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UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
FIRST PERSON SERIES
A Conversation with MARCEL DRIMER

Held at:
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
100 Raoul Wallenberg Place, SW
Washington, DC

(Remote CART)

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>> 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 15th year of our First Person program.

Our First Person today is Mr. Marcel Drimer, whom we shall meet shortly.

This 2014 season of First Person is made possible by the generosity of the Louis Franklin Smith Foundation, with additional funding from the Helena Rubinstein Foundation. We are grateful for their sponsorship.

First Person is a series of weekly 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. Our program will continue through mid-August.

The museum's website, at www.ushmm.org provides information about each of our upcoming First Person guests.

Anyone interested in keeping in touch with the Museum and its programs can complete the Stay Connected card in their program or speak with a museum representative at the back of the theater.

In doing so, you will also receive an electronic copy of Marcel's biography so that you can remember and share his testimony after you leave here today.

Marcel will share his "First Person" account of his experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 45 minutes. If we have time toward the end of our program, we'll have an opportunity for you to ask Marcel a few 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. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with his introduction.

Marcel Drimer was born in Drohobycz, Poland, a small town new part of the Ukraine. This arrow on this map of Europe from 1933 points to Poland. Marcel's father Jacob worked as an accountant in a lumber factory while his mother raised Marcel and his younger sister Irena. In this photo we see Marcel 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 father, whom we see here, were deported to concentration camps where they were murdered. In the fall of 1942, Marcel and his family were forced into the Drohobycz ghetto.

Here we see 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-Ukranian 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 Corps of Engineers. I'm sorry. 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 12, and Jack, who is 14. They are both in the International Baccalaureate program.

Although officially Marcel and Ania are retired, they do considerable volunteer work with this 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. 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.

Marcel has donated photographs of great significance to him which he will discuss a bit later. I'm pleased to let you know that Ania is here today with Marcel. They are quite a team. Ania, wave your hand?

(Applause)

Marcel also speaks publicly about his Holocaust experience in various settings. For example, he spoke to the graduating Judge Advocate General class at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, as well as at synagogues and to students. He was also a speaker with Mia Farrow at an event in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Marcel also participates in the Museum's Memory Project in which survivors write about their specific recollections from the Holocaust.

Six of his writings can be found on-line on the Museum's website.

Besides Ania, Marcel is joined today by their good friends Vicki Mechner, Wayne Titerance and Dana Walfish and Sam Pozniak all of whom are sitting right here in the front row.

With that I would like you to join me in welcoming our First Person, Marcel Drimer.

(Applause)

>> Bill Benson: Marcel, thank you so much for joining us today and for being willing to be our First Person. And we'd like to thank our audience for being here on a gorgeous day of which we've been in need of late.

Marcel, you have so much to tell us in a short hour. So we'll jump right in. World War II began on September 1939 when Germany attacked Poland on the west followed quickly by the Soviet Union attacking Poland from the east. Earlier in the war you and your family lived under Russian occupation. Before we talk about that time, however,

tell us a little bit about your family, your community, your life before the war began.

>> Marcel Drimer: Well, Drohobycz was a pretty little town of about 40,000 people equally divided between Polish nationality people, Ukrainian, and Jews. So there was about 14,000 Jews. Each of these groups had their own cultural venues. They had sports clubs. There were soccer teams, Jewish soccer teams. They were playing against Polish and Ukrainian soccer teams. One of my uncles was a star in one of these soccer teams.

There were theaters. There were all kinds of activities for the people. Poland -- when Hitler got to power in 1933, there were somewhere -- some influence on his Nazi philosophy in Poland. Some organizations in Poland embraced that -- his theories. And there were persecution of Jews. There were things called numerous classes that Jews could not attend certain universities or there was a quota to when they could attend. Ania's father studied medicine in Switzerland.

>> Bill Benson: Because of the numerous classes?

>> Marcel Drimer: Because of the numerous classes. Jews could not serve as officers in the Polish Army. Those that did were the ones that were professionals and they were, you know, conscripted.

But we -- with the neighbors and with other people, we really got well, we had a good -- we were happy people.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us a little bit about your parents.

>> Marcel Drimer: My father was the oldest of five siblings. He was born in 1904. And my mother was the oldest of -- my father was the oldest of five siblings. My mother was oldest of four siblings also born in 1904.

