

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

William Helmreich Oral History Collection

Interview with Hannah Rozen

August 25, 1989

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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Hannah Rozen, conducted by William Helmreich on August 25, 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.

HANNAH ROZEN

August 25, 1989

WH: Where were you born?

HR: I was born in Poland . . . in Lodz . . . in 1916 . . . my husband was a newspaper man. He went to Paris and he came back in '33 and we got married and we went back to Paris. We lived in Paris for 6 years . . . 2 months before the war started we came for a visit. My husband, myself and our child. The first time that we came all three. And when the war broke out, the French consulate called me up because my child had already a gas mask prepared. Because of him we can go back. I said, 'It's no use. The whole family is here, and so we're going to stay here.'

WH: Who is your whole family?

HR: My mother, my father wasn't alive . . . my (three) sisters and my (one) brother, all my aunts and uncles . . . I survived and my sister . . . when I came back, we went through with the ghetto . . . we were working for the Germans. My child was 9 and a half years old . . . and one Friday he came to me where I was working and he start crying. 'What's the matter? What's you crying?' I ask him. He said, 'I heard that we going to be separated, that something's going to happen next week and the children are going to go separate. And I said, 'But don't worry, I'm here, I'm going to be with you.' Of course you probably heard that they closed up the ghetto. And they took all the old people and all the young people. But they said that the children who going to be 10 years old, they gonna leave. My child was 9 and a half. So, I said, 'What can I do to make him (feel or be?) like ten.'

WH: To be eligible.

HR: Yeh. So, for a loaf of bread they would do it. They would change the birth certificate. But it was all not true. We didn't eat, all of us, and we gave the bread, but nothing helped. The German, we all had to go down from the apartment, and stay downstairs and he said, 'Left! Left! Left!' He just picked. I had my mother on one side and my child on the other side. And I was afraid for both of them. They left my mother, they took my child. And, - I never see him since.

WH: What about your husband?

HR: My husband, when the war broke out, he ran away from the – Germans. It's a whole story . . . the Russians caught him and they put him in jail for 12- years (HR stops talking as she searches for information to show WH).

WH: This is a book that your – (HR shows book and pictures) . . . so they gave him a 120 years, but he made it out I see, in '41.

HR: Yes . . .

WH: The he was a Chief – Jewish Chaplain of the (inaudible) . . .

HR: The Polish refugees over there . . .

WH: (looking at information) This is his graduation. He graduated from John Marshall Law School . . . he went to law school here in America?

HR: Yeh . . . all he want all his life, is just to learn, that's all. Nothing was interesting anymore, than just -

WH: He wrote about 'Anders,' wasn't General Anders an anti-semite?

HR: Yes. Because of others, he came back to Poland. He – that's why how got out from jail, and that's why there was a (her voice trails). But you see, we didn't see each other for 6 years. And I got a post-card from jail, from the Russian jail, that somebody wrote – that went out. He just stole something, and they put him for just a short time in jail, and my husband give him a piece of bread, so when he go out, he gonna write to me. He wrote, 'You're husband is very, very sick. If he's gonna survive, he's gonna write you again.' And he never wrote again, and I was sure that he's not alive.

WH: What's interesting is, to me, that he occupied a pulpit of rabbi (inaudible) and he learned – in a yeshiva?

HR: Yes . . . (she shows more information)

WH: . . . in 1946 he arrived in the U.S. as a delegate to the convention of the Jewish Orthodox Organization of Agudat Israel (looking at more information) . . . I read that people tried every which way to get into the United States. And one of the things that they did was, they came as delegates to these Agudat conventions, and then they didn't return . . . you're the first person that I have talked to that can verify that. What happened?

HR: (inaudible) . . . first of all, he's not looking for me, so people told him that 'You have got nothing to look for her. We saw her going to the crematorium.' And this was true. I went to the crematorium. It was left, to the crematorium. Right, was the larger. And they saw that I went to the crematorium. I had a little girl, a neighbor's girl in my hand in Auschwitz. And everybody, old and with children, they didn't bother. I saw that I'm going to the wrong place, so in front of me was her grandmother, I took her hand and gave it to the grandmother. And, I run back where the Germans said, Left. Right. And . . . (needs translation) he let me go. And those people who saw me going to the left, -

WH: They didn't see you going back?

