

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

William Helmreich Oral History Collection

**Interview with Irving Goldstein and Regina Goldstein
July 2, 1989
RG-50.165*0035**

PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Irving Goldstein and Regina Goldstein, conducted by William Helmreich on July 2, 1989 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.

IRVING GOLDSTEIN AND REGINA GOLDSTEIN

July 2, 1989

RG: I was born in Zloczow, Poland. I had one sister who died in the war. I was born in the 1920s. I went to gymnasium. I hid during the war with Gentiles. They were paid to do so, My family was religious but not Hasidic.

WH: What year were you born?

IG: 1925. I was in DP camps after the war——Linz, Regensberg. I was in concentration camps- Mauthausen and also labor camps. I was born in Dombrova, Poland. My parents were killed. I didn't go far in school because I had to work. I was 14 when the war broke out.

WH: When did you come to the U.S.?

RG: In 1949 on the General Hahn. It took about 10 days. We came to Boston.

WH: What gave you the faith that you would make it in America?

IG: We were young and ambitious. Why shouldn't we? It's a land of opportunity. I have to tell you, when we came into Boston, everybody got a cardboard and in it was two eggs, an apple, an orange, cookies and a dollar. It was the second day of Passover. It came from HIAS. On the dollar was written something like "Good luck in the U.S." I bought some ham sandwiches with the two dollars.

RG: When we came to Grand Central Station my aunt and uncle and grandparents greeted us. We lived at first on Alabama Ave in East New York.

WH: What kind of work did you do?

IG: Within two weeks I had a job in a dress shop doing everything — from a floor boy to a foreman. But then I heard about the chicken farms in Vineland. If you didn't have a trade it was a sure dollar. If you have 4,000 chickens you make a profit. You learn as you work. The JAS lent you some money but it wasn't enough. You had to have some money of your own or you couldn't make it. We came here to the Catskills for a two week vacation and were looking at farms

WH: Why?

IG: Because we figured we'd settle down on a farm. Even though I'd never seen a farm or been a on a farm, I heard from my friends who went into farming in Freehold and Vineland.....

USHMM Archives RG-50.165*0035

2

WH: So why didn't you go to Vineland?

IG: Because we were here already and we liked the climate. Here there was more land to buy, you could buy hundreds of acres.

WH: So why didn't more from Vineland come here?

IG: They didn't know about it. Jersey was the style. And since more people were there you needed more money to go there and we didn't have that much money. And it was better than an apartment in the city because when you buy a farm you have already a house, and the chickens laid already eggs and with a couple of cows I'll have milk and cheese.

WH: But you didn't even know how to milk a cow!

IG: You learn. At first I had more milk in my sleeve than in the pail when I was milking the cow. My hands swelled up the first couple days. They showed me how ----you pull and you squeeze and you pull and you squeeze. For him it was easy. He doin it for 20 years. But I learned. First, we bought a farm in Woodbourne later it became Jacoby Bungalow Colony. We bought the farm for 39,000 dollars and put down around twelve. We borrowed it, plus we had about \$1,500 saved up. But we didn't make a go of it because I didn't care for the cows. You had to get up 4:00 A.M. So after seven months we sold it. Then we bought a chicken farm with 1,500 chickens. We did very well, sold eggs to the children's camps.

RG: We raised two lovely daughters, one's a lawyer, married, The other daughter is married and works for Eastman Kodak in Rochester. But this husband's not Jewish.

IG: When we came here there were about 300 farms. But with diseases and recession, they all went by the wayside and closed up. This was in 1958,1959. But we stuck with it; we wouldn't give up. We didn't have where to go. Some of the others had trades----one was a butcher and another was a baker. A third one was in his 70s and figured he'd had enough. But the bank decided we were worthy and gave us credit and we kept on expanding. We were the first with cages. But then, after three heart attacks I fell behind. But we had 260,000 chickens. And we owed nothing.

WH: Are you religious?

IG: No but I belong to a shul in White Lake. Regina was president of the sisterhood for ten years. I was on the board.

WH: Where your daughters went to school in White Lake, what percent were Jewish?

IG: Maybe two percent. But in Monticello was already 50-50, in high school.

But you should know that basically, the egg farm is more a business than real farming. And you don't get subsidies like you do with wheat, corn, or milk.

WH: Did any of your children's friends ever say anything about their being children of refugees?

RG: Not refugees, but they sometimes made anti-Semitic remarks. One day, my older daughter came home from school in White Lake and said: 'Mommy, nobody likes me.' She was 9 or 10 then. I found out the children were jealous because she was a very good student. So I told her 'You don't have to tell all the answers. Keep it to yourself.' But in Monticello this wasn't a problem. She had Jewish friends.

