

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

William Helmreich Oral History Collection

**Interview with Louis Goldman and Israel Goldman
June 12, 1990
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Louis Goldman and Israel Goldman, conducted by William Helmreich on June 12, 1990 as research for his book *Against all odds: Holocaust survivors and the successful lives they made in America*. The interview was given to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum on Oct. 30, 1992 and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

LOUIS GOLDMAN AND ISRAEL GOLDMAN June 12, 1990

Interviewer Note

Israel Goldman, at 86, is the oldest living survivor in Vineland and one of the first to come to the area. He lives in the original, farmhouse together with his son Louis, single and 52, who returned to Vineland to help his father after his mother died several years ago. The farm sits on a busy highway between restaurants and used car lots one of which has leased out some of Goldman's property. It is worth about \$300,000, according to Louis. The rotting hulks of weatherbeaten and boarded up chicken coops still stand, somewhat unsteadily, in the tall and uncut grass behind the frame house in which the Goldmans now live. Israel Goldman seems quite spry and fit for a man his age. He attends religious services daily and has a lively sense of humor despite his difficult life.

WH: Where are you born?

IG: This you also have to know?

WH: Yes, if you want to tell me.

IG: Yeah, why not? In a little town near Rzeszow, Bluzhev.

WH: Oh, my father is from Lancut, near there.

IG: Oh yeah, sure I know that place (His face brightens considerably.)

WH: Where were you during the war?

IG: In hiding and in Russia.

WH: How did you get here?

IG: By boat, on the General Muir.

WH: When where you born?

IG: In 1904. I'm 86 (Louis walks in. Thin and unshaven, he wears glasses and a cap. A bit shy at first, he rapidly warms up and joins our conversation.)

WH: Where and when were you born?

LG: In Poland, in 1937, on Chanukah. I'm 52.

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IG: In 1949 we came here after spending the first few months in Williamsburg.

WH: Why did you come to Vineland?

IG: We had three children. One was actually my niece. She was with us during the war. So she's like a daughter. Another daughter lives in Monsey and is Modern Orthodox. Her husband, Paul Schwartz, is President of Rabbi Tendler's shul there.

WH: What do you do here?

LG: I sell chickens and eggs. I lived in Brooklyn until my mother passed away. I lived in Sheepshead Bay, on E. 11th Street, between Y and Z. I went to the Young Israel on East 29th Street and to the Jewish Center around the corner.

WH: So how did you come to Vineland ?

IG: I was making \$32.00 a week making pocketbooks and wallets in my cousin's factory. We were five in the family and I couldn't make a living. We paid \$55.00 rent a month.

LG: Word got around that Jews were buying farms and you could be your own boss and you don't have to worry about the language that much.

IG: And you could keep Shabbos. My family in Europe was chassidisch.

WH: Where did you go to school?

LG: Yeshiva Torah Vodaas, and in the summer I went to Camp Yeshiva in Swan Lake (Louis retrieves some faded black and white photos of himself with camp bunkmates and shows them to me.)

IG: In Europe I also lived in the country, like a farm. I liked to be outdoors. It wasn't like a chicken farm here, of course.

WH: Did the JAS lend you money?

IG: Yes. \$3,000.00. The most we had was about 10,000 chickens.

WH: What happened when the disease came?

IG: Oh, when the disease came, we were very poor.

WH: And this is the farm? You're still living on it?

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LG: Oh yes. I remember when the hurricane came, I was standing here, looking out the window with my mother and the whole roof on the coop opened up like you open a lid on a box. It blew away in just 20 seconds.

WH: Did you have a partner?

IG: How did it work out?

IG: Very bad. Not bad but very bad. What he wanted I didn't want and what I wanted he didn't want. He was a bad person. The JAS said not to go in with a partner. It worked out terrible.

LG: And the funny thing was they were friends before the war.

WH: Did you look in Connecticut to buy?

IG: Yes, but there they had bungalows and not only chicken farms.

WH: Where were most of the farmers from in Europe?

IG: From the shtetls of Europe, not the big towns. And Jews there made a living by buying geese, chickens, or sheep.

WH: Did you feel any antisemitism here?

LG: No. They were very nice. Mostly Italians lived here.

WH: How about the other Jews here? How did they act?

LG: Not too good. They were cool to us, like we were invading their turf. First we were a trickle but then it became like an avalanche, these Polish Jews, the survivors, by 1952 or 1953. By 1955, they started to leave. A lot of them had passed away. I knew most of them because I went from farm to farm inoculating the chickens they had. And I think they died from what they went through during the war.

WH: How did your father live this long, until 86?

LG: God is with him. There was no shul here, so my father started a minyan in one of the upstairs rooms.

IG: I've had so many operations, that I was 99% gone.

WH: You remember the scandal about the Goldhaft book?

IG: Yes, he spoke bad about the refugees. He was not good to us.

LG: He got rich from selling the vaccine he invented. It's ironic because he wouldn't have gotten that rich if not for selling the vaccine to the refugees he made fun of. He looked at the greener like they were a little uncivilized, like a snob looks down on people. Some of the people never forgave him even though he apologized for it.

LG: The crux of the matter was that people looked down on us. I went to high school here and the Jewish kids stuck together. I'd made friends with some of the American Jewish kids. And they were considered the natives and we were the strangers. Some were very nice even though they were very wealthy, like Danny Rudolf. But others looked down that we were uncultured, rough. They were sitting here during the war, lacking for nothing; they weren't afraid for their lives, they didn't have to scrounge for a piece of bread. And the greeners here, they were hungry, they were desperate to make a living. I mean, look, some people came without money. You come to America with two or three thousand dollars, what could you do? Sometimes some of these greeners exerted pressure, they tried so hard. They didn't do anything wrong. And the Americans took it wrong. They said the greener are over-aggressive, they want to be richer than us. They said you just came off the boat. My grandfather built this house and like that.

WH: Are any of the survivor synagogues still around?

LG: Only the Shearith Hapleita shul here in Vineland.

WH: Why did you stay these years?

LG: It was a good life. When we had free time we used to go to the river in Norma, they called it the Jewish River, and relax. We would play cards there and speak Yiddish. The kids would play the jukebox. It was on the Alliance Beach. As far as staying was concerned, those survivors who died, their wives had to leave the farms. Then, a lot of survivors who did well, they got too cocky. They weren't happy just making a living. This guy wanted a new car, this guy wanted a mink coat and new furniture. But there's just so much you can get out of a farm. A lot of them didn't figure on that and they thought it would always be blue sky. And then they owed money to the suppliers. Many went into debt, especially after 1955, when the price of eggs began to drop. And they had a fancy lifestyle. My parents lived the simple life, nothing extravagant, no vacations. I'm not knocking the others, just stating facts. We survived because we didn't owe any money. People owed money, they repossessed the farm. That's what happened to my friend who owed \$18,000 in feed. Had some of these people stayed, their farms would have had value. We now lease part of the property to a used car dealer.

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WH: What did you do?

LG: I went to City College and got a degree in Business Administration. I worked for Dun & Bradstreet's Moody's Investor Service for about eight years. Had I stayed I probably would have been a vice president now. But I left and went into a business, women's shoes, but it didn't work out and then I didn't feel like going back.

WH: How do you explain the Holocaust in religious terms?

LG: I had a rabbi in Torah Vodaas who used to say: "A lot of times God makes something bad happen because the Jews have it too good somewhere." When we lived so well with the Gentiles we had high intermarriage rates and it happened in Vineland too.

Conclusion of Interview