UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
FIRST PERSON: CONVERSATIONS WITH HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS
FIRST PERSON MARCEL DRIMER
Thursday, May 25, 2017
11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Remote CART Captioning

Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) captioning is provided in order to facilitate communication accessibility and may not be a totally verbatim record of the proceedings.
This transcript is being provided in rough-draft format.

>> Bill Benson: Good morning, and welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson. I am the host of the museum's public program*, First Person.* Thank you for joining us today. We are in our 18th year of *First Person*. Our First Person today is Mr. Marcel Drimer, whom you shall meet shortly.

This 2017 season of *First Person* is made possible by the generosity of the Louis Franklin Smith Foundation, with additional funding from the Arlene and Daniel Fisher Foundation. We are grateful for their sponsorship.

First Person is a series of conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their firsthand accounts of their experience during the Holocaust. Each of our *First Person* guests serves as a volunteer here at this museum. The museum's website, at www.ushmm.org, provides information about each of our upcoming *First Person* guests.

Marcel will share with us his "First Person" account of his experience during the Holocaust for about 45 minutes. If time allows, we will have an opportunity for you to ask Marcel questions. The life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades. What you are about to hear from Marcel is one individual's account of the Holocaust.

Marcel Drimer was born in Drohobycz, Poland, a small town now part of Ukraine. The arrow on this map of Europe from 1933 points to Poland. Marcelle's father, Jacob, worked as an accountant in a lumber factory while his mother raised Marcelle and his younger sister, Irine.

In this photo we see Marcelle and his mother, Laura, in 1934.

Germany and the Soviet Union attacked Poland in September 1939, beginning World War II. This is an historical photograph of German troops parading through Warsaw after the surrender of Poland.

On June 22, 1941, Germany violated the German-Soviet pact and attacked Soviet territory. Within a few weeks Drohobycz was occupied by German forces. In 1942, members of Marcel's family, including his grandfather, whom we see here, were deported to extermination camps where they were murdered.

In the fall of 1942, Marcel and his family were forced into the Drohobycz ghetto. This is an historical photograph of Jews being forced into the Drohobycz ghetto.Before the liquidation of the ghetto, the family escaped to a small village.

In August 1943, Marcel went into hiding with a Polish-Ukrainian family. Here we see photos of Jan Sawinski and Zofia Sawinski, the family who hid Marcel and his family.

Marcel's family is seen in this photo taken in 1947 or 1948. From left to right we see Marcel's uncle, Abraham Drimer, his parents, Laura and Jacob, and Marcel's uncle, Abraham Gruber.

In 1957, Marcel earned a degree in mechanical engineering. He immigrated to the United States in 1961 where his wife Ania joined him in 1963. Soon after arrival in the U.S. he was hired by the U.S. Post Office Department to work on the design of mail sorters and conveyors. After a very successful period with the Post Office Department, Marcel transferred to the U.S. Army as a civilian in 1972. He then worked as a mechanical engineer for the Army Corps of Engineers. Although Marcel officially retired from the Army in 1994, he remained a consultant with the Army until 2010. He is now truly retired.

Ania trained as a pharmacist in Poland and continued her profession after her arrival in the U.S. and is now also retired. Marcel and Ania have a son Adam who lives in Richmond. They have two grandchildren, Mary, age 15, and Jack, who is 17. They are both in the International Baccalaureate program.

Although officially Marcel and Ania are retired, they both do considerable work as volunteers with the museum. Marcel and Ania translate documents written in Polish. They translated portions of Emanuel Ringelblum's Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto, a 25,000-page collection of diaries and other documents detailing the events and lives of those who lived in the doomed Warsaw Ghetto. They also recently translated personal memoirs by two Jewish young women who suffered terribly during the war. In appreciation for the translations, the families of these women donated generously to this museum.

Marcel and Ania also worked on the current museum exhibit titled, "Some Were Neighbors: Collaboration and Complicity in the Holocaust," which opened in 2013. To help with the exhibit, they reviewed and transcribed several filmed testimonies and made recommendations about their potential significance to the exhibit. They are quite a team.

Marcel speaks publicly about his Holocaust experience in various settings. He was a speaker with Mia Farrow at an event in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, and spoke to cadets from our four military academies who were on their way to visit Auschwitz. Marcel also speaks to students and faculty at universities and federal agencies including the FBI just a couple of weeks ago.