WH: Since this was a pretty hard life, did you ever ask yourself: 'For this we survived? To have such a hard life here?'

RG: To tell you the truth, we were too busy with the farm to even think about it. But I do remember people who sold their farms and went back to New York City, used to come visit us and I was like a second rate person to them. They used to say: 'How could you stay behind here? Working like a dog.' I said: 'I have the same as you, TV, radio and I know exactly what's going on in the world like you do. My children are very well read because there's nothing else to do here, just to pick up books in the library.' We went to movies here.

WH: How many other survivors came to this area?

IG: After the war, maybe 50 or 60. But we had no special group.

WH: Weren't these the people that you would have been most comfortable with?

IG: Not necessarily. We were mostly comfortable with American people. Because the war, I don't remember nothing and don't wanna remember nothing.

RG: We try to block it out (Maybe there's a personality type who settles there.)

IG: We had both Jewish and Gentile friends. We didn't want to listen to all the stories about the war; how everybody was a millionaire, they all was rich, they all came from Warsaw or Cracow. I came from a small town and we were very poor and many times I went to sleep hungry, many, many nights. I had to work as a kid. What I noticed is the older generation, those who were in their late 20s and 30s when it happened, they like to talk about it (Could be)

WH: Did you know Jacobowicz?

USHMM Archives RG-50.165*0035

4

- IG: Yes. He was a shlemiel. He ran into New York to sell eggs, he made \$200.00. But while he was there, the pipes on the farm froze, the chickens went into a moult and start laying eggs and he was out \$4,000.00. That's what I mean.
- IG: The chicken farm is a business. If you don't know business, you can't survive.
- WH: Is there a difference between survivors you meet from N.Y. and yourselves?
- RG: Yeh. Most of them are show-offs. They just want to play cards. We can't socialize with them in Florida because everybody plays cards. They tried to prove something, but you can't cover up with the jewelry, but you can't if there's nothing beneath it. You understand what I mean?
- WH: Yes.
- RG: They didn't have the upbringing. They were prust (no class). We also tried to prove ourselves here. And it took a long time till they accepted us here in the community, in the shul. At first people wouldn't give us a tumble. We were the only European-born members. I joined the knitting club in the beginning and invited them to my home. But they never showed up. So naturally I never came again. If I wasn't good enough to for them to come to me, so don't do me no favor, invite me to your house. But later they accepted us.
- WH: Who are your close friends?
- IG: I have only one close friend now for forty years, my wife. The others I consider acquaintances. And certainly not the refugees. because .with them is always jealousies. One has more money and my daughter married this one. I see when I'm in Florida.
- WH: Did you feel people didn't trust you because you came from Europe?
- RG: In the beginning, people asked: 'How did they survive? What did they have to do?' Well, Irving survived because one day the Germans were gone; I survived because I was hiding, a third was a partisan. But the people here just didn't understand. Just like it's useless to tell them what you went through.
- WH: How did you feel when you visited Israel?
- RG: I was reading The Source and when I came to Israel and saw what they had accomplished, I felt very guilty that I hadn't gone there when they were struggling. If I had gone then from Vienna I would have been on a kibbutz or something and I would have been very useful. But we support Israel. We give to anyone who asks for Israel. And we found the Israelis very friendly, very nice when we were over there. We loved it.
- WH: What achievement are you most proud of in life?

IG: When I met my wife. This is my pride and joy. And I have two wonderful daughters. We never had any problems with drugs, alcohol, or cigarettes.

WH: What do you think was most responsible for your survival?

IG: I don't know. I just took it day by day. (An intellectual who would think about the larger ramifications might be overwhelmed and give up. Seeing it as one day at a time might well have enhanced survival.) I never thought I was gonna survive. Because when I saw what I was going on day by day in the camps, with people being killed, I thought it's just a question of time. We did not know when the war was going to end. We went on a death march and when we went into the forest I stepped over hundreds of corpses, men, women, and children. We pulled them to the side because it was raining.

RG: I'm proud that even though hundreds of people, Americans and Europeans, many who were established for many years went out of business on the farms we were able to stay and make it. Human beings have a wonderful ability to forget, to block it out completely. When we came here we appreciated everything. You had to understand what it meant—to sleep in a bed, to have a sheet. We had a bathtub in the bathroom. In Europe it was in the attic. I remember when I got my first mixer. You cannot imagine.

WH: How did you find the strength to go on?

IG: Because we knew life had to go on. What you gonna bring back the dead? Everyone was single, of the young men in the DP camps. We were all in the same boat. (Knowledge of this gives you strength.)

Conclusion of Interview