But when they were born, this was Austro-Hungary works in Eastern Europe.

>> Bill Benson: So you had a large extended family?

>> Marcel Drimer: I had a large extended family, yes, because of cousins and uncles and so forth.

>> Bill Benson: So on September 17th, the Russians came and occupied Drohobycz. Once you were under Russian occupation during those first few period of the war, what was life like under the Russians? What changed?

>> Marcel Drimer: Well individually, our family was treated just like everybody else's family. But the Russians tried to impose the Soviet economical and political system on us. They have -- they have taken away private businesses. They have sent a lot of people -- people that they considered enemies of the state, they sent to Siberia.

>> Bill Benson: Like the intelligencia?

>> Marcel Drimer: Like the intelligencia. As a matter of fact, Ania's parents were deported to Siberia where she was born during the war.

I would also like to mention something. Today, 10th of April, is the 74th anniversary of the cutting -- massacre and cutting.

>> Bill Benson: Mass murder?

>> Marcel Drimer: Yeah. When the Russians came to Poland in September, they took POW several thousand soldiers, Polish soldiers and officers. They released the privates and lower rank and --

>> Bill Benson: Took the officer class, right?

>> Marcel Drimer: And took the officers and senior NCOs. And they killed them all. 22,000. 22,000 of the Polish officers and senior NCOs were murdered on that day in

1940. So this is the 74th anniversary today.

>> Bill Benson: Marcel, since you were under the communist system at that point, some of your family members joined the Communist Party?

>> Marcel Drimer: Yes. Some of my aunts were members of the communist party from before the war. They were idealistic, and it sounded quite nice to them. You know? Everybody contributes according to his abilities and everybody else -- and everybody gets according to their needs. Sounds very good. We know that it doesn't work all the time. But they were young, and they joined. They would -- my father's aunts would go demonstrating on May 1st, for example, in the middle of the road. And father would walk on the side of the road. And, when the police came on horses, my father would run into the crowd marching crowd and took his sisters out.

We knew in Drohobycz we know what was going on in western Poland in Warsaw. Warsaw ghetto was established in 1940. Germans already started their extermination of the Polish Jews. Some of the Jews managed to escape and come to the Russian territories. So, when the Germans attacked Poland, when the Germans attacked Russia in the Barbarossa Operation. It was the biggest operation in the history of warfare. It took -- the Germans attacked Russia in -- on the June 22nd. And on June 30th, they were already in Drohobycz.

But my --

>> Bill Benson: This was 1941?

>> Marcel Drimer: This was 1941, right. Most of my uncles were taken to the Russian Army, conscripted to the Russian Army. And some of my aunts were married to these uncles or -- they joined the Soviet Army in their retreat, and they went to the -- to

Russia. Because they knew what was going on in the -- on the western part of Poland. Germans were on the river, so they only had 200 kilometers to come to Drohobycz. The Russians were not prepared to fight the Germans.

>> Bill Benson: So some of your uncles and families going to Russia, but you stayed in Drohobycz?

>> Marcel Drimer: We stayed in Drohobycz because my father at that time was -- I was only five years old, and my sister was three years old. No, I mixed up the dates. But I was very young, and my sister was even younger.

And two of these uncles were killed on the front. Soviet soldiers. But all the others, my aunts and uncles that went to Russia, they survived.

>> Bill Benson: So here you, though, your family is still in Drohobycz. And now you're under the Nazi control. What happened once they were there?

>> Marcel Drimer: They -- the Germans started imposing their rules of occupation. The Jews were not allowed to -- first of all, they confiscated the radios, telephones, arms.

>> Bill Benson: Even bicycles?

>> Marcel Drimer: Even bicycles. Everything they wanted to take, they would take. They would -- the Jews were supposed to wear an arm band, children from 8 up, arm band with the Star of David. And they imposed rationing of food. The Jewish kids could not go to school. They closed all the Jewish schools. The Aryans were allowed to go to school 1-4, because they wanted the Poles and Ukrainians to be slaves. And slaves need to know how to read and write. The Jews were destined to be murdered, so there was no need to teach the children reading and writing. These were the rules

of the ghetto.

>> Bill Benson: And the Germans started doing what we call aktions. Tell us what that is.

