

Escape from Norway: K Cooke 5 Nov 2008

Ruth Tennenhaus (1928-1963),

Transcript of her article in the **Percy Jackson Grammar School magazine 1944**, belonging to the late Michael Cook and kindly supplied by Margaret (née North) Cook.

[Copy of the original and of this transcript are lodged with the Imperial War Museum, Duxford, Cambs., together with biographical notes on Michael Tennenhaus.]

Escaping from Nazi-occupied Norway

November 1942

I was in Oslo at that time, living in a refugee hostel. Long, dark nights had come, and there was a curfew, forbidding all civilians to go out after 8 p.m. Only drunken, shouting Germans filled the streets of Oslo. At this time, the Nazis were planning the final transport of refugees to the gas-chambers in Poland.

November 26

This was the night the Germans had chosen for collecting the refugees and putting them on the boat going to Poland. In our hostel everyone was asleep, when suddenly a friend of the hostel-leader arrived and, having talked things over, we decided that we could not stay any longer, but must hide and try to get to Sweden afterwards.

The friend of the refugees, "Miss X", told us that she was taking us to her place, and while she got in her car we silently crept downstairs so as not to alarm the Nazis who lived in the same house. We drove for nearly two hours and were all fairly fixed, when we arrived at Miss X's house. We had to live in a tiny room, where Miss X intended to hide us in case there was a "razzie" or search.

Two days later we were on our way. Miss X took us to a little hut in the forest, about sixty miles from the border. There she left us as she was already suspected by the police and could easily get into trouble if she was not careful. She told us that a peasant* was coming the next morning to show us the way and, saying goodbye, she left hurriedly.

The peasant came at 8 a.m. We had some hot coffee before we went and cleared up all traces after us in case the Germans came there. We started off about an hour later, working our way through the snow (which reached up to our knees). We walked on, trudging mile after mile through the forest until we were too tired to feel anything.

Once we stopped a little and had some sandwiches we had brought. These were frozen so hard that we had to hold them over a fire to make them fit to eat. Later on, having cleared the traces of the fire, we walked on again, but suddenly, we heard voices speaking in German. It was a patrol searching for guerrillas and stopping people from crossing the border into Sweden.

The voices came nearer and nearer. The first steel helmet was in sight – I was almost paralysed, but suddenly realised that we were standing behind a clump of bushes and, throwing myself down, I made signs to the others to do the same. The Germans did not seem very keen on searching – I suppose they wanted their dinner anyway. They turned back and went away. I could have cried with relief.

We waited until the Germans had disappeared and walked on again. At 11 p.m. we crossed the Swedish frontier. Fagged out, we came to a small village where we were received with the greatest hospitality. After a hot meal, we slept soundly for the next 24 hours. Then we went to our new house in Sweden and after a fortnight I wrote my first letter to my father from whom I had not heard for over two years. Four months later I was crossing the North Sea in an aeroplane to meet him in England after five years separation.

Ruth Tennenhaus. Form 5L.

* for “peasant” read farmer or farmworker. KC.

Biographical note:

Ruth Tennenhaus was born to Jewish parents in Vienna in 1928. Her parents were Michael and Miriam (née Zucker) Tennenhaus. Miriam died in 1938. After the Nazi Anschluss of Austria before the outbreak of World War II Ruth was rescued by the Red Cross and taken to Norway. Her father escaped separately and came to the UK. Her brother and step-mother (Michael T married again) died victims of the holocaust.

In 1943 Ruth was reunited in Adwick-le-Street, Doncaster, with her father, Dr Michael Tennenhaus, who at the time was a teacher of German at the Percy Jackson Grammar School, where Ruth also began studying. After Higher School Certificate, Ruth took a degree in Modern Languages at Manchester University and subsequently married Rabbi R Gaguine. She died by her own hand in 1963. She leaves a son, David Gaguine a GP.