

Ruth Gallagher

Interviewer: If I ask you a question that you don't want to answer, don't hesitate to say no. If you'd like us to turn off the tape, don't hesitate to ask, we will be happy to do that. You know we are here to be as agreeable as we possibly can. Okay I'm speaking today with Ruth Gallagher and Mrs. Gallagher was born in Berlin in the 1920s and she came to America with her husband and

Gallagher: No

Interviewer: No? I'm sorry.

Gallagher: I came here with my parents and my twin.

Interviewer: Okay but you met your husband here?

Gallagher: Yes

Interviewer: Alright

Gallagher: Much later.

Interviewer: Much later, alright. So Mrs. Gallagher you were saying your family lived in for a while in _____ but that your father understood perfectly well that when Hitler came to power that because his

Gallagher: He was Jewish.

Interviewer: Because he was Jewish that he could not stay in his current position. I just read a book by someone who was a teacher and he wasn't Jewish but he was Catholic and he was a member of the Central Party and he had the same experience. He was told you have to leave your job because you are not, because you don't subscribe to our faith in fact.

Gallagher: My parents were Quakers.

Interviewer: They were Quakers. So he couldn't work in that fashion but could he practice as a doctor?

Gallagher: He did.

Interviewer: And what was his specialty?

Gallagher: He was a general physician.

Interviewer: Okay and do you know where he had trained to be a doctor?

Gallagher: No, all I know is he was in World War I and was shelled and somewhere along the way he was trained to be a physician. Physician training was not like it is now I don't think.

Interviewer: So would you estimate that he was born sometime say between 1890 and 1900?

Gallagher: I should say.

Interviewer: Okay somewhere in that general era. Was he, it sounds as if he was politically interested.

Gallagher: He was a socialist. He believed in people and doing for people.

Interviewer: So this would have been the social democratic party?

Gallagher: Yes

Interviewer: You were telling me earlier that when Hitler came to power after the burning of Reichstag in 1933 that you were sent to Czechoslovakia to live with your grandparents. And the thinking was that you would be safe away from what was happening in Berlin. And you lived there for about two years is that correct?

Gallagher: Right

Interviewer: And you learned Czech while you were there. I don't suppose you have much opportunity to speak Czech do you?

Gallagher: No and it is in my opinion a very difficult language.

Interviewer: I've heard it's a difficult language as a matter of fact. I've heard it's a difficult language to learn. That's my impression too. When you came back to Berlin you said your parents were living in an apartment above a bar and it was somewhere not far from _____. Probably in Charlottenburg and when did you go to school? When did you start to school in the 1930s?

Gallagher: I couldn't tell you what school because I went to many schools because I flunked them all. I went from one school to the other. My father was very much ashamed of me because I had dyslexia and I couldn't learn to read and so as soon as I failed he would take me out of school and put me in another school.

Interviewer: Of course back then this wasn't properly diagnosed as a

Gallagher: Not at all, I was just stupid. My brother on the other hand was very bright and so the difference was huge. He was very nice he read to me everything and I would absorb it that way.

Interviewer: How long did your father remain in Berlin working as a doctor in the 1930s?

Gallagher: It must have been close to the 1940s because _____ sought him out and said I want you to be my physician but I don't want anybody to know about it because the German physicians are not trained now to be physicians. And I want someone who is good. So he was his physician unbeknownst to anyone and until I think it was a year before they left and then they stayed hidden for about a year.

Interviewer: I know that in Germany in the 1930s Jewish doctors had the reputation of being the best doctors and yet they were excluded in many cases because of their faith, because of their background. Do you have any idea how _____ met your father?

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Gallagher: No idea, no idea I don't know how any of this came about. All I know is that in spite of that my father was tortured several times just like everybody else. You know they came at night the Nazi's came at night and hauled him down to the street and tortured him.

Interviewer: Do you remember the racial laws the Nuremberg racial laws from 1935?