>> Marcel Drimer: There were two kinds of aktions. There were looting, and there were murder aktions. The Germans would come with their local helpers, and they would take whatever they wanted to take from our houses and apartments. And they would -- and one of these -- my mother was holding my sister in her arms. And the Germans were taking some furniture out. And my sister was crying. And the German officer says, "What a beautiful Aryan looking child."

She had blue eyes and she was blonde. "Too bad that she's Jewish. But don't cry, little girl. Today we just come for your things. We didn't come for you."

But -- and then there were aktions when they were really just killing people on the spot and when they were taking people to the extermination camp.

I would like to talk about the aktion in 1942. This is before the ghetto was established. In our small apartment, there were nine people. There were four of us. There was this grandfather that you can see here, a grandmother whose husband was killed by the Germans. And maybe I'll go back and talk about my first few days of the Germans.

>> Bill Benson: Please do.

>> Marcel Drimer: Okay. I'll go back a few days. The first few days of the Germans occupation, they -- when the Russians retreated, they killed groups of nationalist Ukrainians. They considered them enemies. And they left the dead people in the middle of town. And they spread a rumor -- I don't know who spread the rumor -- that

the Jews killed these Ukrainians. So the Germans gave the Ukrainians a free hand. They could kill and rob the Jews, you know, without any responsibilities. So they -- in Drohobycz, they came -- there were some farmers from nearby villages. They came to my grandfather's house, my mother's father. And they beat him up. They didn't have access to hospitals or to doctors. So my grandfather died within 10 days. But, when they took some things out from my grandparent's apartment, they took albums of photos. They took these albums, and they shook them out in the mud and in the yard and took the albums away. A neighbor, name Mr. Kutskoff, a neighbor picked up the pictures -- there were about 50 of them -- and kept them in his house. After the war my father went there and to look what was left from my grandparents' house. And there was nothing left. But the neighbor came out and handed my father these 50 pictures. Some of the pictures you have seen here, like the picture of me and my mother was part of that batch. All these pictures are now in the Holocaust Museum. And I donated these pictures to the Holocaust Museum.

My father at that time was involved -- he was sent there to the university for some courses. I don't know exactly what. Maybe build the nation. This is what the Russians were like.

>> Bill Benson: what the Russians --

>> Marcel Drimer: Right. So when the Russians attacked, my father wanted to come home and be with his family. But the people at the university said, well, this is war that's going to be fought somewhere else. We will keep going to school. You know, you don't have to worry about it. Of course, seven days later, the Germans were involved.

And they did the same thing. They -- first they announced that they're going to gather people to take them to work. My father was with my aunt who took care of him. And, when they heard that there's going to be a -- you know, that people will have to go to work, my aunt told my father that, you know, "You have to -- you don't have to go there. I'll cover you." She covered him under a down blanket. And, when the Germans came, she -- Germans and Ukrainians -- this is mostly Ukrainians -- they came by, my aunt says, "I'm the only one living here." And they left. After a few -- the pogrom lasted three days and 5,000 people were killed, murdered right there on the spot.

The Ukrainians that did it were nationalists, Ukrainians nationalists under the leadership of Stepan Badera. We called them Banderafsi. They were very active in helping the Germans kill the Jews. In Drohobycz, where my grandfather was beaten up and killed, they killed 600 people and took 2,000 people.

>> Bill Benson: Marcel, tell us -- I want to be sure you tell us about going to your nanny's house.

>> Marcel Drimer: That's what I started to do.

>> Bill Benson: Good. I wanted to be sure you're able to share that with us.

>> Marcel Drimer: In our house, as I mentioned before, there were nine people. There was my grandfather, grandmother, my father's sister with her two children whose husband was taken into the Russian Army; and of course the four of us. They could not take care of themselves, these people. There were no working men in the family, their family. So they all lived with us. And my father was the one that provided the meager food. Food was rationed, but my father would -- he decided that we have

to -- we cannot spare anything, we just have to live. And he would exchange. He was bartering things for food. He would exchange his wedding ring for a loaf or two loaves of bread.

And -- but the situation was quite bad in this apartment. There was overcrowding. There was nine people in a place where about four people should have lived.

