

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

## **William Helmreich Oral History Collection**

**Interview with Helen Schwartz**

**November 27, 1989**

**RG-50.165\*0104**

## PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Helen Schwartz, conducted by William Helmreich on November 27, 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.

## HELEN SCHWARTZ November 27, 1989

WH: Where are you from?

HS: Koshitzer, Hungary, actually Slovakia, near Munkacz.

WH: What year were you born?

HS: 1899. I'm 90 years old. I'll be 91 in April. My mother died at 62 and my father was over 70 when he died, both in a regular way.

WH: Do you have longevity in the family?

HS: One of my grandmothers lived to be past 90.

JS: (Helen Schwartz's daughter) I got out before the war. I came here in 1939 from Switzerland and my mother joined me in 1949. She was in 6 camps beginning with a very short stay in Auschwitz. She was in labor camps where people were killed.

WH: How were you able to survive?

HS: I don't know. I was a little handy and I spoke German. I was lucky because I worked in the kitchen.

WH: What happened after the war?

HS: My husband was killed and I remarried. Most of my friends didn't survive.

WH: What, in your opinion, explains the fact that your mother lived to such a ripe old age after what she went through?

JS: Her emphasis on physical activities, even in Europe at a time when this wasn't so popular. My mother hiked, played tennis. We were from a middle class family.

WH: Are any of your survivor friends still alive?

HS: No.

WH: How do you usually spend your day?

HS: I worked as a manicurist until I was 73. I go to the Herricks Community Center to a group. I don't like to be with old people, with seniors, because I'm interested in different things. I like to read and did so until I became sick. I need a cataract

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operation. In general, I like younger people because the younger people give me my youth.

WH: When you were reading, what kinds of books did you like to read?

HS: Novels and I also liked to go to operas, which I did until two years ago.

WH: How far did you go in school?

HS: Gymnasium and then commercial school for two years.

WH: Do you think what happened in Europe could happen here?

HS: Yes because I don't think they like Jews here.

WH: Do you watch TV?

HS: I did until recently. I lived by myself until two years ago in Queens.

WH: Is there any achievement you're especially proud of?

HS: Not especially.

WH: When you look back on your long life, what do you think was the purpose of your life?

HS: I don't know. When I turned ninety I thought to myself that now I'm dying. But I'm still interested in getting back my independence; but it is too late.

WH: What advice would you give others on how to survive?

HS: Not to rock the boat; to follow orders.

Conclusion of Interview

**Interviewer Notes**

When Helen Schwartz came to the door of her daughter's split level house in Albertson, she impressed me as a very sprightly, agile woman whose eyes were clear, who seemed able to concentrate very well. She knows at least three languages: German, Hungarian and English, and seemed to be in very good shape. Her hair, which was dyed brown-red, gave her a far more youthful appearance than her ninety some-odd years and I would have assumed she was in her mid-70s. Her daughter Suzy is in her second marriage, married to the Yiddishist Mordechai Granit. Mrs. Schwartz relates that after liberation she went back to her hometown and walked into a temple because it was Rosh Hashana but couldn't stay and walked out because she just didn't believe anymore after the war.