

### Esther and Irving Raab Biographical Text



Irving Raab was born Yitzchak Mordko Rab in 1918 in Chelm, Poland to Abraham and Byrna Rab. He had four brothers and a sister. His family was financially comfortable, his father being a grain merchant. Irving was living in Poland when the Germans invaded in September 1939. He was twenty-one at the time. Irving escaped to the Soviet Union, where he found work digging ditches and later as a chemist. When the Germans invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, Irving briefly went into hiding and then joined a group of Russian soldiers retreating east, and he eventually reached the Russian city of Saratov. There he worked for a mill owner, who sent him to oversee a mill in Kyrgyzstan until 1942. With the advance of German forces to Stalingrad, Irving decided to leave the mill and went to the city of Osh, where he worked for another grain mill until the end of the war in 1945.

Esther Raab was born Estra Turner in 1922 in Chelm, Poland. Her family was a middle class, orthodox Jewish family, and her only sibling was her brother Idel. She led a fairly sheltered life, attending an all girls school, and taking Hebrew lessons after school. In December 1939, the first unit of the SS arrived in Chelm. They ordered all Jewish men to assemble in a square, where they were then executed; among them was Esther's father; her brother survived by playing dead until he could escape and return to his mother and sister. In 1940, Esther and her mother and brother were moved into the Chelm ghetto, in Siedliszcze. From there, Esther and her brother were sent to the Chelm-Staw labor camp in 1942, and then she was sent to the Sobibór death camp.

Upon arrival in Sobibór, Esther was one of few Jews selected for labor. Esther was put to work sorting and discarding the property of victims, cleaning SS quarters, taking care of rabbits, and knitting. However, Esther was one of a group of Jewish workers who planned and carried out a daring revolt, the only one of its kind recorded at the Sobibór death camp. On October 14, 1943, prisoners killed several guards and attempted to escape Sobibor. Esther succeeded with a small group that made it into the woods, where Stephen Marcynuik, a Catholic Pole, gave them shelter in his barn. There she was also reunited with her brother.

After the war, Esther and Irving returned separately to Chelm looking for surviving family members. The two met in spring 1945, when they were staying with a mutual friend. They then traveled to Potsdam, Germany and on July 23, 1946, the two married and planned to move to the United States; however, in late 1946 Irving was arrested by the Soviet occupation authorities who claimed that he was a British spy. Irving was moved through multiple prisons and endured hard labor, and eventually worked as an interpreter and bookkeeper. By bribing a Russian guard, Esther was able to win Irving's release from prison in 1949. They immigrated to the United States and settled down in Vineland, New Jersey. In 1951, Irving and Esther bought a chicken farm and became quite successful later owning four farms. Irving was also joint owner of the Vineland Kosher Poultry Plant. Esther testified in many trials pertaining to the Holocaust and had stories pertaining to her experiences published. The two would also spend much time raising their two sons. Esther died in 2015 and Irving passed away in 2017. They are survived by his two sons, eight grandchildren, and 14 great grandchildren.