United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Ruth Rappaport
October 14, 2010
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PREFACE

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RUTH RAPPAPORT
October 14, 2010

Gail Schwartz: This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Ruth Rappaport conducted by Gail Schwartz on October 14, 2010 in Washington, DC. What is your full name?

Ruth Rappaport: Ruth Rappaport.

Q: And is that the name you were born with?

A: Yes.

Q: Yes. And where were you born?

A: In Leipzig, Germany.

Q: And when were you born?

A: May 27, 1923.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about your family. Your father's name was—

A: Mendel. Rappaport. And he was a Romanian subject living in Leipzig.

Q: Was he born in Romania?

A: Yes. In the (both talking) Ukraine.

Q: And so you know what town he was born in?

A: Yes. **Wistoki.** [ph]

Q: And do you know when he was born? It's ok if you don't.

A: Not really. Except that he got married in 1910 so that's kind of an earmark date.

Q: In Romania?

A: Yeah.

Q: Your mother's name?

A: Helena Rubinstein and she was a first cousin to Helena Rubinstein. So that's the family background.

Q: And was your mother also born in the same town your father was?

A: No, no, no. My mother was well you know these, these Jewish birthplaces, they kind of change because the Rubinsteins were all born in a little itty bitty village called **Myelitz** [ph] which nobody acknowledges. It's a suburb of **Talnuf** [ph[which nobody acknowledges, which is a suburb of Krakow, which everybody acknowledges.

Q: And do you know when she was born or not?

A: Not. Well wait a minute. Her older brother was 40, her older brother died in 1947 and was 65 and she was maybe three years older.

Q: Ok. And so did your parents meet in Romania or meet, where did they meet? Did they get married there?

A: Well see it wasn't Romania then. It was the Austrian-Hungarian empire. They were both living under Kaiser Franz Joseph. And they remember the historical connections is, whatever you call the stratification.

Q: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

A: I had two half-sisters.

Q: Two half-sisters?

A: Yes.

Q: Because one of your parents had been married before or –

A: I. My father's first wife died in childbirth. You know back in the olden days when and so I had that half-sister. And then my mother well anyway, then there was another one and then there came me. So we were three half-sisters.

Q: What kind of work did your father do?

A: He was a furrier. In Leipzig Germany, everybody was a furrier.

Q: What brought them to Leipzig?

A: Actually it was interesting. My father initially was sent to Leipzig from Romania, a city called Wistoki where the family owned wooded, many forests. And a saw mill. And he was sent to Germany to sell the lumber. And stayed. And then got into, because everybody in Leipzig had something to do with fur. He drifted into the fur business.

Q: And was he successful?

A: Fair. I mean considering that most of this was the depression, nobody was that—but ok.

Q: Were your parents very religious?

A: Modern orthodox. In fact you might even have heard of this. Leipzig had a very famous rabbinical family, the **Kalmbach** [ph]. You probably heard of Shlomo. Well Kalmbach was my school principal. I went to Kalmbach's private school. And he was my school principal. And one of my classmates was Shlomo's cousin. And I was very close to the Kalmbach children.

Q: What was the first name of the principal. Do you know? That's ok.

A: It's been a long time.

Q: Just a few years. So you said your parents were modern Orthodox. You went to this Jewish school, Kalmbach school.

A: Yes and Kalmbach was our family rabbi. He had the modern Orthodox synagogue in Leipzig, the big –

Q: There was a big one?

A: Oh yes.

Q: Do you remember the name of it?

A: I think it was referred to as the Kalmbach schul.

Q: Were your parents Zionists? At the time?

A: My father was. My mother was not, figure that one out.

Q: How did that manifest with him? Did he speak about –

A: Well, I guess he always wanted to go to Israel and never did. Or Palestine. And my mother always had her eyes set on the United States. She never made it but she, she had three brothers in Seattle, Washington. And if it hadn't been December 7 killed it all. No, they –

Q: Once we went to war you mean.

A: They had papers to go to Cuba. Legal, I mean valid papers. They were purchased but they were for real and if December 7 hadn't happened. Ok because of the American immigration quota system, my father was number 34 on the list to come to the States. So there's only one thing nobody told you. The Romanian, Romania only got two visas a year. So being number 34 meant a 17 year wait.

Q: So he was still considered Romanian even though he lived in Leipzig.

A: That's right.

Q: And your mother also was considered Romanian?

A: Yeah because she, we only—you know the family passport was Romanian passport.

Q: Even though you were living in Germany. Ok. Let's talk about you as a young child now that we've talked about your family. You went to --

A: I was very precocious. I was a snot nosed kid. But I was bright. In fact it's kind of interesting because when I was six years old somebody took me to some Zionist meeting. It was sort of a commemoration of somebody who was a hero. Joseph **Trumpeldor** who died, da, da, da and here is this little six year old and she says well what's so great about dying for your

country. Isn't it more important to live for it. And I thought that was a pretty astute comment from a six year old. Me.

Q: How did the teacher answer that?

A: It wasn't a teacher. It was a youth group. Very, they were quite impressed. As I say I was a kind of a bright snot nosed kid. I don't think I was quite as smart as I thought I was. But I was fairly bright. Which has stood me in good stead over the years. In fact I guess growing up when I did I grew up sort of confrontational and I think it stood me well all my life. I like to say I've never been aggressive but I've always been assertive. Fine distinction but a good one.

Q: What's the distinction?

A: That when you are aggressive you hold things, you have boundaries. It's not all free floating. As aggression can fly in every direction. Assertiveness is focused. At least to me that was the distinction.

Q: You went to school. Did you live in a Jewish neighborhood? Was your house in a Jewish neighborhood in Leipzig?

A: No it was a mixed neighborhood.

Q: So did you have friends who were not Jewish?

A: Yes, yes we did. Actually you probably wouldn't know about this but there used to be a very famous German encyclopedia called **Brachhaus** [ph]. You know it's, take my word for it. It was very famous. And the Brachhaus family lived across the street from us and Leipzig of course was a publishing city. And very few people know that but you know the, not pocketbooks but paper backs, quality paperbacks were published in Leipzig long before the, the names were coined. Because we had these publishing houses in Leipzig and boy I had a whole collection of English novels that I read by the time I was ten years old.

Q: So you were able to speak English?

A: Yeah.

Q: How did you learn that? in school?

A: Leipzig being a city that had fairs also had language institutes where they trained translators and interpreters and it was a three month course and you kind of lived, I mean I didn't have to live at the school because I was from Leipzig, but most students lived there. And it was immersion study.
You had breakfast with your teachers. You went for a walk. You couldn't use anything but English. If you couldn't say it in English, you couldn't say it. It was agony while it lasted. However, when I came to the States as an immigrant, I didn't have to take a single required English college course. I passed every single college course, high school and college entrance by exam.
The only thing I couldn't pass was Shakespeare.

Q: What other languages did you speak, did you know besides German and English?

A: Well I spoke a little Hebrew. And English and French. From school. Still speak a little French.

Q: What were your other interests as a child?

A: Mostly reading. No I wasn't too much into sports because I was very near sighted as a kid and in those days we didn't have plastic glasses, so you know I couldn't go in for sports.

