

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 eighth season of First Person. Our first person today is Mrs. Ruth Greifer, whom you shall meet shortly.

First Person is a series of weekly conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their firsthand accounts of their experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor. Each First Person guest presently serves as a volunteer here at the museum. With the exception of August 1, we will have a First Person program each Wednesday through the end of August. The museum's website, at www.ushmm.org, provides a list of the upcoming First Person guests. You can access that by going to the Public Programs portion of the website.

This 2007 season of First Person is made possible through the generosity of the Louis and Doris 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 40 minutes. We will follow that with an opportunity for you to ask Ruth some questions.

Before you are introduced to Ruth, I have several requests of you. We ask first that, if possible, stay seated throughout the one-hour program. That will minimize any disruptions for Ruth as she speaks. Second, during our question and answer period, if you have a question-- and we sure hope you will-- please, make your question as brief as possible. I will repeat the question so all in the room, including Ruth, hear the question. And then she'll respond to it.

I'd also like to ask any of you who may have a pager or cell phone that's not yet been turned off to please do so now. I'd also like to let anyone who has a pass for the permanent exhibition today know they are good for the balance of the afternoon. So you can stay with us until 2 o'clock and then still be able to go to the permanent exhibition.

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-- six 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. By 1938, Ruth's family concluded that life under the Nazis would only get worse so they went to the Netherlands. Germany's occupation of the Netherlands forced her family to separate and go into hiding with the help of the underground. That began a frightening clandestine existence for Ruth, who was not yet 20 years of age.

We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with the introduction of Ruth. We begin with this 1932 photograph of Ruth Elisabeth Dahl at age 10 with her mother, Sophia, and her older siblings, Edith and Carl. Our 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 the upper left-hand corner.

In this photo, Adolf Hitler poses with members of his first cabinet in the chancellery on January 31, 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, which is near Maastricht, where Ruth's mother was born. Ruth and her family moved to Valkenburg in 1938. Her father was forced to close his business and sell their home at a considerable financial 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.

We close our slide presentation with this photograph of Ruth at age 18 taken in 1940. Ruth and her husband, Bernie, live in Alexandria, Virginia just across the Potomac River from Washington, DC. They have three daughters and five

grandchildren.

Ruth has been a volunteer here at the museum since it opened 11 years ago. You will find Ruth at the donor desk on Mondays. I'm pleased to let you also know that her husband, Bernie, is with us today as well-- Bernie, if you wouldn't mind raising your hand or standing up. And with that, I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our first person, Mrs. Ruth Greifer.

[APPLAUSE]

Yeah, I'm doing fine.

Good. Yeah.

OK.

Is she all set up?

Yeah. Oh, there's a lot of people here.

Yeah, around there, right there.

Welcome, Ruth, and thank you so much for your willingness to be our first person today.

Thank you. I'm glad to tell the people about my life.

Well, Ruth, let's get started then. Your journey, Ruth, to the Netherlands and then later into hiding began in 1938 when you were just 16 years of age. You described to me that your early life in Germany was wonderful.

Oh, yes, it was.

So perhaps we could begin today with you telling us about that wonderful part of your life, those years before the war began.

I was born in Germany in Geilenkirchen, which is a small town. But a lot of Jews lived there. And I had girlfriends. And it was just wonderful. My first experience-- I went to Catholic school, the Ursuline Academy. And then when-- but when we left for Holland, I had to quit very early. In the meantime, life was good. But when Hitler came, I couldn't even go to the movies or go swimming because Jews weren't allowed. And life was absolutely dreadful.

Ruth, before you tell us more about that, just a few questions for you, if you don't mind. Your father was in the cattle business. He was a veteran of the First World War, wasn't he?

Oh, yes. Yes.

And had served for the German Army--

Oh, absolutely.

--so a very loyal German up until that point.

Yes, he was.

Tell us a little bit about your siblings. You had a brother and a sister. Tell us about them.

My sister, Edith, she was a couple-- I was the youngest in the family. I think I was 11 years younger than my brother

and eight years younger than my sister. But they all went to school in Geilenkirchen. But in 1938, when Hitler came, things weren't so bad in the beginning.

But then in 1938, that's when they took my dad's business away. And we could move to Holland because my mother was born in Holland. And they let us in. Not everybody could go where they wanted to go. Anyway, we moved to Holland. But I know the other people that still lived in Germany, they were all transported and ended up in concentration camps.

