

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

## **William Helmreich Oral History Collection**

**Interview with Frieda Jakubowicz and  
Salomon Jakubowicz  
April 16, 1988  
RG-50.165\*0049**

## PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Frieda Jakubowicz and Salomon Jakubowicz, conducted by William Helmreich on April 16, 1988 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.

## FRIEDA JAKUBOWICZ AND SALOMON JAKUBOWICZ

### April 16, 1988

WH: Where were you born?

FJ: Tarnopol, Galicia. My husband is from Czechstochowa, and we came here May 15, 1950 by boat. HIAS brought us over and we arrived in New York. They put us in a hotel not far from HIAS, The Americana and we went to HIAS for the meals which we ate in a nice big dining room. My husband had all kind of jobs with leather but we couldn't make a living. You see, we had no family here. Then we lived in Brooklyn, in Brownsville.

WH: How did you decide to come to the farm here in Parksville, N.Y.? (When I interviewed them, they were renting a small house in Liberty, N.Y.)

FJ: We had saved up a few thousand dollars from the black market activities of my husband in Germany. Eggs was 88\$ a dozen and we heard you could make a dollar with a farm. So we bought here farm. The house was beautiful but there was only two chicken coops. And these coops were filled so high with manure. It was there for years. We stood and slaved in the heat, cleaning the coops. It took a few weeks. A man from the Jewish Agricultural Society helped us by showing us what to do because we didn't know anything.

WH: Weren't you afraid to do something away from the center in New York, that you had absolutely no experience with before?

FJ: He was a cattle dealer (her husband) and had lived on a farm in Poland. But life was very hard. My children, two daughters, were three years old and a few months old. I had no money to buy regular milk so we bought Carnation milk. We bought old bread. We had a very difficult life and no one helped us. People from town, they didn't even know us. We bought a 1937 Studebaker and my husband tried to learn how to drive. We borrowed some money and bought about 2,000 chickens. They were not very good chickens but we had no choice since we didn't have hardly any money. Then we sold eggs. We had to clean every egg with a brush. We couldn't get along with the partners. We was living all in one house. They were also survivors. But they had family. They weren't so struggling like me. They couldn't take this farm life. So they wanted out. We didn't have any money so we got another partner, an American Jew, who bought them out. But this American wanted we should be the slaves and he would be the boss. Anyway, we had fights with them. So we had enough with partners. Anyway, the top floor of the coop caved in on the floor below. We had 3,000 chickens and was working all by ourselves.

WH: What time did you get up every morning?

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FJ: Don't ask. We didn't have days and we didn't have nights. It cost \$700.00 to fix the coop . And then the water dried up. It was a dry season. My husband had to go with cans and get water from a spring on the hill.

WH: How old were you then?

FJ: Oh, I don't know. I was 100 years old.

WH: When were you born? I just wanted to get an idea.

FJ: 1923. My husband is born in 1913. Then we tried to drill wells. Then, you know, you can't stay in one place. Our children growing up, helping on the farm. They used to answer the phone. They were the bookkeepers. From the time they were five years old, they helped. They knew better English than I did. They took the orders and the messages but they didn't even know how to write it down. Then, eventually, we hired a man or two to help. You have to keep on growing. Then we borrowed money. We established credit.

WH: How did you go against the competition, the other farmers?

FJ: I'll tell you, we had luck. Whoever bought our chickens, our eggs, they wouldn't eat any other eggs. They were the best eggs in Sullivan County. People raved about the eggs. Then later on, we couldn't make a living. The eggs was very cheap, the feed was higher. So my husband bought a truck and he used to take the eggs to New York.

WH: When was this?

FJ: In the 1960s. It was very hard. All the time I had to tear my hair out. So from this I don't have any hair (She gives a short, bitter laugh.) We drilled four more wells and still wasn't enough water for the chickens. We was working day and night. Then we had to buy automatic machinery because we had more eggs. And the machinery used to break down.

SJ: On Sunday I would go to the city and I slept in the truck.

FJ: One time he was driving himself in New York and all of a sudden he blacked out.

WH: Did you ever think then, of getting out?

FJ: You cannot. You swimming in the sea and you cannot stop in the middle. There's no such a thing.

WH: You worked from morning till night. Did you have a television?

FJ: In the beginning wasn't. They didn't have television. In 1960 we got a little TV.

WH: Did you have to work seven days a week?

SJ: Eight.

FJ: And you had to work at night too. We didn't have time for friends either. Some people came from N.Y. to the farm. They just took away my time. I couldn't handle that. The children, they suffered with us. They didn't grow up in the town and they did suffer. We tried the best. They went to the Livingston Manor school. So we wanted they should go to a school with more Jewish children. So for a few years we rented an apartment here in Liberty. They went to Hebrew day school. It wasn't easy for us but I said we have to do something. Then I had here a brother. He wasn't too good to me so I didn't want to talk about him, he should rest in peace. He came a year before and had a farm. And that's the reason we bought a farm. So I didn't have a good word for him, that he did this. Anyway, he used to build a lot of coops. He was a big talker. And he made himself out he was a millionaire. He offered to lend people money. He didn't have a penny! But people listened to him because he talked good. They thought he was rich! That's the way American people are! You don't know the experience of being a refugee in America then. Today, at least, the Russian people come, they give them everything. We came from the camps, from nothing, we didn't get anything.

WH: What about HIAS?

FJ: HIAS could help so much. How much they could, only when we were in New York. Once we needed money and we asked the JAS to give us a loan. They asked us how much money you have in the bank? My husband said: 'When I have money in the bank I don't have to come to you.' They didn't give us a loan.

WH: What was the attitude of the American Jews towards you?