Marcel recently donated photographs of great significance to him as well as a ring which played a role in his survival, which we will hear more about later. And we hope to hear about a trip Marcel and Ania took to his home town of Drohobycz last year.

Please join me in welcoming our First Person, Mr. Marcel Drimer.

>> [Applause]

>> Bill Benson: Thank you all for being here. And Marcel, thank you for being with us today and for your willingness to be our First Person today. We have such a short period and you have so much to share with us. We will cover what we can and get started.

World War II began in September 1939, when Germany attacked Poland from the west followed quickly by the Soviet Union attacking from the east. Early in the war you and your family lived under Russian occupation. But before we turn to that time, before we turn to the war and the Holocaust, tell us just a little bit about your family and your community before the war began.

>> Marcel Drimer: My family consisted of my father, mother, and younger sister, Irine. And my father was the oldest of five siblings. My mother was the oldest of four siblings. My father was an accountant, as you said earlier, at the lumber factory. And we lived above the offices. We used the lumber factory as our playground, my sister and I.

Drohobycz was basically known for oil --

>> Bill Benson: Big refineries.

>> Marcel Drimer: Right. As a matter of fact, one of my grandfathers worked in the refinery. Drohobycz was the biggest producer of gasoline in the beginning of the 20th Century. So this was the industry.

About the people, Drohobycz was a town of three nationalities living in peace: Ukrainians, Pols, and Jews, about 16,000, 17,000 each of these groups. People had their own sports clubs. I had an uncle who was a good soccer player. I remember watching him and screaming, Uncle, Uncle. This was my mother's youngest brother. He was a wonderful person.

And the Jews had their buildings there, theaters, clubs. And so did the Ukrainians in their own language and so did the Pols. The Jews had even a high school that was a Jewish high school. Life was good. We didn't know really what we missed because I only realized that when I came to America. But we were happy at that time.

>> Bill Benson: That, of course, was about to change. On September 17, 1939, Russia attacked Poland. As a result, you would live under Russian occupation until June of 1941. What was that time like when you were under the Russians until June of 1941?

>> Marcel Drimer: About one-third of Poland was occupied by the Russians. They tried to make -- at that time they tried to make that part of Poland like one of the republics of the Soviet Union. They nationalized factories, big buildings. They kicked out people that they considered enemies of their state. They sent them to Siberia. Among these people were the parents of my wife. They were not -- well, the father was a doctor and mother was a lawyer. The Soviets didn't trust people that were very smart.

>> Bill Benson: They considered them bourgeois.

>> Marcel Drimer: Yes. They didn't want to accept Soviet passport so they were sent to Siberia where my wife was born.

>> Bill Benson: And Ania is right in the front row.

>> Marcel Drimer: Her father delivered her and they survived there. We in Drohobycz knew what was going on in the western part of Poland. So when the Germans attacked Poland later -- I'm getting a little ahead.

>> Bill Benson: Just a couple more questions. Since you were under the Russians, some of your uncles even joined the Russian Army. Is that right?

>> Marcel Drimer: Well, they didn't join. They were drafted.

>> Bill Benson: Drafted. Ok.

>> Marcel Drimer: Yeah. Well, most of my uncles were drafted to the Russian Army. They fought against the Germans. Two of them were killed but the others survived. Those that were deported or ran with the Russian Army whether the Germans attacked, about 80% -- about 90% survived.

>> Bill Benson: Those who went with the Russians.

>> Marcel Drimer: It wasn't a picnic but it was -- it was a very hard life but they survived. But those that stayed under the German occupation, about 95% perished.

>> Bill Benson: One more question about that period. Your birth date, May 1, I'd like to ask you -- it's a significant date in the Communist world. Tell us about the significance of that date for you because of your birthday.
>> Marcel Drimer: Well, I just turned 83 on May 1, so it's an important date. My father had two sisters who were members of the Communist Party of Poland. My father was sort of leaning in that direction. May 1 was a holiday, a Labor Day. So I was born in my grandparents' house. A doctor came there and delivered me and went away. And my father a couple of days later had to go to the authorities and report my birth. So he decided to -- I was actually born April 30 but my father decided that maybe it's going to be nice if he would be born May 1, holidays and so forth. So I am born --
>> Bill Benson: Officially May 1.
>> Marcel Drimer: Don't tell anybody.
>> [Laughter]
>> Bill Benson: Marcel, soon after Germany turned on the Soviet Union in June of 1941, then, of course, German troops occupied Drohobycz and life for you and your family and the other Jews in Drohobycz changed dramatically and tragically. Tell us what the Nazis did after they took control of Drohobycz and what this meant for you and your family.
>> Marcel Drimer: Yes. They started their hellish action July 1 and 2. Even before they came, they contacted the Ukrainian nationalists, anti-Semites, and they told them the first few days you will have the right to go to the Jewish homes and do whatever you want to.