Well, when we moved to Holland and my father was in Valkenburg, was a cattle dealer. And he started his business again. But in 1940, when Hitler-- I can see the soldiers moving, coming down the street. And the sky was full of airplanes. That's when all the trouble began.

Ruth, before you go on about what it was like once the Germans attacked the Netherlands, let's spend just a couple more minutes, if you don't mind, talking about that time before then. Your father, your family had to sell their family home. And it was at a tremendous loss. And why was that?

Because we couldn't take our time. Because I tell you, we want-- it's the sooner we sold the house, the sooner we could move to Holland. And the doctor from across the street bought it. But I've been back. The house is still there. And we're going to hear more about that, I hope, a little bit later. And your father, of course-- and before you left Germany, he lost his business. And that, of course, was part of the decision to go to the Netherlands. And tell us-- in 1938, if I remember correctly, you had an incident in which your house was stoned.

Oh, yes.

Tell us about that.

That's right. That's the first-- the house was stoned. And that's-- it was time. That's when we moved to Holland.

So you knew the troubles were really beginning in earnest for you at that point.

Oh, yes. Oh, yeah.

Was it easy to just pick up and move to Holland?

No.

How did you make that happen?

Well, we had so many furniture that I don't think we could fit it all in. But because my mother was born there--

Oh, so your mother was Dutch.

Yeah.

OK.

Yeah, absolutely. So we moved to Holland. And my dad did the same business. He was a cattle dealer.

I think you had said to me that even though your father was able to start up his business again, that for you, the adjustment wasn't an easy one to go from your German home to your Dutch home.

No, because I was used to going to my grandparents in Holland. And I had two aunts. But my brother didn't want to stay with us. He said, I'll go and live with your aunts in Maastricht.

What about your sister?

Oh, my sister still lived in Germany.

So she stayed behind.

Yeah-- no-- yes, she stayed behind. But he had family in America--

Her husband?

--her husband. So they let him out of Dachau to come to the America. So my sister and brother-in-law was here in America.

November 9 and 10, 1938 is the night that's known as Kristallnacht, or the Night of Broken Glass, in which Jews were attacked and their businesses all over Germany and Austria. And many Jewish men were rounded up and sent to Dachau. Is that what happened to your sister's husband?

No, he already was in Dachau when she lived in Germany.

Why was he sent to Dachau?

I have no idea.

Really? But they let him out of prison?

They let him out of Dachau just to come to America.

Just to get out of the country.

So my sister was the first one that came to America. And she came to a small town, Kittanning, Pennsylvania-- very small town. Kristallnacht had a profound effect on your family.

Oh, yes.

Tell us a little bit about that.

Well, I know that our synagogue in Geilenkirchen was burned at the same time. But we already lived in Holland. I didn't see it. But I know about it.

And your grandmother, where was she?

My grandmother? Well, she still lived in Germany. And I had a lot-- my dad came from a family of 11. And he was the first one that moved to Holland. Then he had two brothers that moved to Belgium. But the rest was all taken away and never to be heard from. So they probably were all killed.

On the night of Kristallnacht, your mother, your grandmother, was-- suffered, was vandalized, wasn't she?

Right.

Tell us about that.

Oh, but my grandmother lived in a house with her daughter. And when they came in, they destroyed all the furniture. They destroyed all the glassware and everything. But when they came to my grandma's room, that's the only thing they left alone.

Her bedroom. They left--

Her bedroom.

--they destroyed everything else in the house.

Everything else in the house-- no chairs to sit on, no glasses to drink on. Everything was gone, except her room. But she still lived in Solingen, in Germany.

So she continued to live there?

No. No, not for very long. She already was in her 90s. Well, anyway-- but in the meantime, we moved to Holland. And 1940, the Germans walked in. I can see it. They came down the street. And before you knew it, they took people away. First, they picked up our neighbors. And they took them away. Then they came for me. And they wanted to take me. And I screamed and cried so much, they wouldn't take me. Then they came for my mother. She did the same thing. And they didn't take her. But they never came for my father.

So in the meantime, my dad found some-- people had disappeared. And he talked to this man. And he said, if you go to the post office, there's a very tall man. And he said-- and you tell him, Mr. Jansen, and he knows what you want. In the meantime, they had moved us out of our house into a place with several Jewish families. So if they take everyone away, they had all of us there.

Ruth, if you don't mind--

No.

--this is 1942 you're talking about. The Germans invaded and conquered the Netherlands in 1940, May. So you would live for two years under the occupation of the Germans even before the deportations began.

Right, absolutely.

