

## ***Biographical Profile***<sup>1</sup>

### **Background**

Name: Paul Gould (name at birth: Maryan Goldhirsch)

Date of Birth: September 8, 1919

Place of Birth: Lwow, Poland (raised in Vienna, Austria)

Status: Labor camp survivor and French Legionnaire

Camp Location: Germany (forced labor)

Immediate Family: Sigmond Solomon Goldhirsch (father), Stella Goldhirsch (mother), Robert Gould (brother)

Wife: Marie (Miriam) Gould

Children: Shlomo-Sigmund Gould (son), Lillian Erdheim (daughter)

### **History Before WWII**

1919-1933: Paul Gould started his early life in Vienna, Austria. His father was in the army during his very early childhood, and then took part in selling/trading of furs. During the war, his father became the emperor's son's commander-in-chief. His mother did not work outside the home. The family lived in a two-bedroom apartment. He went to school in Austria. He graduated high school at the age of 14, as was common in his area. He preferred to study art and geography. He was in his temple choir and acted in several plays. Gould describes the environment in Vienna to be very anti-Semitic, and he was called "Christ killer" on occasion. "It was a great deal of struggle." Despite this social turmoil, he had both Jewish and gentile friends that he often played soccer with. Paul learned his uncle's trade of barbering. At the age of 14 he got a four year apprenticeship at a posh beauty parlor and barber shop downtown. As a teenager, he knew he did not want to stay in Vienna.

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<sup>1</sup> Biographical information and quotations obtained from Gould, P. (1997, Oct. 13). Interview by USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California. Greensboro, NC. Tape 34335.

1933-1939: The government transitioned from a socialist government to a fascist government. Paul was aware of the treatment of the Jews in Germany and the restrictions given to Jews. "Jews are used to restrictions....they have been going on for thousands of years...it wasn't something extraordinary." After the occupation/invasion of Austria by the Nazis (known as the *Anschluss*) in 1938, Paul wanted to leave and his father refused. His father said, "First of all, this is my country. Where am I supposed to go?...This has happened before." He said this even though Paul was told it was wise for them to leave, and they knew officials who said their names were on a list of people the Nazis wanted to target. "We were told that if we go to Aachen, Germany...go to a certain hotel...meet a certain man...for a fee would take us over the border (to Belgium)." The barber shop where Paul worked was taken over by Nazis. He applied to go to America but was unsuccessful. He then decided to leave Vienna and go to Aachen, Germany in order to flee Nazi rule. He boarded a train and travelled for two days. When he arrived in Aachen he was immediately sent to prison. He was given a piece of paper to sign renouncing his German citizenship and a one-time pass to go to Luxemburg. He went to Luxemburg with a young man named Weiss and was then arrested immediately there. He was then put on a truck and sent back to Germany. They asked to go to Belgium, but the military men told them, "No, you go back to where you come from."

1939: He was sent to a camp for political prisoners that was a forced labor camp. He was initially interviewed and told them he was a barber. He then became one of three camp barbers for the camp personnel. All of the camp personnel were German. This camp was in a stone quarry; however, Paul was in a building in a room with two other men. After working at the camp for a week, Paul noticed a farmer that delivered food through a side door. Paul started to make escape plans. He hid in the farmer's wagon in order to escape unbeknownst to the farmer. Once they got

to the farmer's farm and the farmer saw him, the farmer started to beat him up. The farmer wanted to tie him up, and Paul threatened the farmer that he would tell everyone that the farmer kidnapped him to use him for sex. In Germany, homosexuality was punishable by death. At this threat, the farmer let him go. Paul walked all night and half a day and crossed over the French border. Paul was arrested on the road. After five days, Paul was given the ultimatum of going back to Germany or enlisting in the army. Paul joined the French Foreign Legion and had to sign a five year contract. In Marseilles, Paul was trained for cavalry and sent to Tunisia for boot camp. He also barbered on the side. One of the colonels took Paul with him to another town (Sousse) and Paul became the barber there. Paul befriended the Jewish mayor of Sousse. Due to an injury, the military wanted to discharge Paul, but he refused. So Paul volunteered to chauffeur his commanding officer and he was sent to France.

### **History During the War**

1940-1944: Sent to Morocco and learned French. He was sent to a Communications school for the military. In 1941 Paul was sent to Chad. His regiment travelled across North Africa to fight with the British and Americans against the Germans. Paul interviewed the prisoners of war. He remarks that the German prisoners were treated very well. During his time in the French Foreign Legion, Paul was not in contact with his family. He knew of only two other Jews in the French Foreign Legion with him.