So when they came, when the Germans came, bands of Ukrainian nationalists would run through from house-to-house. They would beat people and grab what they wanted. Among others, my maternal grandfather was beaten up. We couldn't take him to a hospital because there was no hospitals for the Jews, so he died in 10 days.

I had an aunt who was in the biggest university town, near Drohobycz. She was also killed by the Germans. In that town about 5,000 Jews were killed the first few days. In Drohobycz, about 80 people were killed, among them my grandfather and about 600 were wounded. So on the first day, first day of German occupation, I lost my grandfather and an aunt.

But what they did, what the Germans did, they had a big list of things what the Jews cannot do. What can do wasn't much but what they cannot do. Children were not allowed to go to school, Jewish children were not. Christian children were allowed to go through the fourth grade because they were supposed to be the slave labor for Germans and they would need to know some elementary, I think, and reading. But the Jews were to be killed so they didn't need any education.

They ordered Jews to wear an arm band with the Star of David on it. They established a ration system that people could buy only or get food about up to 300-calories, which you couldn't live on. And they also started aktion. After the first one it was just many, many like that.
>> Bill Benson: An aktion is action.
>> Marcel Drimer: In German. I'm sorry. But there were aktions. This is when they would go to Jewish homes and take whatever they wanted away. And the killing aktion, they would kill or send people to the concentration -- extermination camp.

I'll go back a little. When the robbers robbed my grandfather and almost killed him, they took out photo albums, several photo albums, and shook out the photos into mud and took the albums. After the war my father went there to look at what's left of the grandparent's

house that was gone but a neighbor came and gave father a stack of photos which he picked up from mud.
>> Bill Benson: Some of the photos that we saw?
>> Marcel Drimer: Some of the photos you have seen here and Bill mentioned about the donation. I donated all of these photos to the Holocaust Museum. They made me beautiful copies. But all of these photos are in the Holocaust Museum. And if you Google my name, you can see all of these photos.

Ok.

>> Bill Benson: One of the things I know during that period that you want to tell us about, and that is the early stages of the occupation before you were forced to go to the ghetto, you had had a nanny before the war. Tell us about the significance of the visit you made to your nanny.
>> Marcel Drimer: Yes. In my house, in my apartment, there were my two grandparents and one aunt with two children whose husband was taken to the Russian Army. The grandparents could not work, so they would stay with us. My father was the only one that was working. But he managed to barter things for food. He would, for example, exchange a ring for two loafs of bread. So these people stayed with us and they -- you know, it was quite crowded.

I had a nanny, her name was Jancia. I don't remember her last name. She loved me very much and I loved her, too. She would come to visit us. She brought some food, milk, and played with me. And one day she offered my mother -- I had some sickness. I wasn't feeling good. So she says, I'll take Marcel to my house and I'll give him a bath and I will feed him and I will bring him back.

And my sister -- after a day or two my sister started complaining that she would like to get me back to play with her. I was two years older. I am two years older than she is. She is still alive, thanks God. And she bartered and bartered so my mother said, ok, we'll go and get Marcel back. So she took off her arm band then.

By the way, if you were Jewish and you would take out your arm band, and they would discover that you were Jewish, this was death. They could kill you on the spot. My mother was blond and blue-eye sod she looked not very Jewish.

So she went to Jancia's house. She came with Irene. And I was sitting in the corner and crying. And Jancia was giving birth to a baby. She was in the ninth month and there was nobody. I was the only one there. There was no telephone. Her husband was working. So my mother came and did what she could. She boiled some water and, you know, delivered the baby. But the baby was stillborn.

So, but it got dark. It got evening. So Jancia said why don't you stay here because it's dangerous to walk and then we'll see what we will do. So we stayed there overnight. In the morning, this was August 4, 1942. The next morning her husband comes from his work. He was on the night shift working. And he says, Oh, my gosh what are you doing here; don't you know what's going on in Drohobycz? Of course we didn't know anything. There was no telephones. There was no radio. There was nothing. The Germans confiscated the radios, telephones, and all of that thing. He says if they would come here and see you here, they would kill you and they would kill us, all of us. So he says you better go and hide somewhere outside.