Tell us about that period of time. For two years, you had to live under their rule.

Well, it wasn't easy. I tell you boys, general people, they-- first, they took our bicycles away. See, in Holland, everybody has a bicycle. And wherever you go, you go with a bicycle.

Why would they take your bicycles?

So that we couldn't move around.

So to keep you're stationary.

Right. Then they took our radios away because they didn't want us to know what was going on in the world. Then by the time I was young, when I had to go out on the street, I had to wear this, this Jewish star, I had to wear. Because this way, they could see that I was Jewish.

Ruth, if you don't mind, tell us what it says on that star.

Oh, it says Jood in Dutch, means Jew in English.

So that's the Dutch word for Jew.

Yeah, right. I had to wear this star any time I had to leave the house so they knew who I was.

For the audience, the star that Ruth has on is the actual star that she wore. And a little bit later, we'll hear about how she was able to actually keep that all these years. Your mother was very concerned, from what you told me, that that might come off, which would have dire consequences. What would happen if you didn't have it on? And what did your mother do to make sure that you did not lose it?

Well, when-- I always had it on. But I tell you one thing, it's another-- when I left to go into hiding, I gave it to a friend, who kept it for me until I came back home.

So hung on to that for you.

Hung on to this.

If I remember right, your mother's worry about it somehow getting lost-- she sewed each-- attached each point on the star to your clothing.

Right, absolutely.

Every point.

Yeah. This is all what my mother did, with pins and everything. So anyway.

You also, besides having to wear the yellow star, losing possessions like bicycles and--

Everything.

--radios, then they made a curfew. So you could only go outside at certain hours?

That's right, while it was daylight. Never go out at night.

And what about earning a livelihood? Was your-- what happened to your father's business during that time until the deportations began? How did you get along? How did you eat?

I don't know. I absolutely don't know. But we had to go into hiding. And so this gentleman came and said, I can find a place for you. But for elderly people, it's very hard to find a place to go into hiding.

And this man was the-- somebody who directed your father to go see this man at the post office.

Yeah, Mr. Jansen.

Mr. Jansen at the post office, OK.

Absolutely. So anyway, he said, the only thing you can take with you is one suitcase. And I meet you on top of the hill. But that was without a star. If they would have found us, they would have killed us right away. But finally, we made it up on the hill. And there he was with his car and took us to another house.

All three of you?

All three of us.

OK, your mother, your father, and you.

Right.

OK.

Well, the woman's told her neighbors that she was going to have a lot of company and because there were three of us. But I was the one that stayed there. And my parents went somewhere else. Where?

Why did they leave you.

Because they wouldn't keep three people.

Ah, it's too many to hide. So OK.

Too many to hide. So I stayed there. And my parents left. And I never saw them again till the war was over.

And that would be another--

They didn't know where I was. I didn't know where they were.

And that would be an almost another three years, wouldn't it?

Yes. So I didn't stay very long in this house because to find a Jew and-- it's dangerous just to have a Jew in the house. So I stayed there for a while. And people--

Ruth, if you don't mind, it was dangerous because it was-- the Germans would have probably--

Killed all of us.

Including the family that hid you.

Everybody. Everybody. And it has happened. But then the family that I lived said, it's too dangerous to have you here.

They got scared.

They got scared. So I moved to another house.

And how did you-- how would you-- tell us how you would move.

Well, at night.

The same man from the post office?

That same man that-- he had a car. And they took us. Then I moved there. So I came to another house. The husband was a doctor. And they needed a maid. Well, I've never been a maid.

But the idea was that you were the maid?

Yes, I was supposed to be the maid. But there was another maid there. And the maid looked at me. And she said, 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. So I went to the lady of the house. And I said, this is too dangerous for me. I have to leave again.

Because you could have been given away, then, because of that.

That's right. That's right. So I guess she called Mr. Jansen. And then I went to another house. But I forgot to tell you, in the first house, they served rabbit. And I never eaten rabbit. And I wouldn't eat it. So I have to tell you, I was hungry. So when the rabbit came on the table the next time, let me tell you, I ate the rabbit. So I had eaten horse meat already. Oh,

yes. Look, when there is a need, then that's what you have to do. So where am I now?

So you realized that you can't stay at the doctor's house because this other maid has pointed out that you don't have maid's knees.

