**United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**William Helmreich Oral History CollectionPRIVATE**

**Interview with Ben Geizhals and Esther Geizhals**

**December 25, 1989**

**RG-50.165\*0029**

**PREFACE**

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Ben Geizhals and Esther Geizhals, conducted by William Helmreich on December 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.**BEN GEIZHALS AND ESTHER GEIZHALS**

**December 25, 1989**

HW: Tell me a bit about your family.

EG: I was born October 29, 1929 into a middle class family in Lodz. I had one brother and we had a fruit store. My parents were traditional. I was sent to Auschwitz in 1944. Later I went on a death march. My father survived but my mother died. We were in the D.P. camps for a few years.

WH: Now tell me a bit about yourselves.

BG: I was born in Cracow. My father was a self-made man from a poor family. He was in the printing business and was active in Jewish politics as well as city politics. The Jews in Cracow were pretty integrated with the larger Polish community. We didn’t feel the anti-Semitism as much as in other parts of Poland. The family was very religious but I went to a Polish school. I was sent to Plaszow and worked as a printer. My four sisters were sent to Auschwitz but because they knew printing they were saved. As you may know, they printed English pounds, but they also tried to print dollars. Later on I worked in a factory making mortars for the B-2 bombers. My parents and a brother were killed.

WH: And then you married each other after the war?

WG: Well, it was a common pattern for many of these 25 or 26 year old men to marry these younger women of 17 or 18, to take care of them, so to speak.

BG: These marriages weren’t necessarily made in heaven

EG: No, it was more a commitment. Yet, surprisingly these marriages often lasted longer than the ones of today. My husband wanted to get married, he was alone, and he wanted to make a home.

HW: What was it like when you came here?

BG: When we came the HIAS wanted to help us. My sisters and I met with the social worker who said: “We want to support you for about six months, get you clothing and everything.” And I said: “But I’d like to get a job while you’re doing that.” “No,” she said: “It’s too hard for you now.” And this didn’t sit well with me. I felt so bad I started to cry. I mean, I cry easily, but I was really upset. I said to her: “Do you want to make welfare cases out of us? We don’t want to take any money.” “No,” she said. So I got very upset with her and I said: “You know why you want to do it? Because your future depends on supporting us. All I want is a job where they speak German or Polish so I can work.” So in a few days they gave me a job in a printing place. At that time I lived on 101st Street and Columbus Avenue. I remember I saw a sign near 96th Street that said “To Let.” And I thought it meant toilet. So I went and asked if I could go in and the people said “Why?” I said: “I want to use the toilet.” And they started to laugh. I went to night school and there was an Italian teacher. I said to her: “I want to open up a printing business. If I learn one word a night, it will take me 100 years.” So she said to me: “This is not for you. Go into a movie theater, sit two or three times through the film. The third time I want you to mumble what they’re saying.” And that’s what I did, my wife and I.

WH: So what type of work were you doing?

BG: I went into my own printing business and after two years we bought a two family house for five families in Queens Village. Then we moved to Hyde Park and bought a house for $12,000.00.

WH: Are your friends mostly survivors?

BG: No, they’re mostly Americans because survivors are not generally in the printing business and this is where we made a lot of friends. Then politically we got involved in both Jewish/Israeli politics and American politics. We go to Israel very often and our son made aliya and lives on a Shomer Hatzair kibbutz. He’d gone to Israel as a volunteer in the Yom Kippur war and they assigned him to this kibbutz. My wife has bought an apartment in Netanya.

WH: So you visit Israel often to see him?

BG: No my son is there because we went often.

EG: We instilled in him this feeling. Our children went to yeshiva day school and we were on the first Board of the North Shore Hebrew Academy. Another son lives in Port Washington. He’s an attorney who went to Brandeis and N.Y.U. Law School. My daughter went to F.I.T. and then became a registered nurse.

WH: What about religion. How do you feel about it as a survivor?

BG: I don’t think the religious world can tell us survivors one way or the other, because each and every one of us had either to lose something or gain something from the experience of the Holocaust. I came from a religious home but I do things because of being Jewish not because of religion. We strongly support Israel because we believe that if there had been an Israel then, there would not have been a Holocaust. And Israel has brought us a great deal of pride. Compare what Israel has done in the first forty years with what the U.S. achieved in the first eighty years.

Conclusion of Interview

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