

**Ruth Gruber didn't want to live
an ordinary life, and she wouldn't
take "no" for an answer.**

Born to a Jewish American family in 1911, she grew up to become a renowned journalist and activist. Her career spanned seven decades and led her to places that other reporters wouldn't or couldn't go, from Nazi Germany to the remote Arctic regions of the Soviet Union. At a time when women were expected to stay at home and raise families, Ruth told the stories of people in need and fought for their rights to live in safety and freedom.



**NOTHING COULD
STOP HER**





NOTHING COULD STOP HER

The Courageous
Life of Ruth
Gruber

Rona Arato

Illustrated by Isabel Muñoz

KAR-BEN
PUBLISHING



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—R. A.

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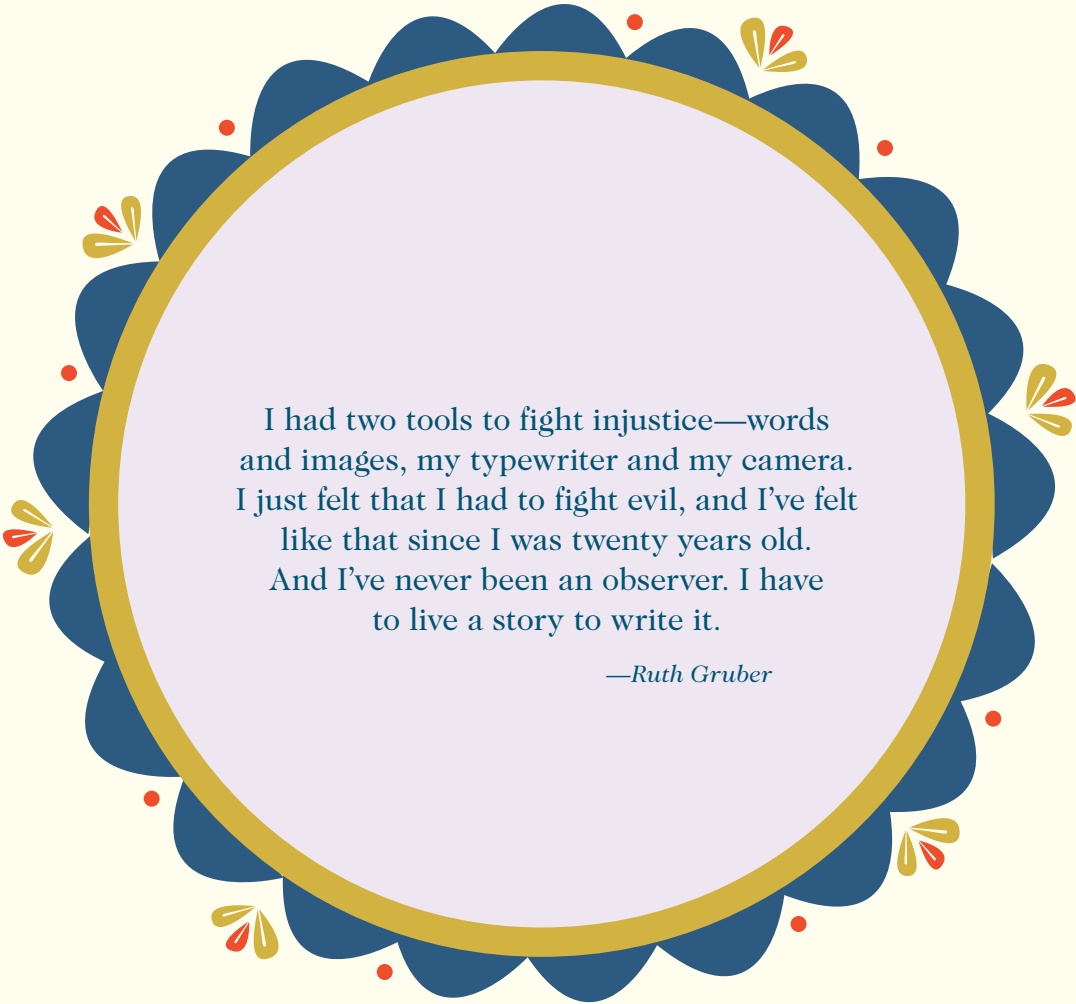
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I had two tools to fight injustice—words
and images, my typewriter and my camera.
I just felt that I had to fight evil, and I've felt
like that since I was twenty years old.
And I've never been an observer. I have
to live a story to write it.

—Ruth Gruber

Chapter 1

Brooklyn

Ruth Gruber was born in 1911 in what she called a shtetl, a village—the Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York. Her parents, David and Gussie, were from Russia. Ruth was the fourth of their five children. She had two older brothers, Bob and Harry, and an older sister, Betty. Her youngest brother, Irving, was born in 1916, when Ruth was five and a half years old. The family lived in a small apartment above the liquor store that her father owned.