And my nanny came to the apartment. She would come once a week and bring milk and food and play with me. She offered my mother that she would take me to her apartment because I didn't look good, obviously. And she would feed me up and give me a bath, and then she would bring me back. So she took me to her apartment. Or house. And after two, three days, my sister Irena started bothering my mother saying, "I want to get Marcel back. I want to play with Marcel."

So mother said, "Okay, we'll go and get him back." She took off her arm band, which was -- the Germans would know that it was punishable by death. Anything was punishable by death. Any excuse to kill Jews was okay.

So she took her arm band and took her and my sister with her and came to the nanny's house. When she came there, I was sitting in the corner crying and Jancia was in labor. She was pregnant and giving birth, and there was nobody else there. And my mother, of course helped her, did what she could do to help her. And the baby was stillborn. But that time it got to be dark. And Jancia asked us to stay with her in her apartment, which we did. And next morning, her husband came from work. He was working night shift. And he said that there is an aktion in Drohobycz going on that the Germans are killing people that they are taking them away and, if they would come to his apartment and see us there, then everybody would be killed. Because

hiding Jews, helping Jews was also punishable by death. And he said you have to go to my mother and ask -- there is a wheat field in front of the house. There's a little road, a wheat field. And behind that there are some woods. And he gave my mother a loaf of bread or half a loaf of bread and said go there and find the place and hide. As we crossed the road and came into the wheat field -- this was August. So wheat was already ripe. My mother had a raincoat that was the color of the wheat. And, as we looked -- went through there, my mother noticed that there was indentation in the ground. And she said, "We may as well rest here and wait for the aktion to end." So we did.

And soon after that, the -- we could hear dogs barking, Germans screaming "Rous! Rous!"

People begging in shouts and screams of pain. And it got quiet for another few minutes, 15, 20 minutes. And it started all over again. This was like a light motif in the symphony, over and over.

>> Bill Benson: Was your sister later told a concert --

>> Marcel Drimer: Concert of death, yes. And then it got quiet. It was like 6:00 or 7:00 in the evening. But quiet. We waited another half an hour, and mother got up and took us across the road. As we came to the road, looked around, there was no cars, obviously, at that time. It was a small road. But there was a German soldier with a dog staring at us. He looked at us, and we looked at him. And it lasted maybe 15-20 seconds. But it seemed like forever. We thought this is going to be the end of us.

And he just turned around and walked away.

This -- the only reason that I could see -- well, several reasons might be that contributed to that. Normally, when the Germans went hunting for Jews, they would go in pairs. Because they knew that somebody could have a humane, you know, idea to let the Jew live. But, if they were together, the other one would tell on each other. So this is one reason.

The other reason is maybe the Germans were so well-organized that they gave themselves quotas. Maybe he had his quotas of kills. Anyway, he just walked around.

And we came to Jancia's house. And it was quite dark, and we stayed there for another night.

Next morning my father came to pick us up. Father was working at that lumber factory where Jews who did not have families lived and worked. They had dormitories where they worked.

So father survived that pogrom. He came and picked us up, and we went home. And as we came to the house, the door was broken in. The feathers were flying all over the apartment. And it was empty. All the people that were there -- my aunt with two children, my grandfather, my grandmother -- were taken.

What's very painful is a neighbor who was observing that said that the Germans and their local helpers passed the house, somehow it was hidden. And that 10-year-old boy ran after them and said, "Gentleman, you missed a house. There are Jews hiding in that house." so they --

>> Bill Benson: So, Marcel, because I know you have so much more to tell us, tell us now about being forced into the ghetto in the fall of 1942.

>> Marcel Drimer: Okay. I'll finish. They were taken to an umshatz platz, a place without food or water for two or three days. And then they were taken to the camp and killed. The ghetto -- the situation in the ghetto was very, very tough. We lived in one room, the four of us. The furniture was taken away. We slept on one mattress. And somehow we -- my father thought that the ghetto will be liquidated pretty soon. There was always some signals if somebody did some work for the Germans and they said "I need it tomorrow," this is sort of a sign that there is going to be an aktion and they will be taken away.

So father decided to take us out of the ghetto. He bribed the people that worked in town. They would gather every morning in the column. And there was a policeman guarding them, taking them to different places where they work. And people would go to work. And then on the way back, he would pick up these people and bring them to the ghetto. My father bribed a policeman and --

>> Bill Benson: Marcel, can I just interrupt for a second. What you're about to tell us is so important. But you were there in the ghetto for one year. So you just had to skip over a year living under just dreadful circumstances. After a year your father said we've got to get out of here.