So he gave -- he or Jancia gave my mother a piece of bread and told us that behind the road there is a wheat field. And behind that there was some trees growing. So they said go there and try to hide there. So we left the house, crossed the street, went through the wheat field. My mother had a raincoat, the color of wheat. She found an indentation in the ground. So

she says we'll lie down there and cover with the coat and see what happens, try to survive. So we did so.

And then soon after that we started hearing dogs barking, Germans screaming, "Raus, raus." "Schnell!." When I hear these words, you know, it's terrible. And then it was shooting and people screaming of pain. It lasted maybe 15 minutes. Then it got quiet for another 10 or 15 minutes and started all over again. And it lasted like until about 5:00 or 6:00 in the evening.

>> Bill Benson: And this is when the German aktion --

>> Marcel Drimer: One of the aktions by the Germans. This was one of the biggest. So at about 5:00 or 6:00 in the evening it quieted much, like for good so we got up and we started walking towards Jancia's house. As we came to the road, there was a German soldier. I don't know if he was SS. Anyway, he was a uniformed soldier with a dog, standing on the street on the right side. He looked at us. We looked at him. It seemed like it was forever but he just turned around and walked away.

We wondered many times why he did it. The Germans, when they went hunting for Jews, they would always go in pairs or more than two because their philosophy was that if somebody sees something and it's not his business, he could turn around and walk away. But if there was two -- so there was no chance for the soldier or for the SS men to let the person live. But he was alone, lucky me, for whatever reason.

So we walked over the street and came to Jancia and stayed overnight there again. The next day -- excuse me. My father came -- my father stayed in a dormitory at the lumber factory where he worked. There was a dormitory where Jewish men lived who didn't have families. Those that have families would go home but during aktion they would stay there. So father came and took us home. We walked to the home and came to our apartment and opened the door -- actually, the door was open. There were feathers flying all over the place. Furniture were damaged. The apartment was empty. They were all taken. All my aunt and cousins and my grandparents. They were kept for two or three days in umshatz platz where they kept people until they got enough of them, without food, without sanitary facilities. And then they were taken to Belzec and killed there.

Belzec was one of the worst one of the camps. It was a killing camp. There were concentration camps and killing camps. Auschwitz was concentration camp. They would use people to work, as long as they could work, on minimal rations. And then they would bring other people and kill those people. The ones that went to Belzec, they were killed immediately. So my grandparents, aunt, and cousin were killed.

After the war, we found out that when the Germans were passing -- well, the Germans usually had help from the Ukrainian police or Polish police. So somebody told us that when they passed, when the Germans came through, they passed our apartment. It was hidden from the road. There was a 10 or 12-year-old boy that ran after them and said there are Jews living over there, you missed that house. So the Germans came back and took everybody.

>> Bill Benson: Marcel, soon after you lost your grandparents and other family members, like you described, soon after that, in the fall of 1942, that's when the Germans created a ghetto in Drohobycz and you were forced into the ghetto. Tell us what that meant to go into the ghetto and what conditions were like for you then.

>> Marcel Drimer: If you think that -- if it's bad and you think it can't be any worse, that's not true. In our case any step forward was worse than the previous step. The ghetto, four of us lived in one room in the ghetto. There was no furniture. There was only a mattress that we

used. Bread, food was impossible to get. The sanitary conditions were terrible. And they continued their aktions. There would be an aktion and we would hide. We had some primitive hide willing places -- hiding places we would hide and then come out.

So it couldn't last very long because the Germans took -- they had certain quotas of people that they had to deport to concentration camps. So my father decided that the time is right to get out of the ghetto. He bribed -- well, when the Jewish workers from the ghetto went to the places where they worked --

>> Bill Benson: So your father still had his job in the lumber factory.

>> Marcel Drimer: He was slave labor.

>> Bill Benson: Right, slave labor in the lumber but he was still able to do that.

>> Marcel Drimer: Right. They wouldn't let him work in an office. He had to build a little, like, dog house or something where he worked but he had the job.

So a policeman would come to the ghetto in a certain place. The Jews would getting to the and the policemen would guide them to the places where they work. So my father bribed the policeman. My mother put some men's clothing. She took my sister under her arm and my father took me under his arm. We were not obese. Obviously we were thin like sticks. So my father took me and my mother -- and we went marching with the group. And then when we were near the lumber factory, we got out of the group and father put us behind a few bushes.