Gallagher: No what would I, I was a kid.

Interviewer: Well there was a reason that you might and that is that these were the laws that mandated that Jews were expected to carry the

Gallagher: Yellow

Interviewer: Yeah exactly the yellow star.

Gallagher: Yeah we carried the yellow.

Interviewer: And but was your mother Jewish also or of Jewish ancestry?

Gallagher: Absolutely

Interviewer: Okay so

Gallagher: And we had a maid and she reported everything that we spoke in the house. So life was interesting and stressful.

Interviewer: I'm sure it was.

Gallagher: Even for kids.

Interviewer: I'm sure it was. You must have known people who left Germany at this time.

Gallagher: Or were killed which is more likely.

Interviewer: Which is more likely.

Gallagher: Any friends I made were either deported or killed.

Interviewer: Another factor of these Nuremberg laws the racial laws of the Nuremberg time is you weren't supposed to go into a public park, you weren't supposed to go into cinemas, and you weren't supposed to go into public schools. Do you recall any of that?

Gallagher: All I know is we stayed home except for going to school we stayed home.

Interviewer: And most of the schools by the late 30's anyway were schools reserved for Jewish children. Was that the kind of school that you went to?

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Gallagher: I doubt it. My all I know is my brother who was an A student got all D's so he couldn't have gone to one of those schools.

Interviewer: Was he working on a nobitorul? Was he planning to do a _____ degree?

Gallagher: The gymnasium he had to do I did for him. I just dressed like him and did it because he had a bad heart. My father didn't allow that. But he couldn't do it because he got out of breath so I dressed like him and did it for him.

Interviewer: And you go away with it?

Gallagher: Yes

Interviewer: Well good for you. Did your parents

Gallagher: He was my twin that's way, we looked alike. We looked alike for a long time until we were about 14 and then he grew up.

Interviewer: Did you're parents talk about these kinds of issues around that dinner table? Did you

Gallagher: We had a maid, we did not talk.

Interviewer: You didn't talk about these things when she was around?

Gallagher: No

Interviewer: That makes sense that makes sense. When she was gone did you talk about these things?

Gallagher: We didn't, she wasn't gone.

Interviewer: She was there all the whole time.

Gallagher: Yes

Interviewer: I know the Gestapo had paid informants to do things like this to make sure

Gallagher: It was for their benefit.

Interviewer: It was for their benefit for the benefit of the Gestapo?

Gallagher: Yes

Interviewer: Yes of course. When you said your family came here do you know any of the circumstances under which they came here? In other words

Gallagher: Yes my father applied for a number to first he was going to go to Madagascar and when he finally I mean he was a German out and out and Germany was what mattered to him. Not to my mother but to him. And he finally decided that we had to leave and he applied for a number. In the meantime

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my mother's blood pressure was so low that the heat of Madagascar would have killed her. So they decided to go to America and they had to wait for the number. In the meantime was lady, he was part of the United Nations, and there was a lady from England also a physician and she offered to take my brother for a summer and send him to the University of Cambridge, Cambridge University. And he loved it because he could learn free it was free learn it was pure heaven. And he didn't want to come back but he had to come back. When he came back he said I don't want to stay here in Germany I can't learn I can't do anything. And but he wanted me to go with him and we were very close my brother and I obviously. And so he went and sat in the consultant for 48 hours he was very small he was an eleven year old boy. And he just sat there and finally they took notice of him and eventually gave him a visa for me. The lady who had taken care of him that summer said she would take care of him and eventually said she would also take me on in spite of my stupidity. And so we went my brother and I left in must have been the end of 30's beginning of 40s.

Interviewer: Well one way you can date this is of course Cristiano had Cristiano taken place already?

Gallagher: I know it was around but I couldn't tell you.

Interviewer: Well Cristiano was November 1938.

Gallagher: Oh yeah it had taken place I remember the burning books.