>> Marcel Drimer: We've got to get out. Because what would have been -- it was liquidated. But -- so this is the main reason.

So father prepared. He worked in the lumber factory. He prepared a place for us on the -- where the wood was right for a parquet and furniture and so forth. He prepared the place on the attic of that place and also the loosened some planks in the fence of the factory. So, as we -- as we left the column, father took us somewhere -- some

hiding place on the route. And said to me, "You stay here. I can't take you all across the road. You stay here. Hide in the bushes. You stay here. You're a man. And I'll take mom and Irena and then come back for you."

So he took mother and Irena. And I got very panicky. I was no man. I was eight years old. And scared and hungry. And I heard stories of people abandoning children and, you know, and trying to save their lives. Anyway, I was terribly scared. So I ran after father. And the guards noticed father. He says, "You can't be here. It's illegal." Anyway, father gave him a jacket off his neck and bought another time to live.

We were hiding in that shack for drying wood. Father would bring, at night he would bring some food and take waste down, away. And this was like it lasted two or three weeks.

>> Bill Benson: Just so everybody understands, Marcel, your father works in a lumberyard. And in the lumberyard where he works, he has constructed a hiding place among the drying racks for the wood. So for several weeks his family, his wife and his two children, are hidden inside the lumber factory. That's pretty amazing.

>> Marcel Drimer: Yes. But the way he -- you know, at night he would deliver food to us and take it away. And one of the young ladies that worked there went on a date or something and saw my father at night with the cans, food. And she confided to another young lady saying I think Drimer -- in Polish Drimer, she said, "I think Drimer is hiding someone here. And I have to make sure that is the truth. And, when I'm sure, I'll do the right thing."

The right thing was to go to the SS and denounce the Jews. The Germans gave for each Jew either a kilo of flour or a kilo of sugar. So she -- the woman -- the other

woman to whom she he told that was a friend of my father. And she came to my father and said, "Jacob, this is what the situation is. That Theresca is going to denounce you."

So my father was absolutely flabbergasted. Terribly upset. What to do. There's nowhere to hide, nowhere to go. But he had a very good friend who was a doctor, physician, who studied in Vienna and was very fluent in German. They came up with a plan. The doctor wrote a letter to the SS commander saying that he is an SS officer on leave from the front and that he he had sexual encounter with this Theresca and she infected him with a venereal disease.

(Laughter.)

Think about the doctor's Hippocratic oath. Doctor. He had to do it. Anyway, next day, the two SS men came and took Theresca away and took her to the little clinic where the doctor was in charge. I don't know the details, but I know that she was put away until the end of the war. She could not -- she did not have a chance to denounce anybody about it.

>> Bill Benson: Your father was amazingly resourceful.

>> Marcel Drimer: He was resourceful. He was a smart man, and he's my hero.

>> Bill Benson: But, of course, he cannot stay there. He has to get you out of there.

>> Marcel Drimer: Absolutely. After this incident, we know we have to do something. Father went to a little village near Drohobycz and talked to several people trying to convince them to take us in. Some people took advantage of him. They said, "Well, we're not going to do it. But you have a watch. I want your watch because, you know, because I'll denounce you."

But there was a family Sawinski that knew my mother since she was a little girl. He was Polish, and she was Ukrainians. And father begged her to take us, his family, to hide. Well, the problem was, after a lot of begging, she said, Mrs. Sawinski said, "I will take Laura and Irena, but I cannot take Marcel. Because if somebody would come and see a Jewish boy" -- and it was easy to recognize a Jewish boy -- "then we all die. We will all die, and I can't do it. So I'll take Irena and Laura." My father agreed. He was determined to save whoever could be saved. He was ready. I don't know. He told us that he was ready. I don't know if it would come true.