HR: No. They told my husband, 'You haven't got nothing to look for, because she is dead. She didn't survive.' He said, 'But I don't want to rest in peace until I gonna search all the places, because my feeling is that she's alive.' I had family here, and his brother was here in – Israel . . . so I wrote to Dov Rosen . . . he wrote several books, and he was I the government, so I wrote, 'To Whom It May Concern' and I wrote my little history who I am and – He wrote to his brother, and our letters met here. When my grandmother got the paper every week I think, without the paper, who survived, so she said she saw 'Hannah Rosen' so one time she sent her son to look up, it was not me . . . but finally, it was a Hannah Rosen, me. So, they . . . tried to get the news to his brother, and the brother sent a telegram to me, with his address, he was in Italy, (inaudible) and he sent a telegram to him, and my address in Sweden . . . I was with several thousand people who signed up they want to go to Sweden . . . and we went to work. And I didn't think to write on this address to my husband, because I said it must be some kind of mistake. My husband is not alive. But, I got his telegram, and a letter right after that, and we start communicating. After a short while, he called me . . . and he told me to go to Stockholm, there's gonna be waiting a visa for you. Take the visa, I'm going to send you \$400 for a ticket, I'm going to send you the ticket and you come to America.

WH: Where was he?

HR: He was over already in America on this convention.

WH: On this Agudat convention?

HR: Yes. He was here in '46 and I came right afterwards, in 1946.

WH: He came in on a transit visa?

HR: We had just one way possible. And we were illegal. We had to go back. We didn't have where to go back. The only place where we could back, is Poland, because we were born there. But we didn't want to go back to Poland, so my husband had a job . . . somebody gave him a paper that they gonna hire him, if he gonna get the visa.

WH: They gave him a paper from America?

HR: Yes. Over there, in New York. Those people who brought him over, it was a convention was for the – where he belonged, to his party, and they gave him a job, and with this, they send him to Canada.

WH: He didn't need a visa with a job assurance if he was coming as a delegate to the convention?

HR: Yes. But he had to leave as a delegate, it doesn't mean that he can stay. He couldn't stay.

WH: Did he get this visa?

HR: Yes, and he had – if you want to get a regular visa you have to go out from the country . . . so he went to Canada.

WH: So he really had a transit visa to America, and with that visa he went to Canada.

HR: That's right . . .

WH: And you went to Canada too?

HR: Right away. When I came to New York, he and friend of his, they waited all day because I came with the 'Gripsholm,' and . . . Greta Garbo was on it. And I was in third class, and she was in first class. So, until the first class went out, and the second, and third, they had to wait for me a whole day. And of course, when we came in, it was big simcha.

WH: Who made the simcha?

HR: My husband and myself.

WH: Your husband was there to greet you?

HR: And his friend, too . . .

WH: . . . how was he able to get you a visa when he only had a transit visa?

HR: He didn't give me a visa . . . the party sent for me . . . as a representative from this party . . . the (inaudible group name) . . . he belonged to this (inaudible group name) all his life . . . and when he came, he said, 'I have a wife and she's in Sweden,' and they said right away to make the same (inaudible) papers. So that I could come. With a ticket . . . we didn't get anything, we didn't belong to the Joint, we came as delegates . . .

WH: . . . (looking at document) on May 31st, 1946 your husband arrived . . .

HR: The convention was in New Jersey.

WH: Did you get to go to the convention?

HR: Yes, of course.

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WH: They put you up in a hotel?

HR: Yes. I sold my bicycle. All I had in my possession was a bicycle . . . in Sweden . . .

WH: How long were you in Sweden?

HR: Fourteen months.

WH: . . . when you came to America . . .