Knees. So let me tell you, I went to another house. And that was out in the boonies. We didn't have any electricity. We had oil lamps. And we-- and the water came out of the well from the backyard. So let me tell you, I watched the lady of the house brought in a can of water to wash myself. And looking back, I really don't know. My husband always asks, do you remember what you wore? And I don't remember what I wore. Believe me. But anyway, out from there--

Let's not leave there quite yet, Ruth. Let's talk a little bit more about that very rural house you were in-- no electricity, no running water. The circumstances were very Spartan or sparse.

Oh, yes. The outhouse was outside.

And one of the things that I was struck by when we first met, and you told me about this, that it was a very tiny community, a little rural village. And so anything out of the ordinary would be detected. People would notice it. And so what did that mean for things like getting groceries or food? Because now, she's got an extra mouth to feed in the household. What did that-- what happened then?

Well, the people from the underground, luckily, gave us some coupons. But another thing-- I slept with Katie in the same bed, single bed, because of the laundry. People would know if there would be more hang outside. Don't forget, we didn't have washers and dryers. And I slept with Katie in the same bed, a single bed. If she turned, I had to turn. It was really tough.

And one of the reasons for that, Ruth, so that we all understand is if a neighbor saw an extra sheet hanging from the laundry--

That's it.

--and if they were observant, they might say--

Something else.

--something's going on here.

That's right.

Or I remember you telling me that if the lady of the house had gone to the little market, and she's for years been buying a pound of sugar, and now, she buys a pound and a half, people might notice that. So everything she had to do was to be very careful.

Absolutely, yeah.

Were they kind people?

Very, very, very. The only one, of all the people that I met, is the lady that lived in this particular house. She also came to Canada-- not to America. And she was a nurse. And I've seen her once. But I talked to her on the phone. And the other day, the phone wouldn't answer. But I had written her a letter for Christmas. And somebody saw the letter, and wrote me a letter, and told me that she's in a nursing home. So that's the only one that is survived from my time. Yeah, she's still in a nurse-- she's 91 years old.

91. Ruth, one of the other things that is so hard for us to really imagine when you're in hiding for the better part of three years, it's not like you could go outside in the yard. You were in the house--

All the time.

--all the time.

Yes. And that was dangerous to have a Jew in the house.

And much less to have you get out and get a little fresh air. That was just not going to happen.

No, never.

I had asked Ruth, which was probably a very naive question, but I said, did anything-- what happened on your birthday or at holidays? Did you get-- did anybody give you a gift or anything? And tell us what you told me.

One day was just like the other. I didn't know if it was Monday, or Sunday, or holiday, or I don't even know. One day was just like the other.

Do you remember-- because you were a teenage child, a kid, teenager-- do you remember the anxiety or fear you felt? Was it something that you felt that you could manage? What was it like to feel knowing that your life was at risk, that the family you lived with potentially was at risk?

But you couldn't let it take you.

You couldn't let it.

No. No, you could never think-- you just think from one day to the next to stay alive. And that was it.

You had a very scary incident happen in one of the homes.

Oh, yes. In one of the homes-- that's the house where Katie came from-- the soldiers came in the back door. And I was in the kitchen. But there was a dining room on the other side. I went out of the kitchen and closed the dining room door. I sat under a table. And she fed the soldiers.

These are German soldiers.

These are German soldiers right in the same house where I was. I was in the dining room. And I tell you, a sneeze or a cough would have done it. So as soon as the soldiers left, the lady of the house said, that's it.

Too close of a call.

Too close, you have to go again. So they called Mr. Jansen. And he found us another place. I remember, it was in-- I forgot the name of the little town. And most of these people were coal miners because there are lots of coal mines over there. So I went to another house. And I always stayed in the basement because I was afraid.

But there was a coal slack. And a German would shoot at the Americans that were coming in. The tanks were coming in here. So before I knew it, some soldiers, some American soldiers were killed. But when they came to the door-- and I stayed in the basement. But in the meantime, my parents were back in my hometown. And Mr. Jansen came to get me to be reunited with my parents.

Before we talk about that remarkable moment when you're reunited with your parents, the house you've just described, that was your last house in hiding.

That was my last house.

Couple more things about the period that you were in hiding-- it was one thing to ask you if you could play outside or go outside. And of course, you couldn't.

Never.

And you couldn't celebrate birthdays. And nothing you did could make it look like there was somebody living there. One of the things that I was really struck by that you told me, and you really hinted at it a moment ago when you said you couldn't sneeze when the German--

Oh, no.

--German troops were in the house, and you're hiding under a tablecloth, you also said to me that you just simply could not get sick.

No.

And say a little bit about that, during that whole time, why couldn't you get sick?