But anyway, Mrs. Sawinski came one night to pick us up. We were ready. We were waiting in the dormitory where the Jewish workers were. And we started saying good-bye. I was crying, of course. I was supposed to stay, and my sister would go. And my mother cried. This was her "Sophie's Choice." I don't know if you remember that movie, "Sophie's Choice." She had to make a choice to save the daughter and give up her son. And, of course, Mrs. Sawinski cried. And then, after a while, she said whatever will be will be. I can't take it anymore. Take the boy with you. And we went. We went at night. We went through rivers and forests and came to the Sawinski family. We hid there -- I think this was in '43 in the early fall. So we hid there in the barn for a while. Then the barn -- we were in the attic in the barn. And then the barn, the floor gave in. It was a very, very poor farm. They were very poor.

>> Bill Benson: And a very small farm.

>> Marcel Drimer: Very small farm, yeah. And then we would hide. Then we would hide in the attic. It was a thatched roof.

>> Bill Benson: Thatched roof?

>> Marcel Drimer: Sorry. Without a chimney. And we would hide in that attic being smoked through the -- because there was no chimney.

>> Bill Benson: There was just a hole where the smoke from cooking came up to where you were?

>> Marcel Drimer: Exactly. Right. And I forgot to tell you first it was the three of us. And then my uncle with his wife came. And then some other family came. So there was 13 of us in that barn.

>> Bill Benson: Just to be sure, this is a very teeny little place.

>> Marcel Drimer: Very tiny teeny little place.

>> Bill Benson: You've got, eventually, over the course of a year, 13 people were hidden Sawinski family. And how many of them were there.

>> There were four. The youngest was 12.

>> Bill Benson: And then 13 people. Some were hidden under floorboards.

>> Marcel Drimer: There were no floorboards. It was a dirt floor.

Food was a problem. Farmers were not allowed to slaughter any animals without the approval of the German authorities. They also had the cart -- they had to -- they were only allowed to buy for their family. If they would go to a market and buy for 13 more people, it would be suspicious. Then -- there was a refinery nearby, two kilometers from their house. There were oil wells in the nearby swamp. And they were released in Drohobycz where my uncle worked as a butcher. The youngest boy would take a cart with the milk contained.

>> Bill Benson: This is one of the Sawinski children?

>> Marcel Drimer: The youngest boy. He was 12 years old. He would go to the

cafeteria where people ate their meals and take the table scraps from that container and bring it home.

>> Bill Benson: He was taking it supposedly for the animals?

>> Marcel Drimer: For the pigs. We had first choice. What we didn't eat, the pigs ate. Wasn't really much food. The hiding was -- we would bathe once a month. We were infested with lice and -- I don't want to talk about it. But it was absolutely terrible. My sister would look out through a crack in the window or the roof out. And she would see the chickens. And she said, "Why can I not be a chicken? I would love to be a chicken. I could run around and be free and not be hiding and being hunted like an animal."

>> Bill Benson: And in a fierce Polish winter that you were there, it must have been incredibly cold for you.

>> Marcel Drimer: Yes. Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: And besides the difficulty getting food, you also had worries because you, of course, have no access to any medical care.

>> Marcel Drimer: Exactly. My sister was bleeding through her nose. She was a bleeder. Our worry was how were we going to bury her so that nobody could see. We could not get out during the day. And we were also afraid to get out at night. We would either lie down in the hole in the ground or sit or lie down in the attic. So for the nine months of hiding with the Sawinskis, we could not walk. We could not talk loud. We could only whisper. And, but at least we were safe. If somebody would find out, again, they would -- we had to be very careful. They had to be very careful not to squeal. The boy was 12 years old. He could play with somebody and say that we

have Jews -- but somehow they were --

>> Bill Benson: They must have been a very brave family.

>> Marcel Drimer: Very brave. Very brave. By the way, if you go to visit the museum, there is a list of righteous among nations. You could look up Sawinski family. Jan and Sophia Sawinski and their four children are listed there as righteous among nations.

>> Bill Benson: You were instrumental in helping them after the war get recognized as righteous Gentiles?

>> Marcel Drimer: My sister helped to. But the fourth generation Sawinski lived in our apartment. So we helped them as much as we could from Israel and from America.

>> Bill Benson: Marcel, among the 13 people eventually that ended up in hiding with Sawinskis was your uncle who had been the butcher, take a minute. And tell us about that.

>> Marcel Drimer: About him?

>> Bill Benson: About him. And about the girl that came with him.

>> Marcel Drimer: Right. He was a butcher in the refinery. And his wife -- I think the ghetto was already liquidated. His wife and little daughter were -- it's not in the -- it's not in the -- it's not in the Power Point. This is my uncle. This is his wife. And this is the little daughter. They lived in the labor camp where he was working.

