in.

They came-- that was in the kitchen. So, luckily, I was escaped to the other room. But a sneeze and a cough--

Would have given you away.

Would have given me away.

So the owner of the house was talking to the Germans. And I think you were hidden under the tablecloth.

That's right.

And as you said--

But then she said, that's it. You have to go again.

But then Mrs. Janson took care of me. She took me to different houses.

So Mr. Janson, he's the one who got you from-- each time it was this Mr. Janson.

Yes, he's the one that took care of me.

So he'd come make arrangements for you to go to the next place.

That's right.

And he also knew where your parents were.

Oh, yes. I never knew where they were.

But he wouldn't tell you.

Mm-mm.

Did they know where you were?

No.

No. So that way he kept you all very protected.

Right.

Tell us how-- oh, I remember something else I think the audience would also find very interesting. Not only could you not bring attention to yourself by virtue of extra purchases, or laundry, or being seen, but you couldn't afford to get sick.

No. A friend of my brother, I remember distinctly, had appendectomy. And he died. And they didn't know what to do with his body. And they buried him in their backyard.

So I guess later on-- I don't know what happened later on. But he, I guess, after everything was over, the people that buried him probably-- you knew what had happened to him.

And that was because they could not summon a doctor.

No, they couldn't summon a doctor, because for Jewish people it was impossible.

Ruth, you were still in hiding when the Americans finally entered the Netherlands.

Yes.

Tell us when you knew that you were liberated, and what that was like for you.

Oh, I was still in hiding, and-- when the Americans came in. I think I was in a potato bin or something like that. And the Americans knocked on the door. So I came out, and the Americans were there. So I was glad to see them.

I was liberated September 17, 1945, I think. That's when I was liberated.

Ruth, before they knocked on the door, there was a lot of fighting around you.

Yes.

And so I think one of the things that you had to worry about then was just your own safety.

That's right.

Because the Germans were shooting at the Americans, and they're shooting back.

Right. Absolutely. I remember distinctly the American tanks were coming in this way, and the Germans were fighting over this way. But we were glad that the Americans liberated us.

And as I recall, one time you told me that you were actually in the potato bin for several days, because you weren't convinced that it really was safe.

That's right. I was in the potato bin in the basement. I was scared to come out.

So when you finally knew it was OK to come out, and the Americans were there, what happened then? Do you remember?

Well, the Americans were there. I always liked to speak English, because I learned English in France in school. French was never my favorite, but English came very easy to me.

So when-- but--

So you were able to talk to the American soldiers?

Yes.

Were they surprised?

Yes, I'm sure. But then, Mr. Janson knew where my parents were. And they were safe.

And then we-- but when we came home, we didn't have any furniture. There was just nothing there. So the Dutch people went to the place where the German people left, and they gave us their furniture.

They would take it out of those emptied homes and give you some furniture.

Gave us-- yeah, right.

And now you're back together. And of course your sister has gone to the United States. And you don't know what's happened to Carl at this time.

No.

What did your-- what did your father do to start rebuilding a life?

Well, he started with cattle dealing again.

He did? OK.

Yes. He started with cattle dealing again. But then, my parents were in Holland, and they wanted me to get married in Holland. And I didn't want to. I said I'd rather go and leave my parents in Holland, and came to the United States.

Before we talk a little bit about coming to the United States, will you share with the audience what you told me about your father, right after the war ended, and you were liberated, going to the train station every day.

Oh, my father went to the train station to find and see who was coming home. He looked for my brother. He looked for-- my dad came from a family of 11, and they all lived in Germany. And he went to the station, train station, to see if any of them was coming back. But nobody from my father's side came back. They all died. And my brother Carl didn't come back either.

So my dad and I, and Mother, we were all alone.

And he would go to the train station every day hoping--

He did, yeah. Never. Nobody came back.

When did you learn what happened to Carl?

Somebody was with him, and told us that he died of typhoid on the death march. So that is my only brother, Carl, who died on the death march at that time.

Ruth, did any other family members survive?

No. No. None of them. My mother's three aunts and uncles, my father's brothers and sisters, nobody survived. Just my dad and my mother and I. And that was very sad.

So after that, my mother wanted me to stay in Holland and get married and have children. And I said, no. So I left my parents in Holland and came to the United States.

Then, after my mother died, my father met my husband. And he lived with us most of the time.

First he stayed with my sister. And then, when we bought the house, he said, I'm not going back. So my father is buried in the United States and my mother is buried in Holland.

When did your mother pass away, Ruth?

Oh, a long time ago.

Was it soon after the war?

I was already here.

You were already here.

Yeah.

Well, tell us tell us about coming to the United States. You came in 1948, I. Believe So you were still a young person. What was it like to come here, and where did you go?

First I lived with my sister in Kittanning, Pennsylvania. And then she said, you have to get a job. So.

[LAUGHTER]

So she said-- so I went into Pittsburgh once, and didn't get a job. At that time, I was a seamstress.