HR: . . . how did we live? He wrote 36 articles to the newspaper about Russia. And they wanted to kill him. The communists in New York, they said that they going to kill him.

WH: Where did he write these articles?

HR: In the Jewish newspapers . . .

WH: Did you think, or did your husband think, about going to Israel after the war ended?

HR: No.

WH: How come you thought of only going to America?

HR: . . . he looked first of all, where we can meet. Sweden didn't want to let him in. He wrote, and they didn't let me into Italy. So we couldn't find no place, just in America, that's the way we met.

WH: Your family, before the war, were they hasidishe?

HR: They are all very religious . . .

WH: Who's brother was here?

HR: My husband's brother was here, and my family came here early. My grandmother, my grandfather, and my second grandmother, and all the children. Dov Rosen was the first one who made aliya . . . in 1928.

WH: Since you had family in Israel after the war, you still weren't thinking of coming here?

HR: No . . . we didn't have nothing to come with . . . and we knew how bad it is here. We said, 'What we going to do? Go for, on the land to work?'

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- WH: (talking about Benjamin Hirsch) . . . what do you think of the title of this book that I'm writing, should be, 'We Are Here' What would you think of such a title?
- HR: We gonna stay here!
- WH: . . . now to go back to our story, you came to the convention, then you went to Canada, and then you came back.
- HR: How did I come to Canada? One time in my life, I fainted. And this was when I came to Canada, didn't have a visa, didn't have anything. So, I fainted, because I knew, 'How will I get in?' He said, 'This is my wife, this is-.'
- WH: He had a visa?
- HR: Yes. The visa waited for him on the border.
- WH: It's called an (inaudible-accomodao) visa.
- HR: That's right . . . (it was waiting for him) but what will I do?
- WH: Did you hear about USNA . . . HIAS . . .
- HR: We have here an organization of Americans. I belonged for a long time.
- WH: The AACI?
- HR: Yes. I did belong to, but now, - now I am just, I am an American citizen. This is for sure. But I am an Israeli, 100%! I'm so happy in this -. I'm going to come to this country, because most what I want to talk to you about, Israel. Not about America.
- WH: Okay, so let's go through quickly the America-.
- HR: So we were there for about 2, 3 weeks, and they called us-
- WH: In Montreal?
- HR: In . . . Toronto. We came to Montreal, we had to go to Toronto, we got the visa and we came back legal. But thee were people who, in Detroit, they swim . . . this Tolansky helped us a lot because he tried to look for somebody who gonna gave us a letter that he needs a rabbi, and this is the rabbi who-.
- WH: American born, Tolansky?

HR: No, he was from Russia . . . he came in as a young boy . . . When we came legally, Friday or Thursday. Sunday I went to work. That's all I want is to work. I went to shops. We in Paris, used to make men's clothes, and I knew how to sew, and my specialty was back pockets, and this is – you have to know how to do it. And wherever I went in the shops, they grabbed me. But they used me. They paid me and it was sweating there, the old people were sitting and didn't want to pick up their face to look. Anyhow, every week they told me they cheat you, they don't give you the right price. So, I went to another one. Every week I went to another place, and I got more and more and more, until I find a big factory – with a Union. So over there I made some nice money, and he said, 'Look at this greener! She's working! You don't want to work.' But when it slacked down, he said, 'Look at the greener, she want to grab everything, she want to work! Let me see that.' (HR laughs). So, I said to my husband, 'If you want to stay in New York, I'm going back to Sweden.'

WH: Why? Because you didn't like the work?

HR: I didn't like the New York from the first minute. Not the people. Not the work. Not the – we suppose to get an apartment, so I said, 'No, New York is not for me.' But I went to Manhattan every day.

WH: Where did you live?

HR: In Brooklyn. With Talansky. Talansky gave us this apartment what I told you. He always has somebody living there. He said, 'The first time I had people in this apartment, I had hazar in here. All the time.' I came up to him, you want a newspaper from here? No, I don't – (HR: says with apprehension, 'it's going to be taped.')