One day a friend comes in and said, "Abraham, your wife and your child were taken away. And they were taken away in a truck."

My uncle befriended some German soldiers and German officer because he spoke German very well. He was a very, very intelligent and attractive man, as you can see

here. So he -- so the German officer said, "I'll take my motorcycle, and we will go and try to retrieve the child and the wife."

And they were driving like crazy towards the forest. And, as they came to the forest, the truck was coming back with their clothes of the people that they -- that were killed. The Germans always utilized everything that they could. Before they killed the people, they took their clothes and put it in the truck. He opened it -- the German officer opened the cover on the truck. And my uncle saw his little girl's shoes, white shoes.

So he was very upset. He decided not to -- when the next aktion comes, he decided not even hide. He was suicidal at that point. But there was another woman that was a seamstress also at that camp. And she had a little girl. The girl was playing in the yard, and my uncle -- she looked very semitic, the girl. Curly hair. She looked Jewish, let's put it this way. So he asked the girl, "Where is your Mommy?" So the girl took him to her Mommy. And then he told -- this woman's name was Tushia -- "Look, you are endangering everybody by letting this girl run around."

And they started seeing each other. She thought her husband was one of those taken by the Russian constricted. And she somehow found out he was taken prisoner of war. My uncle was widower, obviously. So they started being together. And then he brought her to the Sawinskis. Her and the little girl.

>> Bill Benson: So that was 3 to go along with the other 10?

>> Marcel Drimer: Right.

>> Bill Benson: So, Marcel, there you described somewhat what it was like for you. You'd been there a year. And here come the Russians, and you're liberated. Tell us

about the end of the war for you.

>> Marcel Drimer: The Russians liberated us on August the 6th. I don't remember the date. I do some research when I prepare. It was August the 6th, 1944. And we were -- we got out of hiding. We wore the same clothes that we came in.

>> Bill Benson: And before you got out, though, you were under a fire bombardment, weren't you?

>> Marcel Dimer: Yes. The British bombarded the refineries. And this was the only time that we could get out and breathe some fresh air. Because everybody was hiding.

>> Bill Benson: So everybody is in hiding for the bomb, and you come out to get fresh air?

>> Marcel Drimer: We come out to get fresh air and stretch our legs. But, when we got out, I -- during the nine months we were -- as I mentioned before, we were either in the lying down position or sitting position. And we are not supposed to talk loud. I -- my leg muscles were atrophied. I couldn't really keep my body straight. And, of course, I couldn't talk loud. I could only whisper. And we didn't have anything to wear. We did not have anything to eat. We did not have a place to go because our apartment was taken over by Ukrainians or Poles. We just don't know.

Anyway, but all the Jews who survived that together center of town, in a certain place, there was all together about 450 of us. Drohobycz had 12,000 Jews. 450 survived. Another 400 came from Russia and from the POW camps. And among those that came from camps was Tushia's husband who was captured by Italian units on the eastern front. He wasn't -- he wasn't dead. He was very much alive. And my uncle

already lived with his wife. Anyway, these were stories. These were stories that on thousands. This was a relatively good story. There was a tragedy from a family tragedy. But my aunt Tushia, the new wife decided to stay with my uncle.

>> Bill Benson: For some of you that survived, I think you explained to me the Russians were suspicious.

>> Marcel Drimer: You have a good memory. But my father -- when the Germans came, they called my father to the KGB and said, "You survived. 90% of the Jews were killed. You must have been a collaborator." And my father said, "I survived because I survived. I did not denounce anybody." He gathered some people, maybe the doctor that helped him or somebody. They went to testify that my father was not a collaborator. Being alive, they considered that you could have been a collaborator with the Germans.

Then all the people -- all the family that were in Russia, they started coming slowly back. And we -- in my family, it was always -- it was always -- the Holocaust was just like a dark cloud falling dust everywhere.

First of all, my parents had to tell their siblings who was killed and when and where and how. And I listened to all these stories. There no television. I know all these details from what my parents were telling their siblings. We left Drohobycz in December 1945 because this Drohobycz became part of the Soviet Union and part of Germany. Eastern part of Germany is the Yalta agreement became part of Poland. So we moved to these territories that used to be German. And I lived there until '61 and came here in '61.

