

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

William Helmreich Oral History Collection

Interview with Noach Rodzinek and Perel Rodzinek
September 8, 1989
RG-50.165*0096

PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Noach Rodzinek and Perel Rodzinek, conducted by William Helmreich on September 8, 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.

NOACH RODZINEK AND PEREL RODZINEK September 8, 1989

WH: Where were you born?

NR: Biala-Podlaska, Poland, in 1910.

WH: You were saved by Poles. Do you think they're good people?

NR: This was one in a million. I was working in the city for the Gestapo, one of fifty people, burying people, digging holes, cleaning the ghetto, and I saw what they were like. Most were no good. I lost eight brothers and a sister and also my parents. I'm the only survivor.

WH: Where were you born?

PR: In Yanov, not far from Biala, in 1915.

WH: Where you Zionist as children?

NR: Yes.

PR: Hashomer Hatzair.

WH: Do you think of going to Israel after the war?

PR: Yes, my father had gone there in 1935.

NR: But we couldn't go there after the war. He left because he couldn't make a living in Poland. But it was too hard there for us.

WH: Where were you during the war?

PR: In a labor camp.

NR: I worked for the Gestapo for eleven months. We hid during the war. We ran and we hid. A man who I knew from the war hid me. He's a tzaddik. You can't find a man like him in any nation. He didn't do it for money. We had no money. He was a farmer. And now I go there every year. And they come here to visit.

WH: Why is there anti-Semitism in America?

NR: Same thing here as in Poland. Everybody is jealous of the Jew. The richest people in this country are not Jewish.

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WH: Is there anything one can do about it?

NR: Nothing. You know what I said from the beginning (when we came here)? Every Jew should have a machine gun in his house. So on the day when they'll start coming, you can kill them. When I was freed in Poland, I had a machine gun.

WH: Did you get one here in Canarsie to protect yourself?

NR: Not here. Here is would be organized. I'm a naturalized citizen, but even with the citizenship papers, they could send me out. It says on the passport that I'm naturalized. The Italians are not so bad but the blacks are the worst.

WH: When you came here, were the HIAS people nice to you?

NR: Very nice to us. We came by plane because my wife was sick. They helped us with money.

WH: Do you have an organization in Century Village?

NR: Yes, the Katzetlech. That's what they're called. We have parties, raise a few dollars for Israel. They play cards. Our closest friends are all survivors, all from Poland. We have some Hungarian friends, but they're not like ours, nisht fun unsere. You feel close with your own people.

WH: How about religion?

NR: I don't believe like I did before the war, but I go to synagogue on Shabbos and keep kosher. I do this because that's the way my father did it (because he lost his family, he has a greater need to follow in the path of the parents. It's all that's left, in a tangible sense. Today's children can reject because their parents are still there physically, as is the world of their parents.)

WH: What kind of work did you do?

NR: First I was a rug cutter; then I had a luncheonette on 6th Ave and 47th St. for ten years. Then I went into building 2 –family and one-family houses with friends. Before the war my father was in the lumber business so I knew a little. I was on the job and worked for 13 years until I retired. I was afraid to leave the luncheonette because I had security. But you have to try. I never was a worker. Before the war I was always in business. People couldn't believe I worked for somebody (said with some scorn, a typical businessman's attitude.) I had 160 houses but in the beginning it was very hard. The first two, three years I took out maybe &100. a week. I wouldn't get lost anywhere.

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PR: He's a good businessman.

WH: What makes a person a good businessman?

NR: First of all, it has to be in your blood. You got to be born like this. Second, you must keep your word. If you say you're going to pay, then you have to pay. That's why the bank gave us a million dollars, because we had build up our reputation.

Conclusion of Interview