So I went in twice and I got a job as a seamstress in-- what was the name of the store? Well, in a ladies store. But I needed a place to stay.

So my sister said to me, I have to-- I know somebody. You can stay with her. And she had two beds.

But then, when I stayed with her-- and then when her son came home from college, I had to leave. And she wanted me to come back. I said, no, once I'm out. So I found another house. And I stayed with them until I got married.

I met my husband. I belonged to the Jewish Y, and I wanted to learn how to play bridge. And he signed up to play bridge. And first we dated. And then he said, I'm going to marry you.

And his mother said, why do you marry such a poor girl? [LAUGHTER] I was a poor girl at the time. But we were married for a long-- 55 years. And we had-- 55 years? He said no.

57, maybe. [LAUGHTER] 57.

57. And we have--

Who's counting?

We have two daughters-- three daughters. [LAUGHTER] Three daughters and five grandchildren.

Ruth, did your parents tell you much about where-- because you didn't know where they were hidden. You didn't even know that they were safe. And then you find out they'd been hidden the whole time like you were. Where were they?

I have no idea.

You have no idea.

I have no idea.

Did you, as a family did you talk about it much after the war.

No, no. You want to forget about all this stuff.

OK. Ruth, we have a little time to turn to our audience before we end our program. So let's ask if you have any questions. And if you do, and I see a couple of hands going up already, I'll repeat the question, and then Ruth will respond to it. So right there in the middle.

I have a question about when the Nazis came to Holland, and you said that you screamed, and your mother screamed and they didn't take you. Why didn't they take you? They're not scared of women screaming. I don't understand--

The question was, when you told us about the Germans coming to the door to take you, and you screamed, and they ended up not taking you, and she's saying, well, the Germans wouldn't be afraid of a screaming girl or screaming woman. Why didn't they take you?

I was just lucky. We were just lucky they didn't take us.

I remember when I first met Ruth, she was describing a number of these incidents. This was a few years ago. And ultimately, she said there were just miracles for me. Is that how you describe it? They were just miracles.

Absolutely.

Who can explain? Who can explain. We have a question over here. Yes, in the red.

Yes, I was just wondering, when you were in hiding, were you aware of what was happening at the concentration camps? Did anybody ever discuss what was going on?

No.

The question, so we all hear, is, when you were in hiding, were you aware of what was going on in the concentration and the death camps? Did people--

Didn't know of anything.

Didn't know anything.

No, nothing.

Did you--

Like, I said, I didn't know of birthdays, and didn't know of anything.

OK. We have a question over here.

We heard what happened to your brother, Carl, but what about your sister?

The question is, what happened to your sister?

My sister's the one that came to America.

Is she still alive or is she still around?

No, no. My sister died a long time ago.

And you would live with her for a little while.

I lived with her for a little while, yeah.

And she was, after Kristallnacht, after her husband got out of the concentration camp, that's when-- because wasn't one of the conditions of getting out is that he was expected to leave Germany.

That's right.

And so they came to the United States--

They let him--

and got out early. OK. Question, yeah?

I wanted to ask whether the people that kept you in hiding were Jewish or not. And do you know if they did it for free or did they get money?

The question is, for those who hid you, were they Jewish--

No, never.

And did they get paid to do that?

No. No. That was voluntary. No.

Jews were gone. The Jews all were gone. Yes.

What happened to Mr. Janson?

Question is, what happened to Mr. Janson.

That I don't know. He disappeared.

Will you tell us a little bit about Mr. Janson? He's a very heroic-sounding figure.

Yes. He took us from where we had to go.

What do you know about him? You told me he was a single man.

Yes.

And then right after the war he just disappeared.

Yes, never knew what happened to him, because he didn't-- I guess he didn't want any rewards or anything. He just disappeared. But he was-- I mean, what he did for us was unbelievable, because he took us from place to place.

And he worked at the post office.

He worked at the post office.

He worked at the post office. OK. Question with a hat there.

How did the Germans know people were Jewish? And with your Catholic background, could you have said you were Catholic?

The question is, how did people know you were Jewish? And you had gone to a Catholic school. Could you have said you were a Catholic?

In Germany. How did people know you were Jewish? I have no idea. I have no idea how people know.

Back in Germany, of course, one of the worries, even in your hometown of Geilenkirchen, others would have told--

Yeah.

--if nothing else.

In Geilenkirchen, everybody knew who was Jewish.

Right. And would have essentially said, they're right here.

Wait a minute. There's a woman.

A question here.

When you were there in Geilenkirchen, were you not able to leave? I mean, was there any forewarning of the Nazis taking over, and you know, hey, if you're a Jew, you'd better leave now.

No. No, there was no forewarning.

But you weren't allowed to leave the country.

No. We were allowed to leave--

Germany.

--Germany when we moved to Holland.

Because you had family there.

Yes. My mother was born in Holland.

