



Ahead of Time: My Early Years as a Foreign Correspondent

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Ahead of Time: My Early Years as a Foreign Correspondent Ruth Gruber

Long before feminism became a potent force in our time, Ruth Gruber was already blazing a trail for later generations of women. Now in paperback for the first time, this captivating memoir covers the first twenty-five years of an inspiring life, including these historic moments: Gruber's unprecedented academic career, which reached its zenith in 1932, when at twenty she became the world's youngest Ph.D. as a visiting American student at Cologne University, her return to Nazi Germany in 1935, and the rallies she attended where Hitler inveighed against "international Jews" like her; and her first stint as a foreign correspondent, when she became the only journalist to report from the Soviet Arctic, traveled in open cockpit seaplanes, met utopians who extolled Stalin's system, and gulag inmates who told her the bitter truth about his terrible schemes. Gruber writes with warmth, compassion, and humor, offering a life story that will be long remembered by all history lovers, adventurers, and women and men of all ages.

Ahead of Time: My Early Years as a Foreign Correspondent Details

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Lucy says

PhD by 20, foreign correspondent for the Herald Tribune in her early 20s, Ruth Gruber (Michaels) is now alive & well & still kicking butt at 101!
she was a friend of my mom's & I visited her in her house in Jerusalem in 1956--she was a most gracious hostess
but what a life & what a fantastic author!
she saw the Nazis come to power in Germany, saw Stalin come to power in Russia, & reported masterfully on it all

Jessica says

This book is fascinating. Gruber was an intellectual prodigy and a young correspondent who traveled extensively in Europe before and during WWII. Her insight into German culture is excellent. About the last third of the book is concerned with her travels and writings in the Arctic, which I didn't (personally) find quite as interesting as the first part of the book, otherwise I would've given it 5 stars.

Marcleitson Leitson says

Enjoyed the book and was truly amazed at Ruth Gruber(who I believe is still alive). Just found the ending somewhat flat and could not help wondering if she was either incredibly naive to the dangers around her or brave or what. Still an amazing woman!

Tina K says

Incredible woman, what a life! Fascinating and moving, beautiful written.

Urenna Sander says

It is said throughout most of history, women have had fewer legal rights and career opportunities than men. In 1920, women won the right to vote and to increase their job opportunities. Amid race discrimination and anti-Semitism, the only positions available for most minorities were housekeeping jobs. But Ruth Gruber, daughter of Russian, immigrant, Orthodox Jews, was one of the lucky ones.

Ms. Gruber was born in 1911, the fourth child of five. The family resided over their small business in Brooklyn, New York.

At age five, she appeared to be a precocious and curious child. While in labor, her pregnant mother, Gussie, ordered Ruth's older siblings to visit their grandparents. She told Ruth to take a nap. Ruth's father had rushed out to get the doctor.

Instead of obeying her mother, she crept out of bed and watched her mother singlehandedly give birth to her brother, atop the kitchen table.

A voracious reader, 10 years later, she enrolled at New York University at 15. One of her first jobs as a teen was editing a book for a Czechoslovakian Count. At his retreat in Greenwich Connecticut, she discovered Jews were not permitted to purchase property or homes there.

At 18, she won a fellowship at the University of Wisconsin, to enhance her German studies. She boldly hitchhiked from Brooklyn, New York to Wisconsin.

While in Wisconsin, she received a fellowship for one-thousand dollars from the Institute of International Education, in Cologne, Germany.

A year later, in 1932, she became the youngest woman to receive her doctorate, in Cologne. She wrote her thesis on Virginia Woolf.

She was in Germany on the eve of Hitler's rise to power. Alone, she attended a Nazi rally of Brownshirts to get a first-hand look at the paramilitary group. She left the meeting shocked and frightened at their vehement diatribe concerning Jews.

The Jewish host family she lived with ignored her fears. The father in the home had fought in World War I. Because of this, he believed his family would be pardoned.

Before leaving Germany, she visited her sister's friend, an American attending an Austrian medical school. She indicated Jews were not accepted in American medical schools, hence her sister's friend had to study abroad.

When Ruth and he visited the university's campus that evening, the laboratory he shared with other Jewish students had been wrecked and their laboratory projects destroyed.

Before leaving for home, a friend stated his thesis had been stolen.

When she returned to New York, her parents wanted her to settle down and get married, but the unquenchable Ruth was a wanderlust.

She could not obtain a full time job. However, in 1935, she began working as a Foreign Correspondent for the New York Herald Tribune. At the Tribune, she had no desk or office, and was considered part-time.

Although not mentioned, I doubt she received equal wages during that time.

But she wanted to write about women under fascism and communism in the Soviet Union.

Representing the New York Herald Tribune, she flew to Europe.

Before traveling to Russia, she visited Germany and Poland. Hitler had seized control in Germany. Her former German beau had joined the Nazi party. He looked at the Nazis through rose-colored glasses.

When she reached Poland, she visited family members. However, suspicious Polish authorities curtailed her visit and demanded she leave.

Once in Russia, having an introduction letter, she made the right contacts there. However, her visits to certain areas were delayed for several weeks. She required an additional visa to travel.

When she arrived in the Soviet Arctic, the local director, of the former NKVD, now the KGB, refused her request to interview Trotskyites and other prisoners. He permitted her to have a brief interview with a professor of historical India, who served his sentence in the Soviet Arctic.

Ruth became the first American woman to visit the Yakuts, an indigenous people living in Yakutsk, part of the Soviet Arctic.