Q: Cause they would break

A: Because my glasses would you know a tennis ball in a pair of eyeglasses can be fatal. So I kind of was a little bit removed from sports and tended towards books.

Q: Were you very close to your parents. What kind of relationship did you have with them?

A: I was much closer to my mother. Yeah I had a, we had a good relationship. I think my dad was a little bit of a control freak, but then I guess most parents were in those days.

Q: Your two sisters, what were their names?

A: One was Clara and one was Miriam.

Q: Were you close to them?

A: Well no because they were much older—they were close to each other. Well one of them I was fairly close to and in fact the one that ended her life in Israel, I actually went and spent six months with her in **Beersheba** before she died. She was quite, well she, she ended up with Alzheimer's. But that's all right. I mean she was a nice person. And she had, she had good, she had had a good husband and family so she was well taken care of. And I spent six months helping her. And things worked out ok.

Q: To get back to your childhood. You said you were very independent, it sounds like you were very independent and doing what you thought you should be doing.

A: Well yeah because one of, part of the independent bit was as kids we belonged to a Jewish youth group. And parents were not really that much. You know. It was a double edged sword for the parents but –

Q: Do you remember the names of the groups?

A: Yeah, **Habonim.** Oh yes I was a very upright Habonim member. And then when I went to Switzerland they didn't have a Habonim and suddenly became **Hashamir Hatsaya** [ph] as the next substitute.

Q: But you also had non-Jewish friends that you played with when you were a youngster.

A: Mm hm.

Q: When did you know that conditions were starting to change. I mean you were born in 1923. Did you, when did you ever hear of a man named Hitler. Do you remember the first –

A: Yes, 1933. I think I heard about him the day I was ten years old.

Q: The day you were ten, ok what did you hear about him? Do you remember what your impressions were?

A: Terrible things were going to happen.

Q: Who told you, your parents?

A: The neighbors, the parents, it was in the air. There was unrest. It was really turmoil in the air.

Q: And a ten year old child sensed it?

A: You picked that up, yes. It was, you could kind of cut it.

Q: Were there any outward manifestations right then on the street or signs or banners or –

A: Well my, my strongest recollection is the week of Kristallnacht.

Q: Yeah, that's later. We'll get to that. I'm talking about a little earlier. You're talking about 33 and you heard that a man named Hitler.

A: Yeah.

Q: Now in control. Did you –

A: Well told us about Hitler and Hindenburg together. You know as a ten year old you didn't separate that much.

Q: Is it something you talked over with your family?

A: Mostly in the Habonim group.

Q: Mostly with your friend, ok.

A: Mostly with your contemporaries.

Q: Did you hear any speeches over the radio by Hitler?

A: Yes. And not only that, but not wanting to but without being able to help it, I actually saw him. I was crossing a major street in Leipzig when his car you know he was **Heil**-ing **Seig** Heil-ing in his open vehicle, driving along –

Q: The motorcade you mean.

A: The motorcade and I was at the curb. And I couldn't help it. I had to look at him. (laughs)

Q: And you knew exactly who he was.

A: Of course, I mean Seig Heil. I mean everybody knew who he was.

Q: I assume you did not do the salute.

A: Of course not.

Q: Did other people on the street –

A: I don't think people noticed me. Everybody was focused on him.

Q: Him. So they did not notice that you –

A: I mean I was a little, I was small. I was not visible. I'm still only five feet.

Q: And then, again when did conditions start to change. It was 33, 34, 35. Do you remember any progression, any signs or treatment by neighbors. What non-Jewish neighbors, did they ever say anything negative or positive to you?

A: Oddly enough, believe it or not we had very good non-Jewish neighbors who were very friendly. And like the night, just before Kristallnacht, they came and warned us and told us not to go out the next morning. That the party had sent out word that all members had to show up in mufti. And start shooting and looting. And it was, Kristallnacht was planned down to the last detail. And I knew all about it, before it happened. I was told the night before to stay home and be careful. By non-Jewish neighbors.

Q: What were their names? Do you remember?

A: No.

Q: You don't.

A: But I guess you know Leipzig was a stronghold for communism and I think our neighbors might have been communists. And that might have been the warning connection. And I didn't think of it at the time but in retrospect it would make sense.

Q: Up til Kristallnacht did life go on for you as a child, as a 10, 11, 12, 13 year old normally? Did it go on, you don't remember any restrictions cause –

A: No, I mean I went to my private Jewish school.

Q: Ok that was still functioning, all the way til Kristallnacht.

A: Yeah.

Q: It was not closed or anything like that?

A: No, until –

Q: Any restrictions on your father's business? That you know of.

A: Well I, I think between the economic situation and being Jewish it wasn't going too well.

Q: It wasn't going well but it wasn't taken over or closed down.

A: I mean I don't think he was closed, it wasn't shut down or anything. It was just Depression and –

Q: And your non-Jewish –

A: Actually I think it's kind of funny, looking back. I don't know if there was a middle class Jewish trade or not. But you know Jews were never poor. They just had cash flow problems. And I don't think my parents would have ever admitted to not being well off.

Q: Did you have household help?

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you have a car?

A: No. My uncle had a Rolls Royce and we used it.

Q: Very impressive. Speaking about your uncle, so you had an extended family that you were –

A: Yeah, my mother had two, had –

Q: That you were close to.

A: I mean she had, she had a younger brother in Leipzig and we were all very close.

Q: Did you get together on holidays?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you have any certain memories of any of the holidays, anything special?

A: Actually this is kind of weird. My worst memory of Passover is we were always invited to the same family for Passover Seder and I couldn't stand their silverware.

Q: That's important.

A: It, no it was cheap metal and it had a taste and my parents had a real problem understanding why I would go with, to Seder and not eat. That was one of the –

Q: Did you celebrate the Sabbath in your own home? Shabbat. Did you light candles? And your father make a blessing?

A: No my mother lit the candles and we always you know had challah and gefilte fish or regular fish or matzo ball soup or noodle soup. No we had the traditional.

Q: Traditional holiday. Did you keep kosher?

A: Yes and no. My mother kept kosher for my father. So we had a kosher kitchen. But when we traveled she and I ate **traife** and actually with my father's blessing. He just said he was raised orthodox. He couldn't get himself to change. But he was really, he was sort of an accepting liberal kind of guy. And like if I was sick in bed and needed a treat, he'd come home and bring me a package of ham, for sandwiches. So you know it was a tradition, not religion.

Q: You said you were a big reader. What were some, who were your favorite authors?

A: All the forbidden. Everybody who was forbidden. Leon **Furtwangler**, Max Broad. Leon Trotsky.

Q: This is while you were growing up but it was forbidden for people to read those, yeah.

A: And actually what we did was we passed around the paperbacks. We read them and as we finished reading we tore off the pages and destroyed them so we wouldn't get caught.

Q: This is for your youth groups.

A: Mm hm. And I had --- oh the other thing is because in 33 all the German professors were fired from German universities.

Q: The Jewish professors.

A: Yeah. Since I went to the Kalmbach private high school, every one of my high school teachers was from what you call it. You know the one outstanding the one well known.

Q: In Leipzig.

A: No in Germany. What was the big university? Heidelberg. Practically every one of my teachers was from, was a Heidelberg professor. My physics teacher, my chemistry teacher.