And the war hadn't actually started yet when you moved, yeah. It would come that following year, however. Right here.

When you were told you could only take one suitcase, what did you take?

When you were told you could only take a small suitcase, what did you take? Do you remember?

No.

No? No.

[LAUGHTER]

No, I didn't remember. Absolutely not.

Wasn't much, though.

It wasn't much. How much can you put in a suitcase?

When you were in hiding, was it close to this post office man, or how did he keep in contact?

The question is, when you were in hiding, do if you were close to where the man from the post office, Mr. Janson was, and how did he keep track of you?

I have no idea.

No idea. No idea.

I have no idea.

[INAUDIBLE]

Who released your brother from Dachau?

Who released your brother-in-law from Dachau?

They left him out of Dachau because he was coming to America. My brother-in-law had the family in America. They let him go out of Dachau because he was coming to America.

When that happened, that was after Kristallnacht, in late November 1938, the war hadn't begun yet. Germany hadn't invaded Poland. And those Jewish men who came out of the concentration camps after Kristallnacht, many of them were released and told, as a condition of release, leave the country. Some were able to do that. Some were not. And your brother-in-law was one that was able to do it.

In, I think, kind of yellow.

Have you been back to Germany ever?

Have you been back to Germany?

I think once I took my three daughters and went to Germany. And we went to Holland and to Belgium, because my cousin Carola lived in Belgium. I've been back once.

I imagine a question some of you might have is--

There's another lady.

[LAUGHTER]

[INAUDIBLE] Before I turn to her, were you ever able to have contact with anybody who hid you afterwards?

Yes. There was a Katie who--

You shared a bed with her.

I shared the bed with her. Yes. Katie became a nurse. And she moved to Canada. And we always kept in touch with her. I used to call her, and I used to call her. And then one time she didn't answer the call anymore. And I know I got a letter from somebody that she is in a nursing home. But yes, I kept in touch with Katie for a long time.

And she was the daughter of-- she was the daughter of one of the people that we were in hiding with.

OK, now, you, and then in the blue, and then in the lighter blue, back there, after you. OK.

After the war started, how did the Americans were safe?

After the war, how did you know the Americans-- you mean, that they were the good guys, basically? How did you know they were the good guys, the Americans?

I was liberated in September 17, 1948.

'44.

'44? I thought '48. And how would I know they're the good guys? I have no idea.

But the Germans had left. That was probably a good sign. OK. Right.

[LAUGHTER]

And ma'am, I think that'll be our last question. OK.

You were so young when you went into hiding. And I'm thinking of my own young children. And I guess I'm trying to figure out mentally, how did you do it? You say you didn't do anything while you were in hiding. How do you did a potato barrel for three days and mentally do that?

That was the potato bin. That was the end. What did I do all day?

Yeah.

I really don't remember, because I know I knitted once. But for that, I have to unravel the knit and start all over again.

I never knew what day it was. I never knew if there was a holiday. I didn't remember my birthday because nobody cared.

One last question. There we go.

With the genocides that are now occurring in Darfur, what can we do?

The question is, with genocides occurring in other places like Darfur, what can we do?

I have no idea. I have no idea. Do you?

Not much of one other, than I think you would agree to try to always remember that it can happen at any time, and this wasn't just something that happened 60 years ago, and that we have to always remember what happened then and try to apply what we know today. And you might-- if you have something more to say about that in a little bit, I'm sure people would love to hear it.

But why don't I bring us to a close, and then we're going to turn back to Ruth in just a minute. First I want to thank all of you for being here. Secondly, of course, to Thank Ruth for being our "first person."

I'd like to remind you that we do First Person every Wednesday from March through the end of August. We will also have some special programs in June, so we'll be doing First Person on Tuesdays as well. We'll have another First Person program next Wednesday, which is April 9, when our first person will be Mr. Herman Taube, who is from Poland.

Mr. Taube spent the war years on a remarkable journey that took him from Poland to Siberia to Uzbekistan, then into combat as a medic, and then helping other Holocaust survivors and other refugees. I might also mention that Mr. Taube is a noted poet. So we welcome you to come back for First Person next Wednesday or any time you can.

And with that, I'd like to follow our tradition here at First Person, which is our "first person" has the last word. And so with that, I'd like to turn it back to Ruth to close our program with any thoughts that she'd like to share with you. And I would like to also mention that Ruth, when we're done, is going to come down over by the podium. So if you want to come up and asked her any questions or just say hi to her, please feel free to do that. She'll stay behind.

The only thing is I want to say, remember the 6 million Jews that died because they were Jews. And that's all I can say.

I know that many of those were my father's family, because he was one of 11. And of course, my mother's family, she had three sisters, and they all died. And that's all I can tell you. I'm glad that you and I are still alive, and hopefully for many more years.

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you. Thank you very, very much.

[BACKGROUND CHATTER]

I did?

Oh, wonderful. Absolutely. Absolutely wonderful.