WH: I won't print it, don't worry.

HR: So, he was very happy with us. And I went every day to Manhattan, and I went to school to learn English . . . all I wanted is to learn English and this was – before I came back from Canada. Because when I came back to Canada, I went straight to work. But when I waited to get this visa, I went all day long to learn English. Finally, - we came, and I told my husband, 'You have to look for a job somewhere else, not here.'

WH: . . . what was he doing in New York?

HR: . . . he wrote for the newspapers . . .

WH: It was a full-time job. So what happened, then, did he agree with you?

HR: Yes. And he got a job in Atlanta as a Jewish teacher . . .

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WH: What kind of school?

HR: I don't remember . . . the Left . . . in Atlanta . . . when we came there, I went to work for a brassiere company . . . I made a lot of money over there, because when everybody was eating, I was sewing. And so I put the money, dollar to a dollar, dollar to a dollar, and I said, 'We gonna do what everybody is doing. We gonna get a grocery.' I gonna get the grocery, because my husband-

WH: I know this story.

HR: Yah, because everybody else. I was the first one, because I came the first one to Atlanta. There was one man, he's dead a long time ago, he was the first one, and we were the second one. And whoever came, I was the one who got them, who – have children, they went to the doctors, so I went with them. Every thing was -.

WH: When you got a grocery, you figured you'd make more money than at the brassiere factory?

HR: Of course! I tell you, in 1950, we bought a home . . . but we didn't live in it . . . I rented it, so it's gonna pay the monthly payment what we had on it.

WH: Why didn't you want to live in a house?

HR: This was luxury for me. So I wanted-.

WH: So you stayed in a small apartment.

HR: Yeh, I stayed in a very small apartment, and we saved the money, and we saved the money until my sister got a visa to come to America from Sweden.

WH: You worked in the grocery store yourself . . . in a Black neighborhood?

HR: Sure, sure . . .

WH: Do you know Harold Hirsch?

HR: I know them all . . . but anyhow, we were working, and we made some money, and we start – we wanted to build. So over there on Magnolia, we bought a small, little place, and we build over there, five apartments.

WH: When I was in Atlanta, so many . . . survivors . . . got grocery stores. Whose idea was this to get the grocery stores?

HR: The American people. They said, 'That's the way we started.'

WH: You went from the grocery store to buying houses, and building.

HR: Yeh . . . and we start the five apartments, and we rented them, and then we bought a big place on Woodland . . . with a swimming pool. Thirty apartments . . . and it was gorgeous and it was beautiful, but the whole street, one after the other, building, and building, and building.

WH: Did you move out of your apartment?

HR: . . . yes, a long time . . . when my sister came, I decided that she's going to stay with me, they had a little girl, three years old, and we moved to Helen Drive. Of course we had to buy furniture, we had – but we had money for it.

WH: Do you feel any prejudice on the part of the American Jews towards the greener?

HR: Should I tell you one little story? I wanted to buy a car . . . and this was the Korean war, so I couldn't get a Ford, I couldn't get a . . . Chevy, but I came to Oldsmobile, they said that they can give me a car. So I said, 'Let it be, \$3,000' it cost. Beautiful. And Mrs. Marilyn (inaudible) went to me, 'Buy the car?' She said, 'What? A greenhorn gonna buy an Oldsmobile? And I gonna ride in the Ford?' She left me by myself, and she went away. She said, 'What kind of greenhorns they come today.' And I was a short time in – I came in 1946. And this was in 1950. And I bought the car. My biggest aim was to drive the car. And I didn't have no license, so . . . the oral test I made over the phone. Then I took three or four lessons, and they gave me the license . . . I thought that my car is the biggest one, and my husband didn't drive yet, I was the first one to learn to drive, - and I drove this car, and everybody looked, 'Look at this greener with the Oldsmobile. With the white tires, and the black car, and the red inside.' It was gorgeous. But I didn't do it because I wanted. It was because I couldn't get no other car, and they said that if you don't gonna get this car, we won't have a car at all. And I still lived on Montgomery Street with this car.