He prepared -- in defense, he prepared, loosened part of the fence so that we could get through and said to me, "I can't take you all together. I will take mother and Irene and then I will come and take you." Well, I was 8 years old. He says "You're a man so you have to stay." So he took my mother and my sister. I got scared. I heard in the ghetto that people would abandon children and try to save their lives. I just didn't -- I was scared. I was a child. So I ran out and started screaming, "Daddy, Daddy!" And, of course, another policeman showed up. So my father had to bribe that other policeman. He would take things out of his body and give to these policemen.

But my father prepared that place to hide us in that factory. There was a big building that was drying wood for furniture and whatever was necessary. So there was an attic there. We had to wait in the place where father worked, until night. And then at night we went there. In the attic of that building father prepared a place for us. There was no stairs or nothing. We would get there, a ladder, and stay. But every day father -- at midnight, father would come and bring some food. We would put the string down and pull it up and put down the waste. And father would come at night. We would do it for, I don't know, a week or something.

Then there was a friend of my father, a lady, told my father that there is another woman, her name was Theresca, that she suspected that my father had somebody in the camp and she will make sure that she's right and she will do the right thing. The right thing in her opinion was to report us to the SS and she would get a kilos of flour or a kilos sugar for each person that they report to SS. So the other woman told my father.

My father said, you know -- he got very panicky, what to do, what to do. He had a friend who was a doctor. There was a little clinic in that place. So he got together with the doctor who was educated in Vienna, a perfect German -- because Drohobycz, before World War II -- World War I, was Austra-Hungary. When my parents were born, it was Austra-Hungary. When I was born it was Poland. And now it's Ukraine.

So he was educated in Germany and he got an idea. He said, I will write an anonymous letter to the SS and tell them that I had a sexual encounter with that woman and she gave me syphilis. And Germans were very touchy about that thing. Because their soldiers

had to be clean. Anyway so next day, two SS men came and picked up this Theresca and brought her to the clinic where this doctor was. So, of course, he confirmed that she had syphilis. So she disappeared until the end of the war. Then she came out and my father told her what made her go. Maybe it was the best thing for her.
>> [Laughter]
>> Bill Benson: From there, clearly, Marcel, you can't continue staying there. So your father's got to now go find another place for you. I know our time is getting short but we want --
>> Marcel Drimer: I have to. I have to.
>> Bill Benson: Absolutely.
>> Marcel Drimer: So my father went to the villages nearby, especially the village where my mother was born, nearby, near Drohobycz, and contacted several people. They didn't want to help. Some of them threatened him that they'll report him and ask to give the ring or something.

Well, anyway, one family, Sawinski family, decided to -- my father promised them a lot of things, but they were very decent people. So Mrs. Sawinski decided -- told my father that she would take my mother and my sister. The reason for that is that in Poland, only Jewish men were circumcised. So when the Germans would find under the circumstances -- would find me at that house and they would realize that I am Jewish, everybody would be killed.

So my father's philosophy was save anybody that you can save. So a few days later, we came down and we stayed in the dining room, where the workers ate. And Mrs. Sawinski came there to take us. Of course, I was crying and my mother was crying. And Mrs. Sawinski started to cry. And then at one point she says, Well, whatever will be, will be; I will take the boy, too.
>> Bill Benson: So you said to me this is your mother's version of "Sophie's Choice." Save her daughter but not you.
>> Marcel Drimer: I don't know if she would go by herself and I don't want to know. But luckily Mrs. Sawinski --
>> Bill Benson: I'll take Marcel, too.
>> Marcel Drimer: So we went to the village where they worked. This was -- we stayed with the family, with the Sawinski family. The rationing was still in power. And the farmers could not slaughter any pigs or chickens or any animals without notifying the Germans. So if they would go and buy more food on the black market, it would be suspicious.

Oh, by the way. I have to hurry up. She allowed us to come and then my father came and then my uncle, if was working at the --
>> Bill Benson: The refinery, right?
>> Marcel Drimer: Right, as a butcher. So there was 13 of us.
>> Bill Benson: To make sure people understand, this was a little tiny farmhouse.
>> Marcel Drimer: Very poor.
>> Bill Benson: Very poor, dirt floors, very small. And over time 13 people were hidden in there. Did the Sawinskis have children, too?
>> Marcel Drimer: They had four children.
>> Bill Benson: So as many as 19 people. Where were you hidden? Obviously you had to be hidden away.
>> Marcel Drimer: In the attic. There was a thatch roof, without a chimney. The smoke would come there.