Q: Did you know about the book burning?

A: Yeah.

Q: Here you loved books. Do you remember as a young person –

A: I actually remember, I watched them.

Q: In Leipzig?

A: Yeah, I saw them I saw the piles of books on the street in the middle of the road there being burned.

Q: And –

A: And you passed by and you walked.

Q: And you who loved books, what –

A: What. You know you kept on crying.

Q: Were you frightened by that point seeing what was starting to happen in the country?

A: I'm not sure that, I'm not sure that that's, I don't know. I don't think I was frightened. I think I was unnerved. No I don't think I, I don't think fear was the word. In fact, one of the peculiar things about the fact that I was a Romanian citizen and my passport did not say that I was Jewish, I could go out when nobody else, when all Jews were restricted, I could still walk the streets because my passport didn't say I was Jewish. I mean obviously policemen were, on the street people suspected, but they couldn't prove it. And since nobody could prove that I was Jewish they couldn't keep me inside.
So when all the curfews and everything was going I was walking around freely.

Q: I was going to ask you about the curfews and the limitations.

A: I moved.

Q: What did you do? Did you do anything special because you were able to –

A: Well that's how I, that's how all my volunteering started. We had this big, ok. The German no. The Polish government, after the, I forgot his name. now there was a 17 year old Polish kid who killed the attaché in Paris. And the follow up to that is the German government expelling all Polish Jews in Germany back into Poland. And they were all brought to the Leipzig railroad station because you know there was a biggest railroad in Europe and they had all these sidings. And that's where I started volunteering. I decided these people all these people showed up in nightgowns. And I decided they needed toothbrushes. And so I looked up a man who had a sundry shop. And I knocked on his, went over to his house and knocked on his door. And I told him that all these Polish Jews sitting on the railroad siding in their nightgowns and that they needed toothbrushes.
And I made a toothbrush distribution. Of all the crazy – well I guess it was as appropriate as anything else, wasn't it. Kind of weird in retrospect.

Q: Did you do this by yourself?

A: Yeah.

Q: It was your idea.

A: Yeah.

Q: It wasn't a group of friends.

A: No, no, no.

Q: You were just a young –

A: It was just me.

Q: You were about 13 years old.

A: No, 15.

Q: Right, 15, right.

A: Yeah I just, I knocked on the guy's door and I said you have all these sundry items and we have all these people that are dislocated. They are waiting for transportation and they need some ---

Q: Did you tell your parents you were going to do it?

A: Yeah.

Q: And they said ok?

A: Yeah, well they knew I was safe with my passport.

Q: Did you always carry your passport with you.

A: Yep.

Q: The other Jews in Leipzig at the time had restrictions.

A: I guess.

Q: Like curfew and so forth. Did they have restrictions that where they could go by that time or were they, or they had freedom to go around the city.

A: It seems to me they were pretty damn restricted. But one of the things I sort of clearly remember and that was kind of a horrible, horrible I've just never forgotten it. Leipzig had some small rivers and they assembled the elderly bearded Jews on the river's edge. Now there was the river. And you know there was paved, I mean there was little river bed and then there was like pavement and then there were the walls. And what they had done was they rounded up all the orthodox Jews and made them face the wall and shot into the air. They didn't kill them. They just pretended to kill them all. And in some ways that was worse because you heard the shots. You opened your eyes. You looked and they were still standing. But you know fear, being lined up against the river bed wall and hearing all these shot gun, I don't know if they were guns. I don't remember what ammo they used but it was pretty –

Q: And you actually saw this?

A: Oh yeah, I stood.

Q: By chance or did they force you all to come out.

A: No, I made a point of going out.

Q: How did you know it was going to happen?

A: I heard the neighbors talk.

Q: The same neighbors that –

A: The communist neighbors.

Q: That warned you about Kristallnacht.

A: I was a very feisty.

Q: Sounds like it. Very unusual for a young girl.

A: No in a peculiar way, I'm not sure I can explain it but I guess I always kind of went along feeling it's better to see than not to. I felt more in control being able to watch. I wasn't so puzzled. I could see what was going on. But I just sort of hoofed it around.

Q: And then you came home and you told your folks what you saw.

A: Yeah, mm hm.

Q: What were their reactions to all this and what was happening?

A: Horrified. Scared, upset. You know what you expect. And again you had to realize at the time I wasn't quite as analytical as. It's easier to analyze looking back than –

Q: Did the other Jews in Leipzig have to wear a star?

A: That came later.

Q: That came later. SO life went on except for these terrible happenings. Before, you went to school. You did a lot of reading.

A: Well particularly I went to this English translator school.

Q: You learned English.

A: Yeah I had all kinds of good friends.

Q: These were non-Jews.

A: These were non-Jews, but these were immersion classes and –

Q: they treated you well. Did you ever experience any anti-Semitism on the street or at the –

A: I'm sure I did but I don't think it registered. Or if it registered, it didn't stick. I mean I'm sure I was called names by other kids. I just can't remember the specifics.

Q: Do you ever remember being frightened at any time.

A: Not really.

Q: Did you know what was happening in the rest of the world? Did you know about the Anschluss when that happened, when Hitler went into Czechoslovakia?

A: Oh yes. As a matter of fact I was politically very astute. Because of my membership in the youth group. No, I mean I think all of us were way ahead in political understanding from the rest of the population.

Q: In your youth group, were they urging you to eventually go to Israel, to –

A: Not eventually. As soon as possible.

Q: And how did they prepare you for that?

A: Well looking back it's all kind of weird, because at the time they told you to go up and go in some farm and learn agriculture to get **hachshava**. And you know looking back good lord I mean who came up with this you know what I'm saying. But at the time it was a solution to a problem.

Q: How to be a good farmer.

A: Yep.

Q: What did you do? Milk cows?

A: No. I dug potatoes. I harvested potatoes and one of the other strange things in all of this mish mash there was, there were some really large Swiss corporations and they owned acres on which they grew stuff. And when I went to Switzerland we volunteered to dig up potatoes for the, for the Swiss chemical companies. These companies, these chemical companies owned farmland. And they actually cultivated them and so we volunteered and we dug up their potatoes for them. In exchange for which we got to live in a Swiss castle.

Q: This was like a summer project, when you went to Switzerland?

A: I guess so.

Q: This is while you're still living in Leipzig that you went to Switzerland.

A: No I just left, I mean l left Leipzig for good.

Q: Oh you had already left. Ok we'll get to that.

A: And I was in Switzerland.

Q: We'll get to that. Let's get up to Kristallnacht. You said that you went to school. You were a member of the youth group and then one night in November there's a knock at the door by your neighbor saying don't go outside tomorrow.

A: Right.

Q: And then tell me what happened. So what happened the next day.

A: Well the next day as I said I took a walk through town and I –

Q: Your parents knew that, that you were leaving? By yourself?

A: Yeah. I stuck my passport in my handbag and I walked. Well.

Q: What did you see?

A: I told you I saw old men with a, turned against the wall.

Q: That was that day.

A: Yeah.

Q: I didn't know that.

A: That was the connection.

Q: That particular day. Anything else? Did you see any burning

01:40:57

A: Well I saw book burning. Heaps of books in the middle of the **Wolodeen** [ph]

Q: Did you see any synagogues being burned?