>> Bill Benson: When you -- tell us -- you had mentioned your legs had been

atrophied. You had, of course, now to start school. What's it like?

>> Marcel Drimer: I was 10 years old. And I was illiterate, and I had to go to school. So they decided not to give -- put me in the first grade. They put me in the second grade. Because I didn't read or write, but that's okay. I was not quite normal. I did not run around with the kids. I did not talk. I was sitting quiet. And, you know, the teacher complained to my mother that your son is not normal. He's not playing with other children. And so forth. But mother said look, give him another few months and he'll be perfectly normal. I tried very hard to be normal.

I -- I started exercising at the age of 12, and I still exercise. I even went to a boxing club, and I trained for boxing. And I could see this was when he was 14 or 15. I could see some -- you know, results. But, you know, being in boxing club, you have to go to the ring sometimes and face another boxer. Well, anyway, I took out of -- my opponents broke a bone in my nostril, and that was the end of my boxing career.

>> Bill Benson: As it turned out, you would live for 16 years under communist rule. In our remaining time, tell us how you were able to leave communist Poland. But, before you do, till us about the advice your father gave you about an occupation.

>> Marcel Drimer: Right. Right. I graduated high school in 1953. Both my sister and I were very good students. I caught up. I was three years behind because of the Holocaust. But I caught up two years. And I was still 19 when I graduated. Very, very good, with very good results. And the time comes to apply to the university. I was interested in nice things of life. I liked good music. I liked reading a lot. And philosophy. And I suggested to my father that maybe I will go to the humanities. And my father quite, you know, strongly said, "Don't be an idiot. You are Jewish. You are

not going to stay here the rest of your life. You will -- we will end up in Israel or in America or in Western Europe or somewhere else. And you need a profession that will bring that for you any time. Philosophy you can do as a hobby. Music you can do it as a hobby. But you have to have a profession."

But anyway, I went to -- I went to the Polytechnic Institute where I got a degree in mechanical engineering. Specialty agricultural machinery. And came here to be an apprentice at the watch making shop. My father's uncle, agricultural engineer and watch maker. This was just an excuse.

>> Bill Benson: And then from there, of course, had an amazing career after that once you were here in the U.S.

>> Marcel Drimer: I did very well. Thank you.

>> Bill Benson: Marcel, I think probably everyone here knows we could have spent the entire afternoon and beyond to dig just even a little deeper. Unfortunately, we can't do that. I'd like to thank all of you for being here. We really appreciate it. I'm going to turn back to Marcel in just a moment to close our program. But first I'd like to remind you that we will have First Person programs each Wednesday and Thursday until the middle of August. You can get information on our Web site.

It's our tradition that our first person gets the last word. So, before I turn to Marcel for the last word, I want to mention two things. One, because we didn't have a chance for question and answers, Marcel when he's finished will step off the stage over here. So, if you want to come and meet him, shake his hand, ask a question, please do so. Don't be inhibited at all. That's a really nice thing to do.

The second thing we'd like to do is our photographer Joel over here is going to come

up on stage and take a picture of Marcel with him with his back to you. And we would like you to all rise so that, when he takes that picture, the backdrop is all of you. So, if you don't mind when Marcel is done, we'll do that. So Marcel.

>> Marcel Drimer: This is something new.

>> Bill Benson: It is new. It is brand-new.

>> Marcel Drimer: I'm talking to you and others who want to listen to me because there are people and organizations who claim that 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 late Charlene Schiff said that we all have to fight the four evil Is: Intolerance, injustice, ignorance and indifference. These are the roots of men's moral corruption that allowed Hitler and his master race helpers to come to power and torture and murder millions of people he considered undermentioned, not worth living. Not only Jews but people with disabilities, gypsies, homosexuals, and many other groups. Changing these behaviors is the path to preventing Holocaust and genocides. And this is what the Holocaust Museum is all about.

And I would like to read a quote from Pastor Martin Niemoller about not getting involved. "First they came for the socialists, 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."

[Applause]

>> Marcel Drimer: Thank you. It's going to be a monstrosity.

[Laughter.]

You're a pro.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you so much for being here. Thank you.

[Program ended at 12:04 p.m.]