Oh, yes. I understand-- I found out later that my brother's friend was somewhere. And he needed an appendectomy. But they could not call a doctor. And when he died, they buried him in their backyard. You could never find a doctor for anything.

And they couldn't come because of the risk.

No.

Right.

No. No. I mean, to being a Jew in that time was the worst thing to be.

Ruth, you also said something else to me that I had never heard or thought about. And in effect, you said, you had two fears. You had fear of what was going on on the ground around you, but also what was in the air.

Oh, yes. If the-- that was and the other house, where if the bombs would come down, and they would find us, that's why I had to move again.

Fear of being bombed by the Allies?

Right, yeah.

But also, you made a really interesting point that if an American or British plane were shot down on a bombing raid, that posed a tremendous threat to you. And why was that?

Because if they would find those Americans--

If they parachuted out.

--if they parachuted out, and that would be close to my house, I had to run again.

And the idea was that if a American flyer, or British, or somebody else--

Was shot down.

--came down, was hit in one of the houses, all the Germans would come looking for them.

Right, right, right.

And then they start checking papers, and there's a child there. So that was a danger to you.

Oh, yeah, dangerous just being living as a Jew in that time. And that's how I survived. How many people died in concentration camps? And I know, my brother was on the death march. And he died of typhoid. That was the only brother that I had. And my aunts from Maastricht, they went to Auschwitz. And they were gassed. So family or no family, you couldn't win.

Ruth, talking about your brother, who as you just said, died at the very end of the war-- he chose to not go with your parents and you.

No, no, no. He went with my aunts.

To take care of your aunts. And so when they were deported, he went with them.

Right. And they died in Auschwitz.

OK. Ruth, liberation-- and you started to tell us about it. So here you are in your final home, the last home you would be hidden in. There's a battle going on outside between the Germans and the Americans. And you're hiding in the coal bin.

I'm on the coal bin, that's right.

And then what happened?

Nothing happened. I stayed there until Mr. Jansen came to get me.

And is that-- and I think you told me that you were afraid that it really wasn't true, that the war wasn't over. So you just stayed hidden.

That's right.

And then Mr. Jansen came.

Came to get me. And my dad-- my parents were already in-- back home. Well, what was home? We didn't have any furniture, don't forget. We lost everything. But the Germans had left. And I guess some people helped us to look for the Germans and gave us their furniture so that we-- don't forget, we didn't have a bed to sleep in, or a kitchen table and chairs, or anything. But they got us all that.

Where-- during the whole time you were hidden, you had said that you had no idea where your parents were.

No, never.

Did you even know that they were alive?

No.

So what was that like for you to be-- or do you remember what it was like to be reunited with your mother and father?

Well, Mr. Jansen reunited me with my mother and father because I never knew even if they were alive. And he's the one that came to get me. And you said, your parents are already there. So that's what happened.

That must have been remarkable thing.

Unbelievable.

Yeah. I can imagine.

Unbelievable.

You told us, of course, that your aunts were-- went to Auschwitz and perished. And your brother died on a death march. What about other family members?

Well, the only sister that I had was the one that was in America. And I--

But you had lots of aunts and uncles.

Oh, they're all gone.

They're all gone.

Oh, on my father's side, he had 10 brothers and sisters. OK, now, there's one survived in Brazil. And one survived that died in Israel. But the rest are all gone, every one of them-- cousins, everybody. But I always wanted to come to America. But for that, I had to leave my parents in Holland.

And first, I came to-- first of all, you just don't get on a plane and come to America. You had to be healthy. You had to have this. And you had to have people that vouched for me. And not only was my sister and brother-in-law, but he had cousins in Brooklyn. And they also vouched for me. And I came to America, leaving my parents in Holland.

Why didn't they come?

My mother never wanted to come to America. My mother never wanted to come to America. And when she died, my father came. So my mother is buried in Holland. And my father is buried in America. In fact, he lived with me.

Speaking of your father, you told me a very just heartbreaking story. After the war-- right after the war, when people-- the few remaining survivors were returning, tell us about your father.

Oh, he went to the station, to the railroad station. And he waited. He thought that maybe some of the family would come back because they all came back by train. And he waited day after day. And nobody came back.

Waiting for Carl.

Waiting for Carl, waiting for his sisters and brothers. And nobody showed up. It was very sad, very sad, unbelievably sad.

In some ways, you said that really, really broke your parent's hearts and affected their ability to continue living.

Oh, that my brother never came back. Yeah.