A: Yeah.

Q: What?

A: The Kalmbach synagogue got set on fire.

Q: And you actually saw that.

A: Oh yes.

Q: And what were the firemen doing? Anything?

A: No. The, the other interesting thing and oddly enough was sort of years later, had a follow up right here in Washington, DC. The librarian from the Folger Theater. His aunt and uncle owned one of the biggest haberdasher firms in Leipzig. And they, they were foreign subjects and so when they set things on fire in Leipzig in the Jewish stores, when they looted and had everything on fire. They protected the foreign owned. They actually had the fire department with their hoses sprinkle down and save the foreign Jewish businesses. And Leipzig had one what they called a high rise. I mean the **Hoch** House. It was ten stories and it was English owned. The fire department protected that. It could not be touched because it was foreign property.

Q: A British Jewish?

A: Mm hm but see it became British rather than Jewish.

Q: I know you were strong. I know you were independent, but what were your reactions seeing your synagogue being burned?

A: Shock, disillusion, sad.

Q: Any fear?

A: I don't think I was afraid. I think what saved me was not being afraid. I think that's what helped me get through it. I was just sort of leading with my chin up front. Maybe I'm too stupid to be afraid.

Q: Did you see any other synagogues being burned or just the Kalmbach?

A: No, I saw them. They set fire to the Forum temple. It was only about two blocks.

Q: And were there crowds on the street watching?

A: I assume. I mean yes there were people, just how closely they watched or whether they were delighted or whether they were appalled, it's been, you know some of these details you don't –

Q: I know. So you come home to your parents and you tell them what was happening.

A: Mm hm. I was a reporter.

Q: You were a reporter. And their response, do you remember what they said. And meanwhile they're trying to get frantically out of Germany?

A: Right.

Q: So this is November 38. Did you go back to school the next day, the next –

A: School was closed.

Q: School was then closed. Permanently? So what was your life like at that point? Were you still able to meet with your youth group?

A: Yeah.

Q: They permitted that?

A: Yeah.

Q: It was permitted.

A: In fact anything that helped get Jews out of Germany was initially permitted. Because initially Hitler wasn't going to kill all the Jews. He was just going to get rid of them.

Q: What did you spend your time doing now that you couldn't go to school?

A: Reading. Did a ferocious amount of reading. Oh and visiting with friends, including non-Jewish friends from the language school.

Q: Who were still good to you and positive?

A: Yeah well the people that went to these immersion –

Q: Were open minded.

A: Most of them were foreigners. So we were all buddy buddies.

Q: And then the next big step was. After leaving, you know how did you, how long did you stay in Leipzig?

A: I came to the States in December of 49.

Q: Ok. Tell me about how you left Germany and how you got out. How the arrangements were made and you –

A: Ok. I started out by being in Switzerland.

Q: Ok, first you're in Leipzig. And then you tell your parents you want to leave or did the whole family go to Switzerland.

A: Well we all went to Switzerland.

Q: The whole family went to Switzerland.

A: Except my parents went back and I stayed.

Q: Oh, ok, but initially.

A: Initially the whole family was in Switzerland. On a, which was a real freak accident because normally one person in the family always had to stay home.

Q: To keep an eye.

A: To make sure.

Q: The family didn't leave.

A: Didn't leave. And so all of a sudden all three of us were in Switzerland. And I hooked up, well we had some relatives in Switzerland who were for the birds.

Q: You were now 16.

A: Mm hm. Anyway to make a long story short.

Q: Let's make a long story long.

A: I kind of got to be an au pair. And I took care, I lived with this young couple in Switzerland.

Q: A Jewish couple?

A: Yeah. In fact I'll never forget them. Their name was Herzog. And they were very nice and I guess I was their au pair. I took care of their, helped with the two kids. And I went to English class every day.

Q: Now this is, when was this. When did you leave?

A: 39.

Q: What part of 39? Early?

A: The week before Kristallnacht.

Q: Kristallnacht was –

A: 38. I'm sorry it was 38.

Q: It was Kristallnacht and then you left it soon after.

A: No I left the day before. I don't know. I left the week of Kristallnacht.

Q: So you all left very quickly after Kristallnacht. Ok. Got to Switzerland.

A: And –

Q: How did your parents decide to go to Switzerland? Cause it was neutral?

A: Yeah. Except I mean my father was totally unrealistic. Hitler's going to last six months and the Germans will know what a bargain. God Almighty. I mean never mind. When I remember, I still get angry. Because there was no excuse for being that much of an ostrich. But anyway, I was in Switzerland, and I sort of worked as an au pair and studied English and made the best of things. And oh there were funny little things. I mean it was such a peculiar time. Like my parents couldn't send me money. You didn't get permission to send money out of Germany anymore. So they would send me pounds and pounds of nail polish which I could sell and that gave me spending money. Cause you know, I was kind of a 16 year old hustler, putting it in modern lingo. But it gave me spending money.

Q: Was it hard for you to say goodbye to your parents?

A: Well I was a runaway.

Q: They wanted you to go back to Germany with them?

A: Yeah. I was on a train with my mother going back to Germany. And when the conductor said all aboard I jumped off. And the train didn't stop until after it crossed the border and there was nothing she could do.

Q: Why did you want to do that?

A: I wasn't about to go back to Germany. No, no ten horses could get me back there.

Q: So this was a surprise to her too?

A: Of course. Well yes and no because when we packed for the trip, she went through my luggage and she said you don't need I don't know some – whatever seasonal clothes I packed was the wrong season. So she knew what I was planning but there wasn't much she could do. And when I jumped off the train and the train moved on that was it. She –

Q: Where were your two sisters when you went to Switzerland. They didn't come with you?

A: Well one was in Israel and one was in France.

Q: By that time?

A: Oh yeah. They were both much older. One was 12 years older. I got a pain. Let me take a little break.

Gail Schwartz: This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Ruth Rappaport. This is track number two and we were talking about your now being in Switzerland. And then you eventually obviously left Switzerland. How did that come about and where did you go? Did someone in the United States sponsor you? Can you tell me a little bit about that.

Ruth Rappaport: Ok my mother's oldest brother sponsored me to come to the States. And he had already sponsored two other brothers. So my mother had three brothers in Seattle, Washington. And that's where I went.

Q: And who was this person who sponsored you, his business and so forth?

A: He was the salmon king. He started the king salmon industry of the United States.

Q: He had enough money to sponsor you?

A: Yep.

Q: Had he sponsored anybody else before you?

A: Well, actually it was kind of cute. There were three brothers. My mother had three brothers. And there were three gay bachelors in South America. And they had themselves a really good time in Argentina. Having fun and dating and traveling and doing all sorts of things. And then two of them came to the United States. They worked their way up from Argentina to British Columbia. They settled in Westminster of all places. Little dumpy, not known for anything place. And they got established there. And by the time I got to Seattle, I had three uncles to live with.

Q: You had said previously that he was quite wealthy.

A: No, as I said he, during the Depression, his certified income was $350,000, he cleared, he paid income tax on $350,000 income. So that is, that was a good bit of change in 1935. And as I say, I would never mention it expect that it's part of the affidavit so it is a matter of record. It's not hearsay.