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Interviewer: Then this would have been 39.

Gallagher: Yeah it was after that. We left my brother and I left my parents stayed. They had somebody pack some of the stuff the furniture old furniture things like that and then disappeared with friends. In the meantime I don't think they got my father during that time because he was hidden and my mother. But before we left a few times when my brother came home from school he was beaten and he could not run well he didn't run but became totally blue because of his bad heart. Which was absolutely my father never recognized that because the man at that time was a boy should be like his father strong and all that. He survived that my brother I was raped a few times coming home from school and you know the usual things that happen to kids that were not in uniform.

Interviewer: Did you know about the by uniform you mean Hitlerubans?

Gallagher: Yes Hitler uniform.

Interviewer: And the _____ because they had uniforms too of course you couldn't have joined either.

Gallagher: We didn't want to join.

Interviewer: Of course not. Did you see you said you saw books being burned at Cristiano?

Gallagher: It was terrible people being abused and really badly it was terrible. And books being burned just I think the when I was a little kid and I saw the ___ start fire my father got us up to look at that and say there's going to be some huge changes now. And of course everybody had to listen to the Hitler's peaches all through the years. And we also had to stand out on the street and raise our right arm everybody had to. And you know the lack of freedom only we didn't call it that. It just and for a while I

think people ate better but only for a while. Because by the time my brother and I left, I know our dog became dinner somewhere.

Interviewer: Well he did I mean Germany was in a terrible economic state.

Gallagher: Absolutely

Interviewer: In 1933 and Hitler made the situation better.

Gallagher: For a while

Interviewer: For a while that's right for a while. I mean building the autobahn building up the armaments industry the _____. Sure things would have improved.

Gallagher: But only for a while and then once people started leaving, the men started leaving, you know it was it was not a great time for anybody.

Interviewer: Okay so you went with your brother to England and where did you live in Cambridge?

Gallagher: No

Interviewer: Where did you live?

Gallagher: This very nice lady lived in Sheffield it's almost towards the northern path.

Interviewer: I know where Sheffield is yes and industrial town.

Gallagher: And she sent my brother to a school boarding school in the north where it was very hilly. And he couldn't take it after a while because of going up and down hills. But I had to learn English because when I was in school the teacher tried to teach, in Germany, the teacher tried to teach me to draw in English and kept on beating me over my hand with a ruler so I never learned English. And but once I got to England I had to learn like somebody would say this is a table.

Interviewer: Of course that's right there's a chair show you that's the way to do it.

Gallagher: I learned English in six weeks and she sent me to a boarding school in northern England it was very nice. And eventually my brother came there too and people were very kind, that's where I learned to read. Somebody a couple of teachers took pains to teach me the rootaments of math which I still don't have too much of and English to read.

Interviewer: Alright you were in England in 1939

Gallagher: Forty I think it was forty.

Interviewer: Was it 40 by then? What about your parents how did they make their escape?

Gallagher: I think they just went on a train and came over to England and waited for their number. And the Quakers gave them an apartment in London and they lived there. We saw them one summer for a short time.

Interviewer: And had they learned to speak English yet?

Gallagher: Oh yeah. My mother listened to when we were in America she listened to soap opera so she would learn English she said. And she spoke good English then.

Interviewer: How long did the four of you stay in England then before you came to America?

Gallagher: A couple years.

Interviewer: Couple years and when you came to America what was your destination? Where did you land?

Gallagher: We landed in New York and my father went to Mississippi where he was promised a job as a physician. He decided that it would be better if he got a license in America. So he went to Chicago to a hospital and became an intern and then took his state boards and then practiced in Chicago as a physician.

Interviewer: Could that have been Rush? Rush Hospital?

Gallagher: No can't remember.

Interviewer: So did you grow up in Chicago then?

Gallagher: No, my brother and I went to boarding school first we went to a Quaker Camp it was supposed to give us the interim between all of this and acclimate to the United States. And acclimating to the United States is not the easiest thing in the world.

