

-TITLE- PIOTRE BUDNIK
-I_DATE-
-SOURCE- CHRISTIAN RESCUERS PROJECT
-RESTRICTIONS-
-SOUND_QUALITY- FAIR
-IMAGE_QUALITY- GOOD
-DURATION-
-LANGUAGES-
-KEY_SEGMENT-
-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-
-PERSONAL_NAME-
-CORPORATE_NAME-
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Piotre Budnik was a Catholic Polish farmer who helped hide six members of a Jewish family during the Nazi occupation of Poland. Rather than delivering the family to the Jewish ghetto, as he was told to do, Piotre took the mother and her five children to various Polish farms where they were hidden for the duration of the war. At great risk, Piotre visited the farms regularly and brought food as payment to farmers and to help feed the Jewish family. Soon after the war, Piotre married one of the girls he helped save and they, along with her sisters and brothers, moved to Israel.

Several people were present during the interview: Piotre, his wife, their son, and her brother. Each person made a contribution to the story. Because the interview was conducted in Hebrew using a translator, it was difficult to follow at times. As everyone was talking quickly and animatedly, it was hard to keep track of who was saying what. Nonetheless, the themes of sacrifice, risk, and gratitude came through quite clearly.

Piotre was the second-born child in a Catholic family of four children. His father was a wealthy, prestigious farmer.

His father and his wife's father (a Jew) were close friends since World War I when his father saved her father's life.

As a child, Piotre learned from his father to shelter his mother from knowledge that may hurt her. He remembers his father advising him to "do what you have to, but don't tell your mother. He heeded this advice years later when he hid six members of a Jewish family but didn't tell his mother. When the Nazis came to their house and asked where the Jews were hidden, she said, honestly, that she didn't know. If she had known, she would have been shot. As it was, she was beaten severely.

As anti-semitism grew in Poland before the war, Polish citizens were afraid to shop at Jewish stores. In defiance of that behavior, Piotre's father not only shopped in his Jewish friend's store, but had his picture taken with his friend. The picture was displayed with pride in the store.

His family was religious, but they weren't strictly observant.

When he saw the Jewish ghetto for the first time in 1942, he knew he wanted to help the Jewish family with whom his family had always been so close. Although he realized it would be dangerous, he decided to take six members of the family from the ghetto to a village 70 kilometers away.

Signs posted all over the village stated that anyone who was found hiding a Jew would be shot on the spot. However, Piotre was so sure of what he had to do, he overlooked the danger. He was compelled to do what he believed was morally right.

His wife's father (the good friend of his father) died of a heart attack about a month before the Jewish ghetto was formed. Although he wasn't killed by the Nazis, his heart attack was triggered by the fear he felt when a group of Nazis came to his house.

Piotre's son, Yosef, reveals that his parents didn't talk much about the war when he was growing up. He assumes that they didn't want to burden him with guilt.

Yosef knew about his father's rescue efforts and always thought of his father as a hero.

Yosef says he honestly doesn't know if he would do the same thing his father did. He doesn't think his father's deeds have influenced his life very much. He says it's very hard to say what you will do in a situation unless you are in it.

Piotre's three grandchildren are more interested in the Holocaust than his son ever was.

The family moved to Israel in 1957. Piotre is a dairy farmer, as is his son. They prefer to live in the country rather than the city.

In Poland, Piotre's family and his wife's family were neighbors. When he became aware of the impending occupation of Poland, Piotre thought something bad would happen to his family as well as to his neighbors because they were all so close.

Outside of the Jewish ghetto was a "lager", a concentration camp, set up as a lure for Jewish youth. As they walked through the forests to the village to escape the ghetto, they were always looking for somewhere to sleep. The people in the concentration camp told the young Jews that they could sleep there; they would be free to come and go as they please. In fact, all the youth who went into the camp were killed.

When the Jewish ghetto was formed, the Jews in the towns and villages were taken out of their homes and carted off to the ghetto.

Piotre was told by the Nazis to load his Jewish neighbors into his

cart and escort them to the ghetto. Because the father had already died, the Jewish family consisted of the mother, three daughters, and two sons.

When they got to the gate of the ghetto, an official thought Piotre was there to pick up the belonging gathered from the Jews who had already arrived. (The Jews were stripped of all but the barest necessities when they were in the ghetto.) That is when Piotre realized how dreadful a place the ghetto was.

Ho threw the suitcase and belongings out of the carriage so there would be room to hide the six people ho had with him. The family crouched down and were covered with blankets. They never actually wont into the ghetto.

Piotre took some members of the family to farms and some to the village.

[This part of the interview is very confusing. There is talk of running to the farms, and different people being hidden in different places.]

Because Piotre and his family were know to be "friends of the Jews," they were afraid for their lives.

At this point, Piotre's brother-in-law tells part of his story. Ho was 10 years old at the time. The gist of it is that he ran away, became very ill, was in a hospital for several months, and was free when he was released from the hospital because they didn't know he was Jewish. He says he went to a camp for Jewish people, and there he found one of his sisters.

When Piotre was hiding the family, he brought them food at great risk and difficulty. He kept moving the family members from farm to farm so they wouldn't be found.

Piotre always delivered the food at night. He put the sacks of food on his cart and took them to the families with whom the Jews were staying. The food was for the families; what was left over was for the Jews. The food was payment for the families who were protecting the Jews.

Although Piotre was never caught by the Nazis (he was once caught by the Ukrainians), he still has nightmares about being caught while delivering the food.

The Nazis shot the owner of the house where Piotre's future wife was hiding. She pleaded with Piotre not to take her anywhere else because she was afraid that Piotre would be shot, too

Nonetheless, Piotre took her to the house of a man who used to work

with her father. The man protected her for nine months Piotre brought the food during all that time.

At one point, Piotre caught an illness from one of the sisters who was very sick. He was delirious with fever and was in the hospital for a month. They thought what he had was typhus.

The Russians came when the war ended.

After the war, there were still Polish people who were shooting the Jews.

Today, Piotre works in the fields of his farm. He is so happy to know that there are so many people in Israel.

Piotre's brother-in-law was the first one in the family to come to Israel. The others followed.

Piotre and his wife had always felt like family because they grew up together. They decided to get married right after the war ended when Piotre realized the Polish people -- his people -- were still going to shoot the Jews.

Piotre has the most pleasure from knowing that he has family -- children and grandchildren

In Israel, Piotre feels friendship from all his neighbors. Even though he is a Catholic in a predominantly Jewish nation, he doesn't feel different from anyone.

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