But before my uncle came there, the food -- the youngest boy of the Sawinskis would take a cart with a container and go to the refinery where my uncle was working as a butcher, and my uncle would give some meat or bread or something for which he would be killed immediately. And also the scraps from the table, the people ate. When we -- when he came back, we, the hiding Jews, had the first choice before they would get their part. It was not eating. It was just surviving.
>> Bill Benson: And you had -- there was a hole in the ground where some were hidden, as you said. Some were in the that happened attic where smoke came up through. And there was a little shed maybe. And you had to rotate somehow, right?
>> Marcel Drimer: Exactly. Yes. Yes. We did not have a chance to go out and play. My sister saw a chicken once from hiding from the roof and she says, "Why can't I be the chicken?" The chicken just runs around and nobody bothers him and I have to stay here. We bathed once a month. There was lice, bed bugs. It was just absolutely terrible conditions.
>> Bill Benson: And you were there for almost a year. Right?
>> Marcel Drimer: Right. The Russian Army liberated us on the 5th of August 1944.
>> Bill Benson: So almost a year. So you went through the winter.
>> Marcel Drimer: Through the winter and the fall.
>> Bill Benson: And the winters are extremely tough. So how did you survive the winter in there?
>> Marcel Drimer: We were close. [Laughter] Physically close.
>> Bill Benson: Right. Right.
>> Marcel Drimer: I couldn't -- most of the time I could not stand up. I had to lie down. I could not talk loud because somebody could hear. That's the way we lived and that's the way we survived.
>> Bill Benson: You shared with me -- I mean, of course you could not do anything to bring attention to you, the fact that any of you were there. And you couldn't get medical care. You had a very scary time with your sister, right?
>> Marcel Drimer: She was so sick. She was bleeding. We worried where would we bury her so as not to make -- get somebody to realize that we were there. I did not see a dentist for three years. I did not see a doctor. It was a very, very tough, tough time.
>> Bill Benson: After a year. And you can only give us a glimpse of that here. Tell us about your liberation. How did that come about?
>> Marcel Drimer: Well, the Soviet Army liberated us, as I said, the 5th of August. We heard we were liberated. We were ecstatic.
>> Bill Benson: But before that, there were bombardments going on all around you.
>> Marcel Drimer: Right. The allies came from the territories that they also had in Europe and they would bomb the factories, the lumber -- no, not lumber, but the oil so that the Germans would not have oil. So this was the only time that we would come out from hiding and stay there because everybody else was hiding.
>> Bill Benson: So everybody else goes in their shelters and you could come out while bombing was going on.
>> Marcel Drimer: Right. Right. The only time.
>> Bill Benson: What did the Russians do when they liberated you?
>> Marcel Drimer: Well, they were -- they made my father the director of the factory where my father worked, luckily. A Russian officer comes once to my father to order some lumber for the front and my father was barefoot. So the Russian officer says, "You are a director of the factory

and you are barefoot. How could this be?" He says," I don't have any money. There is nothing available."

He told them what the situation was. When we got out from the Sawinski's, it was in the same shirts and pants that we came in. So the Russian officer gave my father some military boots. And then my father asked how about -- at that time I was 10 years old. I have a 10-year-old boy and he also doesn't have any shoes. So I got military shoes. I ruined my feet with that.

>> Bill Benson: Marcel, that was August of 1944. Of course, the war continued in Europe until April of 1945 and the armies were moving on as they moved westward. Were you able to -- you started to go to school. Tell us what that was like for you.

>> Marcel Drimer: Right. The children -- I would be very quiet. I would just sit quiet and not play with other children, talk very low, very quietly. So the teacher asked my mother to come and she said, What's wrong with your son? Why doesn't he play with other children? Why doesn't he talk, scream, like children? So my mother explained that this is what the reality was. I couldn't walk. My muscles atrophied. So I couldn't play with other children.

So after the war, I tried to catch up. I lost three years of schooling because I should have started at 7 and I started at 8. I caught up some. But it was tough.

And after the Russians came, all the Jews got out of the hiding and came to the middle of town. There was about 400 Jews left.

>> Bill Benson: Out of about 17,000.

