

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

William Helmreich Oral History Collection

Interview with Harry Haft
June 28, 1990
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Harry Haft, conducted by William Helmreich on June 28, 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.

HARRY HAFT

June 28, 1990

Interviewer Note

I interview Harry Haft, the only known survivor to ever fight Rocky Marciano, in his daughter's home, in Greenwich, Connecticut. Though no longer young, one look at his huge hands and powerful physique tells the story. This is a strong man. He is very friendly, as is his wife Miriam, an American.

WH: Where were you born?

HH: In Belchator, a little town near Lodz. We belong to their society. I was born in 1925 and I came here on the Marine Marlin.

WH: When did you start boxing?

HH: In concentration camp, in Jawozna Camp. I was in the Lodz Ghetto, in Birkenau, where I worked in "Canada" where we searched the clothes. I made friends with a German officer and we made a deal....He will get me through the German time and I will get him through the war. In Jawozna, I worked in the coal mines. As a youngster in school I was already training to be a boxer. I was very powerful. But in Jawozna, the fight was to the finish. The loser wound up in the hospital and if he didn't get well after a few days he went out on the next transport to Auschwitz. Then 12,000 people were marched to Gros-Rozen and 190 survived. We marched for a week. After the war, I boxed and was named European Jewish Champion of the refugees in the D.P. camps I won the championship in Munich. When I came here in 1948 I trained with all the big boys....Cus D'Amato, Whitey Bimstein, Charley Goldman, who also trained Rocky Marciano. I fought Marciano and I had to lose. It was way before the title fight. He was an upcoming fighter and I was one of those fighters that fought him as he was on the way up. You know, they take somebody and decide to build him up and he was on his way. He was a good fighter. The sports columnists in New York, Dan Parker, wrote about me. In my days though, the Mafia controlled the boxing game and you did as you were told. In 1949 I was picked the third best prospect. In the Light-Heavyweight Division. I had already 19 fights. Then I stepped up into the Heavyweight Division, because of politics, and I lost. I gave up 27 pounds to Marciano and 25 to LaStarza.

WH: Did the fact that you fought in Jawozna saved your life?

HH: In a way because it me in good condition.

WH: What are you proudest of?

HH: My wife and children.

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WH: Do you ever talk to your children about the war?

HH: No, because I'm very soft. To a stranger I can talk, but if I speak to my kids, I'll start crying.

WH: What did you do after boxing?

HH: I worked as a hat blocker, then I had wholesale fruit stores. I bought on Washington Street. Then I drove a cab. I still have the medallion. My brother-in-law is Daniel Walden, sociologist at Rutgers, my wife's brother.

WH: Tell me about your children.

HH: My daughter is married to Enzo, who is Italian and converted. My two sons run an investigative agency in Florida.

WH: Did the Nazis in Auschwitz respect you for fighting?

HH: No, they just gave you extra food. They didn't respect me. We were just survivors, entertaining them.

WH: Did you think of yourself as fighting the "Jew as coward" stereotype?

HH: No, it was just sport.

WH: Do you believe in God?

HH: I believe in God.

WH: Do you belong to a synagogue?

HH: No, because I lost my faith in supernatural during the war. When they killed my sister's baby the night she was born. That did it for me.

WH: Do you believe that Jews should have resisted more?

HH: They couldn't because they were taken by surprise.

WH: Do you believe that most Americans are anti-Semitic?

HH: No, but a lot are.

WH: What do you do in your spare time?

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HH: I golf, read, play cards and here I am in the Raleigh where my kids gave me a vacation but you have to eat too much. I golf, read, play cards. I don't hang around with refugees because they're so into showing their wealth.

Conclusion of Interview