

RUTH GEOFFEY

Ruth Geoffey escaped Europe, fleeing to Shanghai, and Manila, where she spent the war years.

“We left by train on Christmas hoping that the guards would be more lenient because of the holiday. The couple we were traveling with was taken away and was never seen again.”

Ruth Geoffey (née Huber) was born in 1915 in Brünn in the former Czechoslovakia. At the outbreak of World War I, her father, an officer in the Austro-Hungarian army, was recruited. Her parents divorced when she was two and her mother, took young Ruth to her family in Berlin where she grew up.

When Hitler’s rose to power in 1933, Ruth had just finished high school. The new laws made it impossible for her to attend university. Ruth’s family encouraged her to develop her talent for drawing and she went to art school. Ruth illustrated stories for Jewish papers and worked did fashion design.

Ruth married Joseph Reiner, a journalist, in 1938, and they made plans to immigrate to Shanghai. They arrived safely in Trieste, Italy with all of their hidden “treasures,” which allowed them to survive until their ship for Shanghai sailed. After Shanghai, they went to Manila. Despite carrying Austrian passports with a “J” marking them as Jews, they were considered “Allies of the Axis” and were not interned. However, life was very difficult for Jewish refugee community in Shanghai even though they were under the leadership of a Rabbi who had escaped from Germany. Because of tremendous inflation they were forced to sell most of their belongings and plant gardens as their main source of food.

When her husband died in 1945 Ruth remained in Manila. She married a Holocaust survivor who had been in several concentration camps. Ruth taught arts and crafts at the American School there and her husband worked for 20th Century Fox film. They eventually moved to California where Ruth started painting and received a degree in Fine Arts in 1968. Ruth lost all of her family in Czechoslovakia and Germany during the war, except for her mother, for whom she was able to get a ticket to Shanghai.

Later in life, Ruth used her art to paint subjects recalling past times and reviving memories of Jewish traditions. Those topics are the origins of her many paintings surrounding her in her portrait.