>> Marcel Drimer: Out of 17,000. There were some more that came from Russia and some that were partisans, some were in Polish Army and Russian Army. So all together about 700 Jews survived out of 17,000 Jews.

>> Bill Benson: Marcel, of course, you lived under Communist rule until 1961, when you finally made your way here.

I want to leave a little bit of time for a couple of questions from our audience, but before we do that, you just recently, this last year, you and Ania went back to Drohobycz, first time -- you had been to Poland but you had never been to Drohobycz since 1945. Briefly --

>> Marcel Drimer: 1946.

>> Bill Benson: Briefly, what was that like to go back?

>> Marcel Drimer: It was absolutely amazing. It was absolutely amazing. What happened is the Sawinskis had -- in addition to these four children that were there when we were, two daughters that were one was married and one was sent to Germany for slave labor. I didn't realize. I didn't know about it. But a young lady, Maria, studied history in Drohobycz. And she wanted to write a story of her family. Somehow somebody remembered that there was a young boy, Marcel -- my name was spelled different. So she started Googling and researching and found out one of my stories that I talked to in the University of West Virginia, the Holocaust Museum, so she wrote a letter saying -- telling us that she was the grand, grand, granddaughter of the Sawinskis and she was the one that has the photos that we have here. And I have many more photos. And she invited us.

We went with a group of survivors from Israel. Only four were survivors, my sister and I and two from Israel. And the others were second generation, third generation. But it was an amazing trip. I had the chance to put some flowers on Mrs. Sawinski's grave. She died in 1957. And I was with the whole family. Maria's grandfather was one of the grandchildren of the Sawinski's, the only one that remembered. So we talked about it. We exchanged photos. We

went to the places where the train took people to the extermination camp, to the places where people were killed in forests.

One place where my uncle's wife and daughter were killed was in the forest, 6,000 people in that forest were killed. We would go from place to place and pray for the dead. And tell our stories. Those that remembered stories, we tell for the others. They spoke Hebrew, most of them. But my sister translated.

Oh, and I -- Maria asked me to talk to her class to her student class. I talked to her class. I gave them -- offer I can speak English or Polish. So in western Ukraine, Polish is quite popular. They speak a lot of Polish. So I talked Polish about what I am telling to you except that it wasn't there, it was here. The ghetto was about two blocks from where I was talking to them. The forest was about three miles where people were killed.

>> Bill Benson: The Sawinski's home.

>> Marcel Drimer: The home, was already in ruins, a new home. We tried to bring her here for vacation and stay with her but visa did not work. She spent $150 for the application of the visa. And they, in the Ukraine, they earn -- she graduated history the department and she was a teacher. And she earns $50 a month.

>> Bill Benson: And the application fee was three months' wages.

>> Marcel Drimer: Three months' wages. They didn't accept it. I mean, this was our people.

>> Bill Benson: Marcel, I think we are at 12:00 so I think we're not going to have time for questions from the audience. But, when Marcel finishes, because we've not quite heard the last from Marcel, he's going to remain here on the stage. So we invite you, any of you, all of you, believe it or not, to come up on stage and meet Marcel, shake his hand, get your picture taken with him, whatever you want to do, or ask him a question. Please feel free to do that.

I want to thank all of you for being with us. I remind you we'll have a *First Person* program each Wednesday and Thursday until the middle of August. So I hope you can come back sometime this year. But if not, next year. You can find information and transcripts from our programs and podcasts on our website. So you can see other programs as well as this one.

It's our tradition at *First Person* that our First Person gets the last word. So I'm going to turn now to Marcel to close us out.

>> Marcel Drimer: Last word. I am talking to you and others who want to listen to me because there are people and organizations who claim that the Holocaust is a hoax, that it never happened, that the Jews made it up to get money from the Germans. I am a witness that it did happen. By listening to the stories of my childhood, you become witnesses also.

Our good friend, the -- said that we all have to fight the four evil Is: intolerance, injustice, ignorance, and indifference. These are the roots of men's moral corruptions that allowed Hitler and his helpers to come to power and torture and murder millions of people he considered under people, not worth living, not only Jews but people with disabilities, gypsies, homosexuals, and many other groups. Changing these behaviors is the path to preventing Holocausts and genocides. And this is what this Holocaust Museum is all about.

About indifference, I would like to read this short statement here. This was Pastor Martin Niemoller when he was liberated from Dachau.

“First they came for the socialist and I did not speak out because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionist and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak for me.”

So there is something to think about.
>> [Applause]