And in effect, I think you said, it ultimately probably killed your mother.

It did. My mother-- it killed my mother because she lost three sisters and my brother. And I mean, it just-- that did it for her. And she died and is buried in Holland. And then Dad came over. But he never learned to speak English, never, not a word. All he could speak was German. And thank god my husband could speak German.

So Bernie was the communicator with him, huh?

Yes, he did.

When did you meet Bernie?

Oh, when did I meet Bernie? In Pittsburgh.

In Pittsburgh?

I went to-- while I went to work in Pittsburgh. And how did I meet him? I went to work in Pittsburgh. And I belonged to the Jewish Y. And I wanted to learn how to play bridge because my sister, and brother-in-law, and her friends, they were always playing bridge. So I signed up to learn how to play bridge. And so did he. That's how we met.

A bridge to each other. That's great. Ruth, you've obviously talked and mentioned a number of times Mr. Jansen, a man who ostensibly worked at the post office. He was obviously much more than that. What--

I don't know.

What was he?

Oh, he was-- but he disappeared. I mean, I never-- I don't know. He was tall and good-looking. And that's all I know.

And you don't know what ever became of him?

No.

So after-- so he survived the war.

Oh, he did.

And then and then was gone.

Yeah.

And he wasn't doing that just as an independent person doing good works. He was--

Right, dangerous for him.

And he was part of the Dutch resistance?

I guess so.

That's what you think. He was underground. What was he like? I mean, do you remember?

Very kind man.

Very kind man.

Very kind man.

And one of the things that I think we're probably all struck by is that he had the knowledge of knowing where you were at every stop. And he knew where you were. And just thank god he survived because he had that knowledge.

He never let us know where my-- well, he took care of my parents. But I never knew where they were and they never knew where I was. But he brought us together.

Yeah. He does, indeed, sound like just a remarkable man. And I think you told me that the only person really around him is he had a housekeeper--

Yes, he did.

--who was aware of what he was doing.

Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

So they were a team that--

Yeah, because in one house, if we had around-- that house was close to his house. And we would-- because the housekeeper would be there. Yes.

Ruth, after the war, and as you said, you came to the United States. Your mother and father stayed in Holland.

Oh, I left my parents.

What was their life like after the war?

Well, it was good.

They were able to get back on their feet.

Absolutely. Yeah. My mother died first.

And then and that's-- as you said, your father was able to come to the United States after that.

Yes. First, he lived with my sister. And then when we got married, he lived partly-- well, we just had a small apartment. And she had a house. So she-- sometimes, he stayed with us, sometimes, he stayed with my sister. And when we bought the house that we live in, he said, I'm not going back. I'm staying with you. And he stayed with us, could never speak a word of English. And he was 93 when he died. And he was a dear old man, let me tell you.

Ruth shared with me that among the very few people in her extended family who survived were two first cousins who made it to Brazil. And they're still alive.

Oh, yes.

And one of them is 99 years old.

I talk to them all the time. Carl is 99 and Trude is about 96 years old.

Ruth, you made a remarkable journey back to Holland and to Germany. Tell us about that.

Well, I have three daughters. And they wanted to see where I used to live and where I was. And we went back to-- landed in Düsseldorf, went back to Germany. Well, I didn't have anybody in Germany.

And then we went to Holland. And the only one that I found there alive was one person. And she said, leave me your daughters here. I said, no, we cannot do that. But I wanted to show them the house where my mother was born. And we knocked on the door. And I didn't want anything. They wouldn't let us in at all. Then I went-- where else did I go?

And that was the house in Holland?

Yeah, that was the house in Holland. They thought I want-- we wanted something. No. But we did go back to my mother's grave, that I did. And then I have a cousin in Belgium. And we visited with her. And then we came home.

What was it like for you and your daughters to go to Geilenkirchen, to go to the town in Germany where you had begun your life? What was that like?

I saw the-- I went to see the bürgermeister, the--

Like the mayor?

--mayor, mayor. And he wanted me to visit. And I said, this is the only time I'll come back. I'll never come back again. Then I saw, I have three girlfriends that I went to school with. And I'm still in contact with them. Yes. They call me-- Anneliese and two other friends, they call me for my birthday.

They're Germans?

They're Germans, yes.

And stayed there that whole time?

Yes. They're not doing too well. The other one told me, her son took her car away. And her son took her car away because I don't think she-- whatever is wrong with her. But anyway, I still have three girlfriends. I correspond with them and talk to them.