Q: And his name?

A: Rubinstein.

Q: And his first name?

A: Carl.

Q: So he was the one who sponsored. So you were in Switzerland. You got this sponsorship. And did you see your parents before you left Switzerland. Did you see them again?

A: Yes, I saw them once.

Q: Did you go back to Germany or they came to Switzerland?

A: They came to Switzerland.

Q: And what did they say when they came to Switzerland about what was happening in Germany?

A: Well what everybody else knew. I mean you know the usual. Wasn't anything different.

Q: Why didn't they come to the United States at that time? Because of the quota system.

A: Because of the quota system.

Q: But you were able to get out under the quota system.

A: Yeah well the whole thing was so weird because the United States went by where you were born.

Q: Oh, so since you were born in Leipzig.

A: That was German quota was open.

Q: Even though you had Romanian papers.

A: It didn't matter because –

Q: It's cause where you were born.

A: It was that whole **mishugenah** business of how the United States classified people.

Q: So how did you get to the United States? By boat?

A: Yep.

Q: Do you remember the name of the boat?

A: Yeah. The **Veendam**. In fact it was a delightful trip because the boat had been turned into a one class boat. And 90% of all the passengers were immigrants, Jewish.

Q: Jewish immigrants.

A: German Jews. Polish, I mean, German Jews.

Q: Where did you leave from?

A: Holland. And I don't know, a shuffle between. I sort of shuffled back and forth for a while between Amsterdam and Brussels. There was confusion about boat reservations. The war was on. And so I got kind of trapped and having reservations, cancelling reserve –

Q: Now this is December 39 you are talking about.

A: Yeah.

Q: And the war started September 39 so you're right.

A: So I got caught in that whole wartime mishugenah planning.

Q: But were you handling it yourself or were your –

A: Mm.

Q: You were handling it yourself?

A: As a matter of fact. It had never occurred to me that my uncle from Seattle, Washington would come to New York to look for me. And so when the ship arrived in New York, I was sitting up on deck, dumb, fat and happy, watching all the families reunite. Oh I had a great time because you know husbands and wives are meeting up and parents and children were meeting up. And it was such a lively good scene. People had gotten out of Europe. And they had made it to the United States and everything was sort of happy, happy, happy. And I was sitting up on deck watching it all.
Because I didn't except anybody to look for me. And all of a sudden, in those days we still had these little Western Union boys. With the funny little straps. And here's this little flag coming along. Paging Ruth Rappaport, paging Ruth Rappaport. And finally I realized that was my name up there.
And so I said that's me and so the little Western Union boy, he was dragging this five by five gentleman who turned out to be my uncle. And so my uncle is standing there and saying what in hell is taking you so long.

Q: Had you met him before?

A: Unh.

Q: It was the first time you met him?

A: Had no, the only thing that was funny is that also my father had a brother in New York. So I had an uncle on each side of the family. And while they were looking for me, the two uncles met. And it was sort of sad because the New York uncle wanted me to stay in New York before going out west. And I was so tempted. You know I heard about Broadway. I had heard about New

York. It was the middle of the war and I really, I was dying to stay in New York. But I guess I was a good little kid, in spite of – because I decided they had come to New York and they had been sitting there for six weeks. Waiting for me.
And the only, and they had to leave that day because uncle was involved in a court case in Seattle. And so when it was a question of immediately going to Seattle, or seeing New York, I decided, if he can wait for me for six weeks, he deserved to have me with him. And let's face it. That was in the day of the Pullman. We had two drawing rooms. Pardon me. I had my own bedroom.

Q: You went first class?

A: We went first class. Being in the salmon business, he shipped all his salmons with the railroads so he was a preferred railroad –

Q: Customer.

A: VIP. Person. And oh boy was it elegant. I mean the waiters with their white gloves. Serving all meals. And the only thing, I nearly died on that trip. Going west. Hear of **Finamint**. Looked like Wrigley's mint.

Q: It was chewing gum

A: Yeah, except it was a whatchamacallit. Make it go.

Q: Oh a laxative.

A: It was a laxative. And my aunt that poor lady. She had heard about you know the poor steerage passengers from Europe. And how everybody had to straighten out their stomach. She pulled out a package of Finamints. And all the way from New York to Seattle, every hour I got a Finamint. I nearly died.

Now my uncle and I don't know if this had to do with **kashrut** or money but the biggest thing he could do for you is buy you an ice cream cone. I don't think he ever ate ice cream when he was a kid. I don't know if it wasn't kosher. In that little village. Or I don't know why he never had ice cream. But you know he gave you a hundred dollars as a present, That was nothing. But he bought you the ice cream snack, he was really in love with you. He really loved you. And every time the damned train stopped, I got an ice cream cone. I nearly died. I spent the entire trip.

Q: You know where.

A: In the bathroom. As I said, luckily we had private accommodations. But oh what a trip.

Q: So you finally got yourself across country. Was it hard to say goodbye to your parents.

A: Yeah. Except of course at the time, I hoped they would come. You know. It would have been a lot harder had I known what was coming.

Q: So you get out to Seattle. And you go to school or you lived with your uncle.

A: Mm hm.

Q: And how was he related to, how was he related to Helena Rubinstein?

A: First cousins.

Q: They were first cousins. Their fathers were brothers.

A: Yeah. Fathers, yeah. By the way there's kind of a cute story about them. Helena was in Seattle and visited my uncle at one point. And asked him what business he was in. And he said in the salmon business. And she said oh, kind of smelly. And he looked straight at her and said so's yours.

Q: You went to school in Seattle? High school? And were you accepted? Did the other kids accept you?

A: Oh yes.

Q: Did you speak English with an accent or did you speak it –

A: I spoke with a British accent.

Q: With a British accent, ok.

A: I spoke the king's English. I was going half and half.

Q: They accepted you, and the teachers. So there was no problem.

A: Oh I had a real, real easy, easy, easy time.

Q: Was it a public high school?

A: Yeah. And not only that. But I was accepted at the university and they waived all English requirements for me.

Q: Was this the University of Washington in Seattle?

A: Yes. Didn't have to take a single required English course.

Q: You made friends easily? I assume.

A: Mm hm

Q: And then you graduated from –

A: Eventually the University of California at Berkeley. Oh I wasn't going to get stuck in Seattle.

Q: You changed schools?

A: Yeah.

Q: And went to Berkeley? And what did you major in?

A: Sociology.

Q: And then what happened? During that time were you in contact with your parents? At all?

A: During the war there were maybe one or two like 25 word like cross exchanges. That was it. There was no way of –

Q: What did happen to your parents?

A: What happened to the rest of them. My mother, no my mother eventually died in Theresienstadt. And my father in Auschwitz.

Q: And you found this out later?

A: Yes, through the Red Cross.

Q: Through the Red Cross after the war. So you got these, a couple of these short messages and that was it.

A: That was. And I don't remember if I mentioned this earlier. We had been in touch with a bunch of lawyers and they had purchased Cuban visas. Did I tell you that? Oh they had been in touch with some lawyers in Washington, DC. In fact the company is still going. Dickstein. And

we had made arrangements and we had paid $10,000 for them to try and get Cuban visas, which was legal you know you could. You could do it legally. And if it hadn't been for December seventh, my parents would have been in Cuba. And it was that damned December seventh that killed it all. And in fact it was interesting because we paid $10,000 to make these arrangements and they, they offered the money back saying they could do nothing.

