

RUTH BRAND

BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE



ECHOES & REFLECTIONS

TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST. INSPIRING THE CLASSROOM.



Ruth Brand was born Rivka Szabo to Mordechai and Gitza Szabo in Cuhea, Romania in 1928. She had one younger sister, Sara, and one younger

brother, Fishel. Ruth and her family lived with her maternal grandmother and led an observant Jewish life. When Ruth was a young girl, her father escaped to Argentina to avoid the Romanian army draft and to try and earn enough money to move the family there. Things were going well until he was fatally injured in a traffic accident.

To support the family, Ruth's mother opened a grocery store in Cuhea where Ruth worked from the time she was six. Ruth attended a Romanian school where she remembers experiencing some antisemitism from teachers who moved her to the back of the classroom and graded her lower than other students because she was Jewish.

Ruth began to feel the impact of the war in 1941 when Romania enacted anti-Jewish legislation. For example, the family business suffered when they were no longer allowed to sell such basic items as flour, sugar, and oil. Jewish students were required to attend school on the Sabbath. And then they were not allowed to attend school at all. When the Germans invaded Hungary in March 1944, Ruth and her sister Sara were working as apprentice dressmakers in Budapest. The sisters returned home to be with their family. Four weeks later the family, along with the entire Jewish population of Cuhea, was sent to Dragomiresti, a large village near Cuhea where a ghetto had been established.

After a month in the ghetto, Ruth and her family were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. When they arrived

on May 18, 1944, Ruth was separated from her mother, grandmother, sister, and brother and she and her cousin, Chaia, were selected for forced labor. She later found out that the other members of her family were all sent to the gas chambers. While in the camp, Ruth tried to maintain her faith and she and Chaia, although hungry and at great risk, decided to fast on Yom Kippur. In January 1945, they were forced on a death march to Bergen-Belsen.

Several months later when Bergen-Belsen was liberated on April 15, 1945, Ruth and Chaia were near death. Ruth felt she did not want to return to Cuhea, so instead she went to Sweden. There, she resumed her education and befriended a group of Zionists and became interested in moving to Palestine. In October 1947, before moving to Palestine, she traveled to America to visit some of her relatives. A couple of months after she arrived, she met her future husband, Joseph Brand, who had served as a sergeant in the United States Army under General George S. Patton. They were married in July 1948.

Ruth and Joseph had four sons: Harold, Gary, Michael, and Avi. In 1972, Ruth and Joseph moved to Israel with three of their sons, twenty-five years and ten days later than she had originally planned. In Israel, she worked as a bridal gown maker. At the time of Ruth's interview in 1997, she and Joseph had eleven grandchildren.