Interviewer: No it's not that's right.

Gallagher: And then we went to a boarding school in Barneswood Ohio. It was a Quaker boarding school a strict Quaker boarding school. And my brother stayed one year and had a four year scholarship to University of Wisconsin. And I stayed two years because my English wasn't so good and when I took an exam IQ exam was 90. And so I stayed another year it also gave me a chance to read a book a day. By that time I could read and catch up what I didn't know. Then I had a scholarship in a Quaker college and my father would not allow it because he said I was too stupid to go to college.

Interviewer: It's unfortunate that your father did not let go of his prejudices.

Gallagher: Oh he never did in his whole life. Even when I got my master's degree he would not acknowledge that I did.

Interviewer: That's very sad, that's very unfortunate.

Gallagher: It didn't matter anymore by that time. We didn't live with our parents so it wasn't pain.

Interviewer: Oh I understand. Did you like England when you got there?

Gallagher: Oh I loved England.

Interviewer: What was it about England that you particularly liked?

Gallagher: First of all you know it was a time when teachers were very kind to both my brother and I. We both could learn and people were just nice. We could play tennis I could play tennis and hockey and all the things I liked to do. And my brother seemed to be happy because he didn't have to do things that he couldn't do. They were going to send him to Oxford my brother said no. It was just as well because of the war. But and we didn't really want to be separated we were separated later but not at that time.

Interviewer: And dare I ask what were your impressions of America when you got here?

Gallagher: You know there was a senator who gave us a hundred dollars, gave my parents a hundred dollars and says, "I don't ever want to hear from you again." But at least we got over here and I didn't know what to do in America. My aunt lived in New York and I've never liked cities. And once I got in the country I thought it was great. It was a lot to get used to but for me it was being in the country that mattered so much.

Interviewer: But you did have relatives here already before you and your family came here?

Gallagher: That was the only relative we had because everybody else got killed by the Nazis.

Interviewer: Okay were you in contact with people back in Germany until

Gallagher: No

Interviewer: No? So you found this out afterwards after the war?

Gallagher: My parents told me.

Interviewer: Okay

Gallagher: Or my mother told me.

Interviewer: So did they go back to Germany after the war?

Gallagher: No way. My father wanted to my mother said go ahead I'm staying here.

Interviewer: Did they ever go back to visit?

Gallagher: Not that I know of.

Interviewer: Did you ever go back to visit?

Gallagher: Yes my children not my son but my daughter was stationed her husband was stationed in Germany. I visited her.

Interviewer: And what was your impression going back?

Gallagher: It was a beautiful country.

Interviewer: Yeah it is a beautiful county.

Gallagher: My husband and I went once because he wanted to go and he wore a German hat I think it was a hat and we went to France and they gave us a search for, he was not particularly well. And when we showed them our passport they gave us a first floor room. I thought that was funny. No I've never whenever I went to Germany which was twice once with my husband and once to see my daughter. I thought I could never sleep the whole time I was there. I just you know Germany is a beautiful country and for a long time I didn't want any part of German people because you know I couldn't figure out for a long time that everybody in Germany is responsible for what happened. Because but then with time and reading history I thought I'm wrong it's not the German people, it's what would I have done if I was in that position. Would I want to eat or not to eat? It comes down to very simple basic things and I've now gotten so that when I meet somebody from Germany it's okay. I don't have those prejudices anymore.

Interviewer: What became of your brother? I know you said that he went to the University of Wisconsin for his degree.

Gallagher: He went two and half years in Wisconsin and then went to medical school for three years and was a doctor at 21.

Interviewer: And where was he a physical where did he practice?

Gallagher: At a VA hospital eventually in Maine and he died at 44 of his heart bad heart.

Interviewer: And what about your parents, what became of them?