FJ: Very mean. Very mean. I mean they didn't want to know us. When I couldn't speak English and they didn't know Yiddish. Later when I spoke English, they spoke Yiddish! They didn't want to speak Yiddish at first because they were afraid, maybe I will ask for something. No one wanted to touch a finger to help a refugee. It was like they felt we took away something from them. We had one fellow, that he signed for us. Otherwise, nobody. Freddy Gasthalter's father from the Paramount Hotel.

WH: What about other refugees?

FJ: What could one refugee help another? They all from the same place. Just like I couldn't help them, they couldn't help me. (This is directly opposite the story of and attitude of the Atlanta survivors.) Some people had family here, they took them in. But if you don't have anyone, no one could help you.

- WH: I read that in the Vineland, N.J. farming community, they had a helping fund.
- SJ: But they were more established there. But we were proud. God will help us.
- WH: Do you believe in God?
- SJ: Sure. (He walks to a nearby synagogue every day for services.)
- FJ: You have to have a belief. If God is there or not, we don't know. But whatever, I'm alive.
- FJ: So we built a more modern coop. And it was less work, the place wasn't smelling. Then everyone was building cages. And from this we made a beautiful place and people used to come from all over to look at our place. By then we had a 100,000 chickens. But then the manure stunk up the place and we didn't have enough land to deal with it. And it was a big, big problem. And those cages, they chased us out from the farm. On the floor they could, the farmers, take the manure away, but in the cages it was loose, but we didn't think of it much. We didn't want to be left behind. We wanted to go with the crowd.
- WH: What about the other people who had cages?
- FJ: Listen, I can't tell what's doing in their backyard. Some people had where to spread their manure. So we had big expenses with electricity, not enough water, and the problem with the cages. By the end we had almost 300,000 chickens. Then my husband, he got sick. I had been sick too a few times over the years. When I got sick, my husband couldn't even come to the hospital to see me. He didn't have time. My 16 year old daughter had to come pick me up from the hospital. Then, in 1969, my husband broke down. And everything broke down, the elevators broke down. My husband was half dead. We sold everything out. The cages, they did the trick.
- WH: But it was an accomplishment to build it up from nothing.
- FJ: Yes, we built it with our hands, 300,000 chickens. But, we had to give it up.
- WH: But you got a price for it.
- FJ: We got....we went bankrupt. That was the price. That was the price. Say goodbye and that's it. It was a 48 acre farm.
- WH: I get the feeling it was a matter of fate. How could you know what would happen?
- FJ: In the beginning we couldn't give them no work. Later on we couldn't get no decent workers. They was drunks, bums; who else would work on the farm? We left the farm in 1970.

WH: What did you then?

FJ: We rented a room here in Liberty. My husband got restitution money from Germany. He got \$7,000.00. I had before \$10,000.00 but it went to the farm. After a few years my husband got a job working as a mashgiachat Falls Chickens in Livingston Manor.

WH: Tell me about your children.

FJ: The children went to college in New York and to high school in Livingston Manor and in Liberty. They went to Hebrew day school. I came from a religious home, but not hasidic. I don't believe in the payes. Because not everyone is good what is wearing the payes. We believed in Yiddishkeit.

SJ: Now I go every day to shul.

FJ: It is good for his morale.

WH: What about school for the kids?

FJ: The younger one went to college. The older one couldn't concentrate so good in school, so she didn't go. She started but couldn't make it. Not everyone is college material. My younger one was cum laude at Queens College. The two girls took an apartment in Flushing. The older one was a Girl Friday. Now she's an assistant bookkeeper.

WH: Is she married?

FJ: She's married. But she wants to divorce her husband. He's good for nothing. He works by a race track, OTB. And my younger one is not married yet (She is probably about 38) But, thank God, she wouldn't date or marry someone not Jewish.

WH: Do you have any long range effects from the Holocaust?

FJ: Yes. When I see someone in uniform it scares me. My heart beats like a.....  
I can't help it.

FJ: But you know, I'll tell you, you must tell the world about what happened. If not, how will they know? I saw when we came here, some people thought how come you alive and the others dead? Must be you killed them. Not Hitler, but you. How come you are alive? And really, no one wanted to know. When you tell them, they say: 'Oh, we know already. We read the paper.' You see, people are selfish. When they living in a good home, they think: What you have to think about the refugees? You don't wanna hear this. And the Americans didn't help us then. The Puerto Ricans, the Haitians had a home, but not the

Jews. They sent five ships back. And the American Jews complained: 'Oh we couldn't have steak; we had to have chicken.'

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

FJ: God gave me the strength to live thru the war when I lost everybody. And when I came in this country God helped me. I had twenty years slavery here, but, thank God, I came out alive. And I'll tell you one thing. I was always dressed decent. No one could say I'm a farmer. My home was beautiful. I made them welcome, whatever I could.

WH: People have all sorts of problems. What advice would you give them?

FJ: God helps you. You should have faith. Because if you think—that's my life and it's never gonna be better, then you commit yourself suicide. You keep yourself nice, in shape. I always took a shower, I dressed myself and I'm a lady again. Otherwise, I wouldn't survive. First of all, you must have self-respect. That's my philosophy. Even you come now to my house you will never find me in a nightgown. I get up, I wash up, I wash my hair. My children are brought up the same way. They get up, have to make their beds. So wherever I go out everybody respects me because I'm not a shnorrer. You not a prostitute. That's what it is. That's how I survived the camps too.

WH: What do you think of blacks?

FJ: They are a wild nation and you cannot expect that much from them. They not educated; they suffered.

WH: Okay. I thank you very much for your time and patience.

Conclusion of Interview