1944: Once his five year contract was up, Paul was sent to an internment camp in North Africa. One of the commanding officers read his military record, and wrote a letter asking why Paul was even sent to the camp. Paul's former superiors wrote back to let Paul out of the camp, and they gave Paul a bus ticket to Casablanca. In Casablanca, Paul ran into an old acquaintance who got him a job as a barber. He met his wife, Miriam, in Casablanca and was married in 1944. Paul did

not have his family there on his wedding day. He soon tried to apply to immigrate to the United States in 1944. He did not get a visa to go to the United States until 1950.

### **History After the War**

1950-Present: In 1950, Paul and his family arrived in New York and sublet an apartment in Brooklyn. He applied for an apartment in Queens, and he almost did not get the apartment because the management thought he was African and they would not rent to Africans. His first job was to sell vacuum cleaners door to door. While selling vacuum cleaners, he met a woman who got him a job as a wig maker. He went to get a haircut and ended up working at the barber shop that day because the shop was so busy. He then got a job working at that barber shop every Saturday. Paul eventually bought the shop and owned it for twelve years until he decided to sell it. In 1983 Paul moved to Greensboro, North Carolina to retire. Paul changed his last name to Gould when he became a naturalized citizen in American. Paul has been active with the North Carolina Council on the Holocaust, and he speaks at schools about his experience during the war. Paul went back to Vienna and visited where he used to live, and the lady who lived there told Paul what became of his parents. Once Paul's father died, his mother was thrown out of the house. The lady who currently lived in the apartment hid his mother for 3½ years. Somebody discovered his mother, and she was then put on a train and gassed to death.

## *Video Transcript*

### Paul Gould: Crafting Identity Through Holocaust Resettlement Narratives

This production enables you to listen to the voice of one person who resettled in the United States after his experience during the Holocaust. This video is part of the AfterWords Project which collects, studies, and shares stories Holocaust survivors tell about their renewal of life in the United States.

#### Paul Gould

Born: September 8, 1919 in Vienna, Austria  
Married: September 20, 1944 to Marie Levi  
Immigration: August 1950 to New York, NY  
Moved to Greensboro, NC in 1983

Occupation and interests:  
Barber/Hairdresser, Cantor, Sculptor, and Educator

Key to survival:  
Just good luck. One event fitting into the next.

What his experiences have taught him:  
Events and people can both be negative and positive.  
Some of them put you in the right direction.

My main experience in my life, I was obviously able to adjust myself to certain situations. Whatever was available I did. When you ask me, "In the army, did you have trouble?" No, I was adapting myself to the situation. As a matter of fact, when I was in the [forced labor] camp, you know I was—the camp. [laughs] One, two, three, the officers, the supervisors in the camp, they start liking me. One guy said to me, "It's a shame that you be here." I said to myself, "Don't worry about it. I am not going to be here for long." In view of the fact of what happened over there, never anymore and so that's that. I started to teach bar mitzvahs and bat mitzvahs.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The bar mitzvah (and the bat mitzvah for girls in Reform, Conservative, and more liberal Orthodox congregations) is the Jewish ritual marking the transition from childhood to adulthood. It also demonstrates the young adult's acquisition of a Jewish education. The teaching refers primarily to tutoring in reading Hebrew passages from the Torah, a central part of the ceremony.

[visuals of liturgical programs featuring Paul Gould] And I did this for quite a few years for nothing. As a matter of fact, a rabbi said to me, "How come you teach all of these kids, and you are never invited to the party,<sup>3</sup> or seldom? I don't understand this." I said, "I don't understand either, but I don't care."<sup>4</sup>

*What does it mean to be a Jew?*

One thing is: I never hid my religion. I never told anybody anything that I am not. Even when I was in the French Foreign Legion [photo shown of Paul as a young man during his days in the French Foreign Legion], which is not extremely Jewish friendly, I never denied to be a Jew. I happened to be in the position where I could myself be very defensive about it if I needed to be, but I was not. Because I was the head of the barber shop wherever I went.<sup>5</sup> There were only two of us [barbers] in a regiment of about 1,200-1,400. Even there I was in the position of controlling myself, of being in control of myself, not of anybody else. If I wanted to go out and get a leave of 24 hours I went to a lieutenant of mine and said I would like to. He gave me a piece of paper and so then out I went.