Before her departure, she met female Yakuts at a five-day women's conference. They stated the 1916 Revolution had liberated women. They believed socialism made women equal with men and that their lives were fuller.

I enjoyed reading the audacious and resolute Ms. Gruber's educational accomplishments and her travels to Germany and Eastern Europe.

Unyielding to family pressure, and what was expected of women during that era, she was a liberated woman before her time.

To most, Ms. Gruber's writing might appear limited on her subjects. The reason could have been that war had begun to ferment, ultimately leading to Germany seizing Poland in 1939. In 1943 Russia defeated Germany at Stalingrad.

During Ms. Gruber's visit to Russia, I believe the Soviets were genial and permitted her to visit anywhere she requested. However, they limited her resources, the interviewees and what information they provided.

She had an interpreter, Tanya, whom I deemed her bossy, opinionated, sentry.

Ms. Gruber's writing about Germany's dreadful transformation would have been a more interesting survey of that period. However, on her return as a correspondent, before traveling east, she saw the fear in the eyes of German citizens being herded away by the Nazis. She was warned by a concerned citizen to leave before she became a victim. Therefore, it was far too dangerous that she stay.

When she left the Soviet Arctic, Ms. Gruber questioned what the experience had meant to her. Did it change her? She felt she still had all her limitations and faults. But she received new understanding and faith in herself.

Ms. Gruber is alive and 103 years old.

Kristen says

What a fascinating life! Ruth Gruber is the very definition of trail-blazer, and boundary stretcher.

I had never heard of Ruth Gruber, until perusing a suggested book list on Women's Equality Day and on reading of her accomplishments: the youngest person ever to earn a Ph.D, the first foreign correspondent and first reporter to be permitted into the Russian Arctic to explain it to the world, I wanted to learn more.

Ms. Gruber is truly an astonishing human being, never mind an impressive woman! Her story, which she wrote herself from journals and notebooks kept during her work and travels tell a story that women today would struggle to fathom.

Ms. Gruber had a unique and heart-breaking experience of being an American Jew in Germany - she earned her doctorate from the University of Cologne - during the time that Hitler was coming to power. Her perspective on what Germany was like at this time is terrifyingly prescient, and incredibly poignant given our hind-sight knowledge of what was to come.

Following her time in Germany, Gruber was permitted to visit the Arctic, where she chronicled a place the world had no prior knowledge of, as the only reporter ever allowed inside.

Gruber has a wonderfully engaging and self-effacing way of telling the story of her experiences, from her upbringing in Brooklyn, to being a celebrated journalist for the New York Herald Tribune. She tells a terrific story, and what a story it was!

This is a wonderful story for women who want to learn more about the women who came before us, and who blazed the path for those of us today who take for granted the opportunities we have available as women. Those opportunities were hard won by the determined, intelligent incredible women who came before us.

Virginia Papandrea says

Gruber died in 2016, lauded for her pioneering life as a female journalist. This memoir records the early part of her life from a Jewish enclave in Brooklyn to the larger world of Europe between two world wars, most particularly Russia. Her fearlessness and curiosity were and still are impressive. Although her descriptions of the physical world, political intrigues, and people she encountered are quite interesting, I found them

somewhat lacking in deeper reflection and emotional resonance. Otherwise highly recommended.

Hazel Edwards says

Very good at evoking settings. Found the later chapters on visiting the Arctic as the first American female journalist, of more interest. Also her evaluation of Virginia Woolf after meeting her.

Andy Plonka says

A look at Germany and Russia between WWI and WWII through the eyes of a young American Jewish journalist.

Sara says

Years ago, Ruth Gruber spoke at local Hadassah meeting; after reading this book, I regret that I did not attend. Gruber's writing shows an intelligence, and an excitement about life. At a young age, she took hold of her life and explored corners that most of her contemporaries probably didn't know existed!

Her brains took her from Brooklyn to Massachusetts to Wisconsin before being awarded a scholarship to the University of Cologne at the being of Hitler's political career. Despite being a Jewish woman, she still managed to receive her PhD, the youngest PhD in Cologne & all of Germany at that time. She found her way into journalism and made connections that led her to be the first journalist allowed in Siberia after the Russian Revolution. She kept her eyes & ears open, absorbing everything and keeping an open mind while not being naive.

Her enthusiasm for making connections with real people and understanding how political policies affected their lives makes this book imminently readable.

Penn says

Really enjoyed this book about the author's early life. She has led an amazing life! Interesting to hear her tell of her experiences in Germany and USSR during that time period in history. Fascinating read. Highly recommend.

Cindie Harp says

I met the author at a Hadassah convention years ago, which started me reading her books. It is always amazing to me how someone can seem like your average woman, completely belieing the extraordinary courage beneath the surface. Who can really know another person? Even more, who can really know one's self, unless one is tested?

Susan says

What an interesting woman and an interesting life!

Brenda says

A very well written and enthralling book. From start to finish it was difficult to put the book down. Ruth Gruber has a style of writing that is quite engaging, drawing the reader into the world of pre-WWII as if you were living it yourself. Highly recommend this book to any with an interest in history.

Caryn Rose says

All I could think was that this woman accomplished more than I have in my entire life by the time she was 24.

I don't even remember how I found this book, and I opened it one day just to browse through it, only to have powered through three chapters. Her life is astounding. You will need a map to follow her story even if you are a well-travelled and intelligent person. The writing is clear and easy to read and the stories are fascinating.

She is 101, and still with us. Which does not surprise me in the last.