Ruth was a curious child who wanted to learn as much as possible about everything she saw and heard. She would sit on the curb watching tired horses pull wagons filled with fruit and vegetables. She'd listen to the calls of street peddlers. Every day, a tall man carried blocks of ice in huge iron claws up the stairs for the icebox in the Grubers' apartment. On his way down, he would give little Ruth a piece of ice, which she sucked as she watched the people on Moore Street go about their business.



Because everyone she knew was Jewish, Ruth thought the whole world was Jewish. Moore Street smelled of briny pickles in big barrels, roasted sweet potatoes, and candy apples. People greeted each other in Yiddish.

Ruth loved Fridays, when the house smelled of freshly baked challah and almond cookies. At dusk, her mother lit the Shabbos candles and the family gathered around the dinner table. On Saturdays, the street was quiet—no horses or peddlers. Most stores



Yiddish

Yiddish is the language of Ashkenazi (Eastern and Central European) Jews. It is written in the Hebrew alphabet and uses some Hebrew words. But it is also closely related to German. It originated in Europe, in the area that today is Germany, around the tenth century. Eventually, it became the main language of Jews living in Poland, Russia, and many other European countries. About 11 million people spoke the language before the Holocaust wiped out large populations of Yiddish speakers in the 1930s and 1940s. The language lives on, though, with about 600,000 Yiddish speakers worldwide. There are Yiddish theater companies, Yiddish musical groups, and even board games in Yiddish.

were closed, but Ruth's parents kept theirs open. They only closed their store for certain important Jewish holidays: Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and the first day of Passover. Every Saturday, Ruth's grandfather, Zayda Gruber, would take her to shul—synagogue. She'd sit with him downstairs, because although men and women sat separately, young girls could sit with the men. Ruth loved chanting the Hebrew prayers, even though she didn't understand the language. In those days, only boys attended Hebrew school.

After shul, her mother served a lunch of gefilte fish, chicken soup, and boiled chicken. Then Ruth and her sister Betty, who was two years older, would walk six blocks to visit their mother's parents. Their grandmother, Baba Rockower, fed them pastries, talked about her life in Russia, and read them articles from the Yiddish newspaper.

On the Jewish holidays when the store was closed, the whole family went to shul. On these days, Ruth and Betty sat upstairs with their mother and the other women, while their father and brothers were downstairs with the men. Ruth wished she could be with the men, like she was on Saturdays.

Ruth adored her father. David Gruber was six feet tall with a red mustache, gray-green eyes, and a soft voice that he never raised. Ruth's mother, Gussie, ruled the family. She had never finished school but was smart and taught her children the value of hard work.

Ruth's first lessons in helping others came from her father. Once a month, he sent money to relatives in Poland and Russia. And every spring, he asked his children for the clothes they weren't wearing so he could send them to Europe. If Ruth didn't want to part with a dress or coat, he would say, "Send it. They need it more than you."

Ruth's world opened up when she entered public school. Her first-grade teacher was a young Black woman who taught a class of Jewish, Irish, Polish, and Black girls.



Coney Island Adventures

In the summers, Gussie would pack a picnic basket, gather her five children and assorted neighborhood kids, and take them on the trolley to the beach at Coney Island. There, she would spread a blanket and rest while the children splashed in the surf. Ruth loved those days at the ocean and loved her mother for giving them to her.

One day, Ruth’s teacher knocked on the door of the Grubers’ apartment. Ruth hid behind the bedroom door as her mother and the teacher spoke.

“Did she do something wrong?” Mrs. Gruber asked.

“No, no. I just wanted to tell you to take good care of her. She loves books so much. I’m sure that someday she’s going to be a writer.” Ruth never forgot those words.

In 1920, the United States government made drinking or selling liquor illegal. Mr. Gruber closed his liquor store and began working in real estate. Meanwhile, the children were getting too big for the small house. Irving was five, Ruth was eleven, Betty was thirteen, and Bob and Harry were growing into young men. In 1921, the Grubers bought a house on Bushwick Avenue. It was only a mile away from Moore Street, but to Ruth it was a new world.



Historic Tensions

Poland was sandwiched between two powerful neighbors, Russia to the east and Germany to the west. Both these countries invaded and controlled parts of Poland in the 1700s and 1800s. After World War I, Poland regained its independence. But many Poles remained suspicious of Germans and Russians. And many Protestant Germans distrusted Catholic and Jewish Poles.

Without realizing it, the family had moved into a German neighborhood. On spring and summer days, Ruth’s brothers played softball in the street with the neighborhood boys. Ruth and Betty became friends with the boys’ sisters. All the shopkeepers were German, including the man who ran the candy store where the family bought ice cream and Ruth’s favorite dessert, charlotte russe—sponge cake topped with whipped cream. Everyone got along. But meanwhile, in Germany, a man named Adolf Hitler was telling crowds of cheering people that Jews were evil and that his goal was to destroy all the Jews in the world.