Ruth, why don't we do this-- let's turn to our audience and ask them if they would like to ask some questions of you. It's an opportunity for you folks to learn more from Ruth or just ask her what's on your mind. So we've got our brave soul right here. And remember, I'll repeat your question so we all hear it.

Did you ever forget when your birthday was when you were in hiding?

The question for Ruth is did Ruth ever forget her birthday when she was in hiding?

I never thought about it. One day was just like the other one, and never thought about birthdays or anything like that. No, not at all.

OK, gentleman over here.

Do you have an explanation for how the German people, in general, could permit and allow the perpetration of so much evil?

Question for you, Ruth, is do you have thoughts about or an explanation for how the German people could allow what happened to you and to so many others?

I have no idea. I have no idea. I have no idea.

The three German women that you saw when you went back, Ruth, I take it they were not Jewish?

No.

And so they were there in Geilenkirchen in those early years.

Yes, I went to school with them.

You went to school them.

Did they ever talk to you about what happened?

Never.

No.

But they didn't help us when we needed help.

Right, right, right.

They did not help us when we needed the help.

No. OK, question over here.

Can you tell us about why it was so important to keep your star and what it means to you?

Oh, the question is why it's so important for you to keep your star today and why it's so important to you?

Oh. Have you ever seen anything like this? No, maybe in books. That's why it's important for me because I had to wear it at a certain time. I couldn't leave the house without wearing it. I thought, sometimes, you see it in a book that you read about the Holocaust or something like that. But that's why it's this important. See, it's mine and nobody else's. Now, I have a problem. I have three daughters. Who's going to get this one?

Ruth, tell us-- you said that somebody kept it for you for safekeeping. How did they hide it?

I think they put it between in the wall. Because it-- see this, right there--

The stain there?

--the stain. They couldn't-- nobody could find it. You never knew. I think they put it in the wall. And this is where-- you can't see it. There's a stain in here. That's where it comes from, from the water.

Hidden in the wall, OK. We got a question here and then a gentleman back there.

Yes.

I wanted to ask you-- I've talked to a Gentile German during the war. And she said after Hitler got going, she said they were just as afraid of the Nazis as everybody else, and that it wasn't the German general public that was-- wanted to do what Hitler did. But after he got rolling, she said, everybody was afraid of him.

I wanted to ask you-- I was quite young in the '30s. But I'm much more interested in the history since I've grown up. But Hitler started on a rampage in the early '30s, 1933, '34. And I just think of-- nobody stopped him. Nobody stopped it.

Nobody stopped him, no.

And that makes you think of all-- in American military, what, 400,000 American military lost their lives?

Oh, yes.

The British, and all of you, and the German people, innocent German people just because nobody stopped Hitler.

You probably can't hear in the back, but the comment is just the remarkable fact that when Hitler came to power in the early 1930s, that nobody stopped him. And he ended up doing unbelievable things with-- on behalf of the Nazi Party

and all the people, all the allies they had.

Ruth, over the years, as you think back on that, what thoughts do you have about that? Just trying to understand that as best you can, it's-- I imagine, it's just simply not understandable other than it was born of hatred and prejudice.

Right. Right. Yes?

OK.

I just wanted to know, how did your family, your mother, you yourself, your mother, and your father go about rebuilding. Where did you start as far as schooling, and your father and his business, and your mother? How did you all know to get your life back? Was your spirit kind of broken?

The question is how did you and your parents start your life again? Was your spirit broken? And how did you get yourself back to build a life again, which you did do?

You can't let the spirit be broken because then you just fall by the wayside. As long as you're alive, you have to do what you can do. Like when we came back to Valkenburg and we didn't have a chair to sit on, and a bed to sleep in, and a cup to drink out, where do you start? I don't really remember who gave us all the stuff to start over with because all you have on is what you have on. That's it. Right.

OK. A gentleman back here, right. Did Mr. Jansen or any of the people that took such enormous risks to help you and many others ever tell you why they took those risks?

No.

The question for Ruth was-- Mr. Jansen and others who took risks to help you and others go into hiding, did they ever say why they took those risks?

No. He never got paid, nothing. He just did it. That's all I can tell you. That's all. There's somebody here.

We got a question right here-- and two questions. Yes, ma'am.

I was wondering about your thoughts and feelings on why the United States did not step up to the plate during the Holocaust to allow more people in. You were able to come in because of your sister being present here. But we did not largely put it in place to allow more immigrants from European Nazism.

No, I just came here because my sister was here.