*Why do people need to learn about the Holocaust?*

Why do people need to learn about the Roman Empire? Why do people need to learn about the Greek empire? Why do people need to learn our own [Jewish] history—which is 3,000 and some years? Why do people need to learn anything? The Holocaust is something which is an event.

There have been events like this before. Maybe not purely Jewish, but there have been

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<sup>3</sup> Bar/bat mitzvahs are noted for the jubilant, often elaborate, celebrations that the families hold after completion of the formal ceremony.

<sup>4</sup> Notice that Paul has little interest in any kind of material reward or acknowledgment for his services.

<sup>5</sup> Paul's skill as a barber/hairdresser placed him in a position of power. Since military personnel had to get regular haircuts as a requirement, Paul's skills were always in high demand.

Holocausts. How can you exist, especially in this world, without having knowledge of whatever? [visuals of books about the Holocaust, French Foreign Legion, and Jewish themes] I did not go to college but I have been learning all of my life.<sup>6</sup>

### *Tolerance*

It is very hard to be judgmental, to judge people. [scenes of Paul accompanying his wife to the YMCA and in temple] Everybody should be able to believe whatever he wants to believe. As long as I am not going to my next door neighbor who is retarded and say, “Hey, I don’t want your Christmas lights shining in my bedroom.” Or it annoys me, this annoys me. And he doesn’t come to me and say, “I want you to eat on Yom Kippur.”<sup>7</sup> If I want to eat or don’t eat, it’s none of your business. So that’s the way I was living all of my life. I really, really haven’t tried to influence people. I tell people when they want to hear my story. But I didn’t come to you and say, “You want to hear something?” People come to me. They want to hear something I tell them what I know.<sup>8</sup>

### *Education*

My father valued education, because if you live long enough and learn long enough and have enough to eat—if you have brains you can be—you don’t have to have money. If you have brains you can make it. *You can make it.*

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<sup>6</sup> This theme of lifelong learning, a personal pursuit of knowledge, is central to Paul’s life.

<sup>7</sup> Observant Jews fast on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

<sup>8</sup> This point raises the question of whether witnesses *should* be more aggressive in telling their stories. What advantages and problems might accompany more active self-disclosure?

## *Empathy*

I talk to children, I tell them my story. If it makes any kind of impression on them—if one out of 100,000, then I have accomplished something. [visuals of the temple Paul attends] I am not doing this because I want to be known. I'm not trying to moralize, because nobody really, actually is perfect. I am not perfect. The way it sounds, I had a perfect life. I didn't have the perfect life. If one does not have a moral background or a moral—sense of morality, then forget about it, you can't teach them. But if you can be on a certain way you work your life, straight, without having, ending up in personal difficulties morally. Nobody is perfect morally,<sup>9</sup> but morally if you can try to be forward and just live, if you have a piece of bread and somebody comes and wants to share, you give them a little share of it. If have a piece of bread and see somebody hungry and don't give it to them, it is your own way of living. For me life wasn't that. In spite of being complicated—it was very complicated—I have learned as long as it goes straight you can make it.

So, where do you want to go from here?

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<sup>9</sup> Notice the footage of Paul slipping at poolside, but then recovering his balance. Students might chuckle at his misstep, but note that the visual reinforces Paul's key message by showing how no one is perfect physically as well as morally. Both Paul's words and the accompanying video stress human fallibility. The point is not to become perfect but to find ways to regain balance and to improve yourself by helping others.



### **Further Resources about Paul Gould**

Barto, K. (2009, March 26). Holocaust survivor shares his story. *Martinsville Bulletin*. Available at <http://www.martinsvillebulletin.com/article.cfm?ID=18240>

Gould, P. (1997, October 13). Interview by USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California. Greensboro, NC. Tape 34335.

Gould, P. (2008, April 22). Audio transcript for Wake Forest University Holocaust oral history project. Available at [http://wakespace.lib.wfu.edu/jspui/bitstream/10339/1383/3/P\\_Gould.mp3](http://wakespace.lib.wfu.edu/jspui/bitstream/10339/1383/3/P_Gould.mp3)

Gould, P. (2008, April 22). Interview transcript for Wake Forest University Holocaust oral history project. Available at <http://wakespace.lib.wfu.edu/jspui/bitstream/10339/1383/4/PaulGouldTranscript.pdf>