

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

William Helmreich Oral History Collection

**Interview with Yisroel Leifer, Izzy Raab
and Esther Raab
June 6, 1990
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Yisroel Leifer, Izzy Raab and Esther Raab, conducted by William Helmreich on June 6, 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.

YISROEL LEIFER, IZZY RAAB AND ESTHER RAAB June 6, 1990

- YL: I studied here in Yeshiva Torah Vodaas and I have semicha. I was born, in 1928, near Chust, Hungary. During the war I was in Auschwitz. I came to America in 1949 with the Marine Marlin. My uncle gave me an affidavit..
- IR: I'm born, in 1918, near Chelm, Poland.
- WH: Tell me a little about yourself.
- ER: I am one of the few people to escape from Sobibor. My story is in a movie called, Escape from Sobibor. I was born in Chelm.
- WH: And what year were you born?
- ER: Everything you wanna know?
- WH: You don't have to give me the exact year.
- ER: 1922
- WH: How many people escaped from Sobibor?
- ER: Maybe 300, but after the war there were maybe only 40 left. And today, I think, only 18 people are left. You know Professor Hilberg's book? In the U.S. only 3 or 4 survived.
- WH: Yes.
- ER: I told him I don't agree with what you wrote. It's misleading. You got all the information from the Germans. And he said: "You're from Sobibor?" And I said: "Yes." And he said: "You're a rare bird. But I'm very tired and I can't talk to you now. I have to go to sleep." And that was the last I ever heard from him.
- WH: Was there something different about the Sobibor survivors from, say, the Auschwitz or Buchenwald survivors, of whom there were many more?
- ER: Yes, because all the other camps had slave labor and extermination sections. Sobibor was just a death camp. I was there over nine months until I escaped.
- WH: How did you get to the U.S.?
- ER: By plane because I was pregnant, on the Flying Tiger Line. It was a very difficult flight because we flew from Germany to France and then, for some reason, they couldn't

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continue, and they didn't feed us. We had some money but we were afraid to take it out because there were Ukrainians and God knows what on the plane. We stayed there two days and two nights before we continued to Newfoundland. There was a big flood in New York and we couldn't land there.

WH: You must have been exhausted.

ER: Listen, After you've lived through Sobibor, nothing is really so terrible. We came at night. It was in 1950. It was kind of sad because everybody had someone waiting for us and we had no one who greeted us.

WH: Has this feeling of "nothing is so terrible" stayed with you?

ER: I feel I'm a very strong person and I never get too emotional. I think what has helped me is that I never feel sorry for myself. I feel very fortunate and I never let myself forget it.

WH: You have children?

ER: Two sons and seven grandchildren and this is my biggest revenge on the Nazis. One lives in Dallas, the other in Cherry Hill. One has a consulting firm and the other was an accountant and is now in business. They both married Jewish girls.

WH: Would you say the children of survivors in Vineland had a high intermarriage rate?

ER: I would say yes.

WH: Was there snobbery here towards you when you first came to Vineland?

ER: I don't think so, but I think we felt different. We didn't know the language. We still had that fear in ourselves. It took me a long time before I stopped looking behind my back to see who was walking there. We felt others looked down on us, that they thought: "You refugees, you wanna be equal? You have to wait your turn."

WH: How did you come to Vineland?

YL: My sister lived here and told me about the farm. So I came here and I had been trained as a shochet. So that's what I did and that's how this plant, that I'm a partner in, developed (Vineland Kosher Meats.)

WH: And how did you decide to come here?

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- ER: Friends told us about it. One followed the other. It sounded right. You could make a living and didn't have to know the language. With the chickens you could talk any language. My husband vaccinated chickens and we had the farm.
- WH: Did you go to New York to relax?
- ER: We used to go to see a show but mostly we had parties here, and there was a river in Norma and we used to go there for picnics with the children. It was a better life than in New York. If one didn't have time, the other helped out and watched the children.
- WH: Where were you during the war?
- IR: I was working in Russia.
- WH: Why didn't you leave the farm?
- IR: I figured I had the farm and we had a small child; I might well stay here.
- WH: What did you think of The Golden Egg? He complained that the survivors went bankrupt. I know a lot of honest people who went broke. They couldn't help it. Lerman wanted the honor.
- ER: Miles wanted to be above everybody. So how do you do it? You put everybody down.
- IR: He started mingling with the Americans and he got a lot of help from them. But he does a lot of good things for Jewish causes even if he did wrong things.
- ER: I'll explain you Miles Lerman. He is power hungry. He needed me many times in order to push himself forward. He made a gathering of all the liberators. So he came to me because he needed someone who was in an uprising. So I went and it was very nice. But he rubs me the wrong way all the time.
- WH: What do you think of all these survivor organizations?
- ER: I think it's too much money wasted. We don't need museums. And we don't need museums dedicated to Ukrainians. Not one Gentile adult or child was killed in the gas chambers. Why should we make everything together? We should only give to Yad Vashem. They should give all the money to Israel.
- IR: Look at Elie Wiesel. When he saw what was going on with the museum, he left.

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ER: Why should there be a hall for Helena Rubinstein? Why shouldn't it be for somebody who fought back and who died, not for the survivors who offer a lot of money to have their pictures put in?

WH: How come survivors play cards?

IR: We don't have the same interests as Americans. Americans go to a baseball game, they go to a bar. We're not interested in this. We didn't play cards in Europe. Americans talk about cars, about baseball. They tell a story about a rabbi who saw people fighting over a ball and he said: "What are they fighting for? I have a ball in my house and I'll give it to them." At the beach in Norma, the women talked ---- it was too expensive to talk on the phone ---- and the men played cards. Even the goyim called it the Jewish River. They sold ice cream there, people also played chess by the water. We stopped going there in the sixties. The heyday of the community was from 1947 to about 1960.