Yeah, the question was just how difficult it was for so many Jews to be able to get out of Europe and get to Germany to the United States.

Not that many, no. You had to have family here.

It was very difficult.

At least at that time, you had to have family here that could vouch for you. And my sister was here. And then the people that let her come over-- and my brother-in-law, they also vouched for me so I could come over.

Yeah. Thank you for the comment. Another question there?

Did you have any idea of how many families Mr. Jansen helped? Did you ever meet any of the families?

No.

The question was did you have any idea of how many other families or others that Mr. Jansen helped. It sounds like all you knew from Mr. Jansen was just where he put you and that your parents--

That's right.

--went somewhere else.

Right.

OK. We have time for two more questions-- one here and one back there. I just had a question about Mr. Jansen. Now, he helped your parents also?

Yes.

Now, is there any reason in those three years that you didn't know whether your parents were living or not? And couldn't he drop hints just so you knew that they were OK? Is there a reason why?

He never talked about it.

The question was why did Mr. Jansen not least give you a hint that your parents were still alive in that time?

He never talked about it.

OK. I just thought maybe for your own comfort, being as young as you were, that at least you knew your parents.

No, no, no. The only one-- the only-- when I found that they were alive when I was liberated from the-- by the Americans. And he said, your parents are alive. They are already in Valkenburg.

Ruth, would you guess that one of the reasons for that was it was just a situation where the less people knew, the less risk there was of any kind of exposure at all?

Right. That's it.

Yeah. One more question and then we're going to wrap up our program right in the middle back there. Yes.

I can see your gratitude for Mr. Jansen. And it's a mystery. I was wondering if-- I heard about a family in Holland by the last name Ten Boom. And the man was a watchmaker. And I believe that they were big in that Dutch resistance. Did you ever hear the last name Ten Boom?

No.

The question is is Ruth familiar with a Dutch name of Ten Boom that was in the active in the Dutch resistance? No.

Yeah, no. Don't know anybody.

One last question from me, Ruth, actually, if you share a thought you shared with me with the audience. And you said to me that many people, of course, when they hear that you were in hiding in the Netherlands think naturally of Anne Frank. And you said to me that you thought a major difference between what happened to Anne Frank and you-- you told me a little bit about what you thought the difference was. One of the points I think you made is that--

Well, Anne Frank was discovered.

Right, exactly. And your point was why do you think that happened to Anne Frank?

I have no idea.

You had said to me that you thought that one of the differences is that whereas you were in hiding by yourself, your parents were together, that there was-- you thought maybe it was too many people in one place for too long.

That's possible.

Yeah. But it's something that you get asked about.

Yeah. And she was deported. But she died in-- what camp was it? It's not Theresienstadt.

Bergen-Belsen.

What?

Bergen-Belsen?

I don't know.

Bergen-Belsen.

Bergen-Belsen, you're right. Yeah. You're right.

Ruth, I want to thank you for spending this time with us. You obviously can only touch on and give us a glimpse into all that you experienced during that time of the Holocaust and World War II. And I want to thank the audience for being very attentive and asking questions.

Before I turn back to Ruth to conclude our First Person program today, I'd like to remind you that we will have a First Person program every Wednesday until the end of August, with the exception of August 1. So we'll have another First Person program next week on the 30th of May.

And our first person next week will be Mrs. Fanny Aizenberg. Mrs. Aizenberg, whose family moved from Poland to Brussels, Belgium when she was six years old, sent her three-year-old daughter into hiding in 1942, when the Nazis began deporting Belgian Jews to slave labor and death camps. Mrs. Aizenberg would survive Auschwitz slave labor in a munitions factory and a death march before her liberation. After the war, she would be reunited with her daughter and with her husband, who had volunteered to work for the British Air Force. So I hope that you can return on another Wednesday, next week or another Wednesday between now and the end of August.

It is our tradition at First Person that our first person has the last word. And so with that, I'd like to turn the program back up to Ruth to offer us her thoughts to close today's First Person program. And I might mention before Ruth does that, Ruth will stay behind over here by the podium if anybody would like to come up and talk with her a bit further. Please, feel free to do that. So Ruth?

Well, I thank you all for coming. I just-- we can't forget the six million Jews that were killed just because they were Jews. And thank god that I survived, some of my family survived. But too many were killed. I lost all my friends, my girlfriends, my family on both sides-- on my mother's side, on my father's side. And it's only me that survived. And that's it.

Thank you, Ruth.

Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

Think that's it. Yeah.

That's OK.

OK.