WH: Did you have children?

HR: No, here we didn't have no children. I didn't want to have children. I didn't have them – I could, but I didn't want it.

WH: Why didn't you want to have any children?

HR: I didn't want it. I promised. Since they took my child, no more children. I don't know what's waiting on it for it. I was pregnant and I (inaudible -? did away with it?).

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WH: You were afraid?

HR: I did away with it, I didn't want to. (inaudible)

WH: Was it a way of preserving a memory of your other child?

HR: No. Of preserving the memory what happened to the child. That is could happen again. I said, 'No. (inaudible) No more.' And I was so busy making money, that I don't – because my husband was not eager for money. He was just going to school, that's all. He went straight to Marshall Law School. And all day and all night he was sitting, because the law is a very dry subject. Very dry subject. But he made it. And then he worked as a lawyer, and I worked still in the grocery store, til one day, it was – when we came to Israel . . . So in 1968, I said . . . my free day was Wednesday, I didn't go to no business, so I said, 'Leo, you know what? We going to - .' But I was here three times before . . . in 1960 was my first trip to Israel, and in 1961 or 1962 it was the second time, and then I said, 'We gonna move to Israel.'

WH: Why?

HR: Because I had here an aunt with an uncle. And I loved this uncle, he was a wonderful man. And I said, 'Well, we have enough money for us. What should I sit here in America? I want (inaudible) to live in Israel.' Just like this, for no good a reason. My husband wanted very bad, but he was scared to say that he wanted to go to Israel to live there.

WH: Why?

HR: Because he thought that I didn't want it – But when I went to this Anut to arrange this going to Israel, they said that I going to go to the best Ulpan, to Natanya, we really had a beautiful Ulpan, we gonna stay 4, 5 months there, and then we're going to decide it. I came for a year's trial. I gave my apartment to a couple from Israel, they studied there, I said, 'Here is my maid, and there is my house. You gonna live here without a penny, and after a year, when I decide, or I going to sell it, or else I'm going to come back.' And that's the way I did. And she made a tape to sent, that she was (inaudible) (HR raises here voice in mimicry) 'Mother, mother! I had a house, you know what's kind of house?' (HR: 'and she rattled on') That's the way she was talking. They were very happy, and they took good care of it. After a year, after we finished the Ulpan, we bought this apartment . . . we paid 43,000 lyre, this was \$12,000.

WH: You were 52 when you moved here, right?

HR: That's right. This was young, I was full of energy, and full of hope.

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WH: You look like you still have a lot of energy.

HR: I'm still working . . . in (?Shamir) Hospital, for twenty years without money . . . I want to tell you about Israel . . . (inaudible) my husband was like a fish in the ocean. He found here 400 people who knew him, because they made him an Evening. And they came, 400 people, they knew him from Poland, from Loge. And they said, 'Go, get a job, start working.'

End of Tape #1, Side A

Tape #1, Side B

HR: -finally, he had, as a lawyer, who was the engineers . . . (inaudible) . . . and he got (paid) . . . He didn't work for the money. But they said, 'Sit here.' But he said, 'I have to work!' 'Yeh, when it coming up something, that we need for a lawyer, then you gonna be here.' He was sitting a week, a month, two months, he said, 'I cannot sit and read a paper here. I'm not used to it. Or I'm working, or I go away.' So after three months, he left, and my husband's hobby was a newspaper. And there were two Jewish newspapers. One was a daily, and one was a weekly. The weekly newspaper, the man died and he went over there and said, 'I am as a volunteer, I don't want anything, but I want to buy this, I want to be the Director of this newspaper.' They said, 'Alright.' And he took a newspaper, what wasn't worth a penny, and he made out it a beautiful newspaper. He was so busy with this newspaper, that we lived here luxurious. All the holidays, ALL the holidays except Yom Kippur, we went to the hotels. To this religious hotels

WH: Only one half of a percent of all American Jews ever made aliyah to this country. Why were you in that half of a percent?