Q: The lawyers that offered the money back?

A: Yeah and so we just, the Dickstein company. And so we just decided if there, they don't want to take the money, there's no point in pushing. If they say the money doesn't help any, what's the point of. You might as well, you know if lawyers give you back the money because they can't help you, there's no point pushing money on them.

Q: There is no hope.

A: It was sort of unfortunate how, the timing.

Q: It must have been devastating for what a 16, 17, 18 year old daughter.

A: Obviously but.

Q: You finished from Berkeley and then what did you do? Did you stay out west?

A: I went overseas.

Q: And you went overseas.

A: I lived overseas for 12 years.

Q: So you stayed in California til the end of the war and then you went overseas. Where did you go?

A: Southeast Asia. And Japan. And Vietnam.

Q: Who were you working for?

A: Department of Defense.

Q: When did you start working for them?

A: I'm not sure I remember the dates but I guess must have been, ok I quit in 1970 so figure 12 years back.

Q: 12 years back. 58?

A: Yeah. I started out in Okinawa. Oh there was a connection. I studied oriental societies.

Q: In college?

A: Yeah as my sociology minor was oriental societies. And the head, the head of all Air Force libraries in the world met me at a cocktail party. And the joke has been he sent me to Okinawa to sober me up. Because he fed me too many martinis and he stuck me on an airplane and shipped me overseas. To make a long story short, I started out in Okinawa and then I went to Taipei and then I went to Vietnam and I worked for the Department of Defense as a librarian for 12 years.

Q: Between the end of the war and 58, do you know what you were doing before you went over? You had mentioned something about –

A: I went to Vietnam on the first of January 1960.

Q: And you had once mentioned something about being an editor of a Jewish newspaper, the Jewish –

A: The Jewish Transcript in Seattle. At the time it was a subscription paper. At this, today, it's part of the UJA paper. I mean it's the official UJA.

Q: Did you work with the Zionist Emergency Council.

A: Yes.

Q: What did you do for them?

A: Ok. When the United, in November what 79. United Nations passed the partition plan.

Q: 47.

A: I mean 47. And I was working in San Francisco with Bartley Crum who was the American member of the UNSCOP, the United Nations Palestine Commission had one American. And that was Bartley Crum in San Francisco.

Q: So this is what you were doing after college?

A: And I, well because of my work on the Jewish Transcript, San Francisco took, came to Seattle and fetched me and made me come to work in San Francisco. And they had opened a brand new office called the Zionist Emergency Council. And I was the office manager. And in fact I'm really proud of my time there. Because one of the things I did that nobody else had done before me to my knowledge was job sharing. And I had hired two college kids who were roommates and one of them worked Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and the other one worked Tuesday and Thursdays. And it worked out awfully well. Cause it was an early job sharing experiment before you even heard the term.

Q: You worked for them and then you went on to the Department of Defense. When did you become a citizen?

A: Oh way back earlier. I mean after five years in country.

Q: Tell me what that was like. Do you remember becoming a citizen?

A: Yeah it was very simple. My uncle was a friend of the judge's and we just went to the judge's chambers and I swear. Took five minutes and I was a citizen.

Q: Did you feel differently at that point?

A: No. I felt at home from the day I got there.

Q: Really cause first of all you were so fluent in English.

A: I was fluent in English. I had good friends. And I was sort of generally accepted. One thing that was kind of a bit odd. At that time German subjects living in the states were under curfew hm.

Q: So you're in school and you were from Germany so –

A: Yeah but I had a Romanian passport and I had an uncle who knew judges. But some of my German, German Jewish college friends all had to be home at 8:00 at night. I mean it was sort of bizarre because here we're German Jewish refugees.

Q: Considered just German.

A: Being treated as German subjects and punished. I mean sometimes looking back at our own legal manipulations you wonder, what, what in the hell were we doing. No really, it was all the good about the United States. You know we had some awfully strange –

Q: Where did you get your librarian's training?

A: University of California.

Q: So then you traveled all over the far east you said.

A: Yeah.

Q: Had you been back to Germany at that time?

A: I didn't go back to Germany for years and years and years. And I never wanted to go back to Germany. And actually I had an American friend who was a school counselor for the American dependent school system in Germany. She was living in Frankfurt. And she insisted I come and visit. And so finally one day I decided I would visit her because I discovered Frankfurt was a good place to visit. There's nothing to do in Frankfurt except have coffee at a coffee house once and that takes care of Frankfurt.
But from Frankfurt there are a million, it's a major railroad center. And I went down to the, every morning I went down to the railroad station and I checked where the next train was going to. And if it got to an interesting city or place in one and a half hours, I'd get on it. And spend the day at like **Rothenburg** or **Baden-Württemberg** or up, up and down the Rhine river. On river boats. And so I'd spend the day sight-seeing. And depending how my friend Ellis felt, if she was in the mood, we'd meet up and go out for dinner together. Or else I'd go home and have dinner with her at home. And so –

Q: What was it like to come back to Germany?

A: I went back with a horrendous amount of reluctance. I didn't think I was ever going to go back. And don't forget all the years Leipzig was East Germany, so I couldn't have gone to Leipzig anyway. I went back under really duress, by a friend.
However, it was Easter vacation and we took her automobile and we put 2000 miles on the car during the Danube trip and then the Vienna Woods trip. We went to Budapest, via Vienna and

came back through the **Durnow**, through the Danube riverbed. And we put 2000 miles on the car in nine days, never went to sleep. But what a trip.

Q: Was this in the 1990s.

A: 80s.

Q: In the 1980s.

A: And oh I don't know. Years are kind of merging a little. But –

Q: You retired from the Department of Defense. And traveling all over the far east and then lived in Washington from then on.

A: Mm hm.

Q: And did you work for any other group after the Defense Department? No.

A: I can't believe it. I've been retired 19 years and it seems like a year. In fact I think this is more interesting and I had retired. I think what's really interesting is that all my coworkers are still showing up here, picking my brains. At least twice a month, they come and have lunch here and they pick my brains about. To begin with they still had lots of employees I know. And so when they have a, and they have supervisory problems, please you know this kid. What do you think I ought to do with Aaron. He's just obstreperous.

Q: Are you involved in any volunteer work? Are you, in the community? I hear that you are, that's why I'm asking.

A: A little bit.

Q: Through the past years you were active on Capitol Hill.

A: I'm active, oh Capitol Hill village. Are you familiar with that or not? That I think you might kind of check out. And if you don't know it, I think you should meet Gail Cohn. She is the executive director. And she is quite a personality.

Q: So you're doing community, you're active in the community. Can we talk now about your thoughts and your ideas about what you went through. Do you feel very German?

A: Hell no. I never felt German. I was Romanian.

Q: OK, do you feel Romanian?

A: No. I mean you know I'm sort of in between and betwixt. I had a passport from a country I barely knew. I lived in a country where I didn't have a passport. I mean I was just kind of floating.

Q: Do you think in English or –

A: Oh yes. Now if I want to say, if I switch to German, I have to really push a button. I really have to make a switch and force my -- I mean I can think in German but it's a conscious effort.