Gallagher: My father practiced in Chicago for quite a long time. He had some great feelings about prejudices. And at the time the _____ the Japanese people were very much discriminated against and he fought for them. One of the things was separating the Japanese people from the white people in the hospital and he really had a fit. And was quite instrumental in changing that and discrimination was a big deal it's a big deal for me to because I think everybody has read blood including the animals.

Interviewer: Of course that's right. Where did you meet your husband?

Gallagher: I was a public health nurse visiting resident in _____ and I had to give her an injection and my husband was there and I'd been writing kids' books and he was a writer. And so we talked went to

Interviewer: One thing led to another as they say. Mont Holyoke in Massachusetts?

Gallagher: No Holyoke not Mount Holyoke, Holyoke in Massachusetts.

Interviewer: Okay do you have you said most of your relative were lost in the Holocaust.

Gallagher: Not lost, killed.

Interviewer: Killed in the Holocaust.

Gallagher: They were in a concentration camp.

Interviewer: Did you were there any other relatives there that survived the war?

Gallagher: My mother's oldest sister survived she and her husband because I think they worked in the kitchen. And they lived they went back to _____ and lived for awhile.

Interviewer: Have you ever gone back to Czechoslovakia?

Gallagher: No I wish I had, I loved Czechoslovakia.

Interviewer: It's a beautiful country it really is. The Prod is just a beautiful place.

Gallagher: I agree.

Interviewer: I took a train there one time from Nurnberg to Prod and spent several days in Prod it's a beautiful city. I didn't see much of Czechoslovakia other than Prod. I went to a little city near the airport there but I didn't see very much. When you were still living in Berlin did you have contact with people who were able to flee to Israel or able to flee to Canada or Cuba or other parts of the United States?

Gallagher: No the conversation that my brother and I overheard certainly did not include that kind of conversation. I'm sure my parents had that conversation outside the home.

Interviewer: Right you said something being underground that your parents were underground for a while. Do you mean they lived secretly where no one could find them?

Gallagher: Right with friends. And you know the friends were taking a big chance by hiding them.

Interviewer: Absolutely

Gallagher: A huge chance I think they moved around quite a bit for a while so they would not be found.

Interviewer: And was this before I suppose this was during the war wasn't it?

Gallagher: Yes

Interviewer: So they would have had ration cards.

Gallagher: I don't know what they did with them.

Interviewer: Well if you weren't registered you wouldn't get a ration card so that must have been difficult too.

Gallagher: I have no idea what my parents did.

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Interviewer: Did your parents make the adjustment to living in the United States well? Did they like it here?

Gallagher: As far as I know. They lived in Chicago and they lived in Maine and Florida some. I know my mother liked it here. I think my father was always a German and he would rather live in you know one of the things that Hitler did was take away the land from all people who had it. And for my father that meant a lot.

Interviewer: Was it because of his house in _____ or?

Gallagher: Because he was of Jewish background.

Interviewer: Do you know well of course there's been do you know if your father was ever compensated for his losses? I mean

Gallagher: No and they he was told several times that he could apply and he said no.

Interviewer: Well that's curious isn't it? I mean

Gallagher: No

Interviewer: Why?

Gallagher: I would have said no too. I didn't I personally didn't want any part of Germany.

Interviewer: Right

Gallagher: But I was as kid. But he said if I take the money then somebody else isn't going to have it. Now he got a pension from his job that was quite good and that's all he wanted and he was quite adamant about that. Then he also learned here.

Interviewer: Right well I can't put myself in that mindset. I wouldn't look at the world that way but I understand what your father is saying. There were probably people who were more needy than he was. Do you said when we spoke earlier that you hadn't talked about this with many people. That's correct right?

Gallagher: That's correct.

Interviewer: And why do you suppose that is? Is it because people don't ask or is that because you would rather not discuss it or why I mean let me put it this way. If I were in your shoes I would be very proud of what I had done in terms of you overcame the circumstances that you were trapped in and you became successful as a result. Many people were crushed by the weight of what happened in the 1930s.