HR: They all made a bet, they bet with each other, that I gonna stay here a month, and come back. And that's the way it was.

WH: The Atlanta people?

HR: Yes. But I didn't come.

WH: Why did they?

HR: Because they knew that after America, it's very hard to get used to it, to live here.

WH: So what made it possible for you to make a successful adjustment?

HR: Because, first of all, we didn't have to work. This is one of the most important . . . we had money, we had an income. And we sold the apartments what we had in Atlanta, we had 20 apartments on 12th Street, and Piedmont. We had 30 apartments on Woodland Avenue. And we had those little apartments and the government took it because they built a big building over there for the shvartze. So we had enough money to put it in the bank and whatever percentage we had, to live on.

WH: Did you think that anti-Semitism would increase in America?

HR: We had a friend who . . . (experienced anti-Semitism in a new neighborhood) . . . but we didn't feel it . . . you had to have an incident like she had to find it out.

WH: Do you think that the American Jews are making a mistake by staying in America?

HR: No, I wouldn't say that. Israel isn't for everybody.

WH: Who is Israel for?

HR: For us it was (inaudible) a paradise, the way we lived. We loved every minute of it. EVERY second of it! I went to work straight to the-

WH: What are some of the things that you liked most about it?

HR: The chavra. That EVERYBODY has here . . . we didn't have no one evening free. Because, with the paper, what he was connected with the paper and everything else, and the party, but since he's dead, it's eleven years since he died. I don't have a big crowd, but whatever I have this is dear friends. And this is the main thing, because in America you couldn't get a dear friend. You had so – 'I'm friends,' until you invited them, until you – didn't want anything from them. The minute you ask for something, they were not friends any more. This is my experience.

WH: And here, people really help you?

HR: REALLY friends!

WH: Why do you think that's so?

HR: . . . first of all, they not spoiled. Like the American people are so spoiled. Terrible.

WH: In what way would you say that they are spoiled?

HR: They not ready to do not anything for you. They just want to take, that's all. Just like Kennedy said, 'Ask what you can do for the country, don't ask what the country can do for you. Ask yourself what you can do for the country.' This was his slogan, and a really nice slogan. Because – (Interview stops and restarts).

WH: Tell me, the most important thing you said, was what?

HR: This was the life in Israel. The ten years – now, I would never go back. I used to go back every year to America, to Atlanta. Now, for 5 years I have been here and I had a wedding there, my sister's daughter got married, and I didn't go because I don't have any eyes, I can't drive. And, without driving in Atlanta, you just – life without any - .

WH: You had some good friends in Atlanta, too, I imagine.

HR: I had, I belonged in a group, in a Bible group, 17 people, what we met for years.

WH: But it's not the same?

HR: No –o-o-o. It's not even comparison.

WH: Are your friends here from America usually?

HR: I had a friend here, I went to school together with her. She died a year ago . . . her family was just like my family.

WH: But you have most of your group here?

HR: No. I didn't . . . they all from Poland, and this why the most, my English got very bad. In 21 years, I don't use the language.

WH: . . . are you sorry you didn't come here earlier?

HR: No. I'm not sorry because I needed the money when I came over here. This is the most important thing. When you got to go to work here, I didn't – my husband went to the University here for 3 years to get this right to practice law. Then he said, 'Alright, I'm going to-. I said, 'No, not in my lifetime. You cannot compete with the Israeli Jew. They are shrewd, it's not like in America when you started, everybody tried to help you. If you would start here, (inaudible) going to help you. Because in business, they are very shrewd here, and as friends, they are terrific.

WH: They're great friends, but they are not good to do business with.

HR: No. All the papers, what I bought in America, from Israel I lost every penny . . . (inaudible . . .) when 'Roggousin? came . . . sold for the Hebrew School, he said, 'As much as you gonna make, I'm gonna give the same, so the school is gonna have an income-.

End of Tape #1, Side B
Conclusion of Interview