Q: What are your feelings about Germany? Today?

A: (pause) I'll tell you one little story which I think was interesting. When I went traveling with my friend Ellis, since she doesn't speak a word of German, and I do. I was always in charge of the arrangements. And the Germans are very polite. And when we said and I, you know I would order the meal in German. And invariably they wouldn't say who are you or where are you from or what is your background. What I was getting was, oh you as, for an American you are speaking in excellent German. Now this is a whole bunch of bullshit because I do not speak excellent German. I speak a teenage German. I speak a slang German. Well not really, semi

slang. And it was the German way of trying to find out who, what I am, without being too inquisitive was this line of your German for an American is so good. Da, da, da, da, da.
And as I say it's just a slangy colloquial every day teenage German that I speak but that was their way of trying to place me. And what was interesting, among all those travels we did, there was one hotel that was closed that we needed a place to stay. And the hotel people gave us a key to the whole hotel and let us stay in it.
I mean it was really sort of phenomenal the kind of nice experiences we had when we went traveling. And it all seemed to have something to do with, as I said, people recognizing that they were too polite to do too much fishing but they knew there was a story. And so without being too obviously curious they accepted the story.

Q: Did you ever go back to Leipzig?

A: No.

Q: Do you want to go?

A: Not really. It's also, I mean I've outgrown Leipzig.

Q: I know this is painful, but can you tell me how, I know you said you found out through the Red Cross about what happened to your parents. How did you go about that? You contacted them.

A: Yeah and they eventually tracked.

Q: And let you know in writing what happened.

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you remember approximately when that was. In the late 40s

A: (whispering) Oh I don't remember.

Q: You don't remember. What was your reaction during the Eichmann trial?

A: (pause) I think I had a sense of relief when the thing was finally over. It just got to be tedious. It went on and on and on and on.

Q: Did you watch any of it?

A: Some of it, I guess.

Q: Any special meaning to it for you or not?

A: It was just another part of the whole big mess. I mean I think that whole Nazi period is just sort of it's one big mess in my mind. And I really, I guess I don't think I've ever really thought I wanted to sit down and isolate different components.

Q: Have you been to the Holocaust Museum here in Washington?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: What kind of feeling do you have when you walk in there? Do you have an emotional connection or –

A: Ok. Personally, I like visiting the Yad Vashem. That's where I belong.

Q: Because –

A: I can identify with the lay out. I can identify with the righteous Christians. I can, I have all kinds of linkage to it. I think the Holocaust Museum is a truly great educational institution. But it's not my connection to the Holocaust.

Q: Is it because Yad Vashem is in Israel?

A: In part. And because of the way it's laid out. And, and I don't think, I haven't told you. I had a very sort of interesting experience when I was in Switzerland. In order to get out of Germany I, in order to get out of Europe, to the States. I couldn't go through Italy because whatever, no transportation and this and that. And so the only way to go was by way of Holland. But in order to get to Holland I had to go back through Germany because whoever was controlling visas hadn't made a peace treaty yet and I couldn't get – the only way I could get out of Europe was by backtracking.
And (pause) wait a minute. This was going to go somewhere.

Q: You're talking about trying to get out

A: And I kind of had a kind of a bit of a back and forth shuttle between Holland and it took some doing. I finally got out by leaving Europe in a strange little border town called **Sansival** [ph] or **Sumerwal** [ph] or it was a strange sounding name. And the only thing on that trip leaving Europe is I did get to see the **Monica** [ph] on peace in Brussels on the way out. That was one compensation for the weird travel I had to do. But it was a bad time to come to the States because the war was on.

Q: But we hadn't gone to war yet. The United States hadn't gone to war yet.

A: No but Europe was –

Q : Europe was at war, right. To get out.

A: And there was fighting in the channel. And travel was not easy. And I had to get out.

Q: And you were all of 16. Just amazing. All five feet of you.

A: Mm hm.

Q: Did you ever think this is just too hard for me?

A: Hell no, no. I –

Q: You were assertive as you said in the beginning.

A: Yeah and not only that. Challenges were to be met. It's just that simple. Goody, one more step to take.

Q: You are that way because of the way you were raised? Or just because of who you are? Did your parents raise you to be that way.

A: No, I was a very timid child. I was very shy. I was very quiet. I was smart.

Q: So what precipitated the change?

A: The events and things that happened. Having to meet what came along. No, I mean my whole behavior is strictly existential. Meet what comes.

Q: Are you more religious because of what you went through, less religious.

A: I'm not at all religious. I had really strong Jewish identity. I am not religious. What little, I mean I go to services off and on because it's the thing to do, but not because I'm praying.

Q: Is it more for the sense of community?

A: Yeah, exactly. I mean I, you know I'm very much a part of the Capital Hill **Havurah**. That's my interest and that's my sphere of influence. And that's where I participate. And that's where I put my mouth. And that's where I put my money.

Q: Did you, speaking about where you put your mouth and your money, during the civil rights era here in the United States because you obviously knew very well what happened in Europe when civil rights were being taken away, were you active here. Or were you living abroad at the time? In the 60s and 70s?

A: About the only, the only part of that I feel I can kind of answer readily is I just lost my oldest dearest black friend. She just died. She had a mysterious infection and they still don't know what she died of. But the first thing that happened when I came to Seattle, Washington, I heard about fair housing. And I don't think I'd been in Seattle more than a month and I trooped off to the state capital demonstrating for fair housing. And so that was my, that was the beginning of my endeavors. And my friend, Felicia who is my oldest closest black friend, her son refers to me as his home mama and he still comes and visits. And she has two sons. And they're both my friends. And they consider me their, ersatz mama. Both of them eminently successful. In their own endeavors. One is a computer security big shot.

Q: What are your thoughts about Israel? Have you been there many times?

A: OK I spent oh dear god. I spent the siege of Jerusalem in Jerusalem. I fought the battle of Ben Yehuda street.

Q: So you were living there at the time?

A: Yep.

Q: What was your role there?

A: I manned the Spandau machine gun. I did. On my roof. I fed –

Q: Were you there when the UN voted the partition in 47.

A: No, I was in San Francisco. I was dancing the hora outside the opera house.

Q: And the partition plan. And then you went over to, when did you go to –

A: On the first of January 1948.

Q: You decided to go to Palestine.

A: Mm hm. I was an advance party of one.

Q: Working for.

A: The Zionist Emergency Council.

Q: Oh I see. You talked about that. You went over to do that. To open an office or –

A: No to prepare the way for VIP. Oh we were very clever. They were going to have all the rich San Francisco Jews go on a mission. Now they call them missions. We were going to have all the people who gave money and time to work towards partition. We were going to have this publicity flight, DP, destination Palestine. Oh weren't we clever. And so I was going to be the advance party of one. And I was dispatched. And when I got there I sent a telegram saying war broke out. Stay home. And at that time I was still connected to the Seattle publication. And the San Francisco Emanuel Bulletin put me on their contributor list. So they took stories from me.

Q: You wrote stories from –

A: Israel.

Q: From Israel. And so you were there during the war of independence.

A: Yeah.

Q: You were there when the state, when Ben Gurion declared the state.