Gallagher: Well I don't know maybe I look at life differently. I've always been an extremely basic person and have I used to say to people I wish I was a farmer because I would be close to the earth. And I feel that whatever is given to me you have to live school and take the best of it. And I was lucky I had a twin brother, he was ten minutes older but he thought he ought to look after me. And I had white hair and we got to go to a lot of places because of my white hair so he was lucky. But you now and then I came to

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the United States, didn't have any money, got scholarships to go to Simons and had scholarships I did pay for most of my master's degree but not a whole bunch. And you know how lucky can you get but to get a free education.

Interviewer: That's right

Gallagher: In this country and if you work hard enough you can get out of life whatever you want to have. I didn't need a whole bunch of money if I needed money you know there was a time I was really poor, didn't eat very much, so I gave blood. Okay but I don't consider that hard or terrible and my brother saved my life, that's something to be grateful for.

Interviewer: Absolutely.

Gallagher: And I think in this country every time I got a job I thought well I'm darn lucky. And I'm eating, I have a place to live, what's so bad about this. And I'm just lucky I've met some really really nice people here. What's my background got to do with it? Not a bloody thing.

Interviewer: Well that's true.

Gallagher: And I'm just lucky.

Interviewer: Well you're also optimistic and I think optimism is a way of looking at the world that you take the best of the situation that's offered you and if you can't change it then you do the best you can. I'm inclined to be an optimist too by the way so I understand that very well. I understand that very well.

Gallagher: And to go backwards is pretty useful because you can't do a thing about it.

Interviewer: That's right you can't go back. And to be embittered by it doesn't help either because you are just hurting yourself in effect in the process.

Interviewer: Amanda is there anything that you

Amanda: I was wondering the people that your parents stayed with were they Quakers?

Gallagher: Say it again.

Amanda: The people that your parents stayed with when they were hiding were they Quakers?

Interviewer: Yes

Amanda: So the Quaker religion was really strong there in Health. Were there a lot of Jewish people that were Quakers?

Gallagher: I have no idea.

Amanda: You don't know. I find that

Gallagher: You know Quaker meetings are funny people just get together. We ask too many questions about who they are what they are. I think it's one of those things I they do it here in the south a little bit but they do it a lot in Germany, who's your father and they want to know your background. I always hated that. Why don't they ask you who are you?

Interviewer: It's a way of getting started you know.

Gallagher: I know.

Interviewer: It's not necessarily.

Amanda: I have a friend that's a Quaker. Do you know if that's why your father ended up being a medic in World War I is because he was a Quaker? Because I know

Gallagher: No he wasn't a Quaker at that time. I don't know if he was anything at that time. I have no idea he didn't talk about that. As a matter of fact he didn't talk much about anything except to discipline my brother and me once in a while and me more than him because I was always good.

Interviewer: So your parents retired to Florida is that correct?

Gallagher: Yes

Interviewer: And how long ago did they die in Florida?

Gallagher: They lived in Florida for 15 years maybe more. I'm very bad with numbers.

Interviewer: Okay it doesn't matter, it doesn't matter.

Gallagher: My father was 108 when he died.

Interviewer: A hundred and eight. Well that's incredible.

Gallagher: Yeah I think it is.

Amanda: It's encouraging too.

Interviewer: Yes that's absolutely amazing.


Gallagher: My mother was 97 and she hated living this long.

Interviewer: Were both of them in reasonably good health reasonably good shape?

Gallagher: My father was in pretty good health. My mother had cancer.

Interviewer: Yeah well of course. Mrs. Gallagher thank you very much for allowing us to conduct

Gallagher: Sorry I don't have any dramatic anything.

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Interviewer: Oh I think you did just fine. We are very happy that you agreed to sit down and do this. So I'm thrilled thank you again. I'm very grateful that you agreed to do this.

Thank you