A: Yep. As a matter of fact I have a very nice letter, I just can't find it. The government of Israel finally sent me this piece of parchment thanking me for my assistance in establishing the state of Israel. But I can't find it. Don't know what in the hell I did with it.

Q: Tell me about your experience during the war of independence

A: The what?

Q: Tell me your experience during the war. You said you were on a rooftop

A: Yeah. I was living in the tallest house on Ben Yehuda street in Jerusalem. And we had a Spandau machine gun on the top. And we trained it to the YMCA and we exchanged fire.

Q: And you actually fired it?

A: Of course.

Q: How did you know how to do it?

A: Well somebody showed me. And you know people sort of sometimes say ok I seem to be war prone. And you know I frequently get this business of aren't you scared. And you know I'm not scared. You know why. I pretend I'm a spectator. I'm not in this war. I'm watching this war. And that's it, gets me off the hook. I don't have to worry.

Q: But you did not feel your life was in danger?

A: No, I always felt perfectly secure, even when the damn Blitz, moving that tank through town and pointing guns at the Americans or the Israelis. That's another whole chapter the British exit of unh. You know 20th century history has been pretty ugly.

Q: How long did you stay in Israel?

A: Until July 1950.

Q: Working as a correspondent.

A: I was in the foreign press office. And I helped establish the Israel photographic archives. Never mind. I get side tracked into things.

Q: These were government sponsored offices.

A: Yeah. **Dishcat Internat Hutz** [ph] foreign press service

Q: So you were fluent in Hebrew obviously.

A: No. Foreign press service worked in English.

Q: By living there did you become fluent?

A: Well the Israel government sent a professor to my office every morning and I had one hour Hebrew instruction but this didn't take too well. This nice little rotund man showed up one morning. And I said what can I do for you and he said no you're not doing for me. I'm doing for you. I'm your Hebrew teacher. Although had somebody put me on the right track, I could have learned a hell of a lot more Hebrew, a hell of a lot faster than what I did. Because once you play around with the three root characters it becomes a very simple, simply structured language. And I almost feel like I could go in front of the computer and spend two months and learn Hebrew now.

Q: Did you meet any of the government leaders in Israel?

A: Well I went to parties with **Moshe Sharet** and in fact –

Q: Did you meet Golda Meir?

A: Oh Golda and I are old friends. In fact this was very funny because when I went to – oh. I took Golda to the top of the Mark Hopkins for a drink once.

Q: This is much later obviously.

A: No this is earlier. Golda was in the states on some fundraising. And I invited her for a drink to the Mark Hopkins hotel in San Francisco because of the view. And I guess she was forever grateful that somebody did such a nice thing for her. And at the time, we had a drink at the Mark Hopkins in San Francisco, Golda gave me a dirty look and she said, the trouble is people like you don't' come to Israel. You're the kind of person we need. To get things going. To get things done, to get things accomplished. But no you raise money to send other people. And them was fighting words. And I said don't bet on it. Next thing I'm sitting in Golda's office and said, in Tel Aviv and I'm saying I would like to join the army. And she said what's the matter with you? Why the army. And I said because when working in the kitchen I'll learn Hebrew and she said no, if you're working in the kitchen you'll be learning how to peel potatoes. She was a very practical lady you know. She had her feet firmly on the ground. And so I said well if it's not the kitchen.

Q: What else can I do?

A: What else can I do? And so she put me down at the foreign press office. She said with your command of English and your knowledge of newspaper work and publicity, and that's when I got busy and I did we did pack, information packets each month. To Anglo language consulates. And I did the selection of all the pictures and the story line. I wrote the features. But I think

looking back, I didn't initiate all that much. I just never let an opportunity slip. I mean I was kind of Johnny on the spot. And I guess it was always sort of you know well what if goes wrong. so what. And I just didn't worry about results too much.

But one of my, I guess one of the things that was sort of pleasing to me is among placing photographs for publication we had a Canadian tank commander who was a **Machal** volunteer and I got his picture into Life magazine. And I thought that was an accomplishment. And I think that my biggest contribution to this whole English publicity bit was that I took a very firm stand and I said the pick and shovel days are over. Israel needs big time money to get off the ground. You don't get big time money and support of paving a road with a pick and ax. And so I said get away from this dumb publicity of the pioneer who does everything and get this, the people who are starting a state.

And so all my publicity was geared to income producing like I did a wonderful series on **Tapu Hai Za'hav** [ph], the Golden Apples. I mean oranges. But orange export could to for the economy.

Q: The Jaffa oranges?

A: Yeah and so I got into that kind of thing for the English press and that was kind of fun. And also what it meant was that I attended the first of everything. The first **Yama**, the first holiday of this, the first military parade, the first airplane show. I got to go to all of those. And that was kind of rewarding. It lasted for one year everything was a first and that was kind of great fun.

Q: Did you have any contact with Holocaust survivors in Israel at the time?

A: Not specifically. In fact I'm not sure I wasn't avoiding it but I wasn't trailing the Holocaust. I was future oriented, not backwards. What happened, happened.

Q: Do you think it could happen again?

A: (pause) Yes. Unfortunately, yes. Again it's less apt to happen now. We have more competition. The other groups who also have problems. The competing minorities. But anti-

Semitism is not dead. Sorry about that. And anybody who says it can't happen here, I have news for you. It can happen anywhere any time. You hope and pray it won't. But I would not bet that there won't be another –

Q: Is there anything you would like to add, anything you'd like to say that you haven't said.

A: I don't know.

Q: Extraordinary life you've had.

A: I think I'm done.

Q: I love what you said when you said your volunteering tendencies came from giving out toothbrushes. To the Jews in the train car. So you've continued volunteering. Do you think a lot about those days now. You don't

A: No. I told you. I'm forward oriented. I mean what's the point. Most of what's happened is recorded by now. We have a lasting, we have lasting documentary evidence. And just, no I look forward, not backwards.

Q: Thank you for looking a little bit backwards. For history.

A:You know what I'm saying. And I still think it's kind of funny that all of this started with the Poles being shipped out of Germany.

Q: Have you ever been to Poland?

A: Yeah. Not to stay but passing through and short term.

Q: Did you go to Auschwitz?

A: No.

Q: Did you ever go to Theresienstadt?

A: No. I went to one concentration camp in Austria. Forgot the name now.

Q: Mauthausen?

A: Yeah. But there's just been too much in pictures and pictorials. I mean no. I really try not to relive the past. I think one of the things that's kind of ironic. I'm sort of waiting to see how all of this is going to play is I think the one thing that our president is doing right is the one thing he's hurt by. Because as he says, he's not a black president, he's a president who is black. And I think the blacks have it in for him because he won't be a black president. And I think that's too unfortunate. And I'm sort of afraid that he may be a one term – kind of too sad because it's his own folks who turn against him. I think the white population is much more charitable in terms of accepting him. I think the blacks are disappointed because he isn't playing to the blacks. It's unfortunate because I say that's the one thing he is doing. We'll see what happens but I'm looking a little, the political scene looks a little dismal right now.

Q: You've lived through very dismal times in your youth.

A: Well it's been an interesting period.

Q: Well, thank you so much for doing this interview. This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Ruth Rappaport.

(end)