

-TITLE-ELIAHU YAKIRA
-I_DATE-JULY 1, 1987
-SOURCE-CHRISTIAN RESCUERS PROJECT
-RESTRICTIONS-
-SOUND_QUALITY-
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-LANGUAGES-
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-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-
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-CORPORATE_NAME-
-KEY_WORDS-
-NOTES-
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Irena had three sisters. There were no Jews in the area she lived. During the war, she was a nurse in a hospital. Devotedly, she brought Jews home from the hospital, where they were kept in secrecy. However, it soon became known that her home (also that of her family) was a hiding place for Jews. Jews who had escaped from the ghettos retreated there, and remained until the end of the war. After some time, Irena's family moved into another home in the suburbs. They continued to hide Jews even there. For a while, her mother left the house and lived with her sister.

Her parents were both equally committed to the cause because they "thought that what the Germans were doing was terrible." Jews continued to seek refuge there; some would come knocking on their door at two o'clock in the morning. One Jewish family of six whose house had been burned down came together. Irena's mother allowed entry to them all.

Her father, in order to keep the Jew's living in their home a secret, removed floor tiles which led down to the cellar, so the Jews could hide there when they had to (if Germans should come by). Germans came by a few times.

Eliahu insists that this family's situation was much more dramatic and colorful than what Irena relates. He says, "one day a few Germans and Ukrainians came to the door because they were told that Jews were hiding there. There wasn't enough time for them (the Jews) to all get down to the cellar, so her mother put her head in a bowl of water. She went to the door and said, "sorry I'm washing myself." He continues, "in these times if you shot a dog you'd be punished. If you shot a Jew, you'd be praised." Eliahu is Jewish, but at the time of Nazi occupation, he had false papers saying he was Polish of German origin. "You have to understand," he says, "Her family was keeping twelve people for no money at all, and feeding them."

Eliahu was head of a hospital where Irena was a nurse. He was given a quota of Jewish doctors he was allowed to have in the hospital. He then heard that all of the Jewish specialists were going to be killed. He tells, "all I could see - Germans killing like mad. All I saw was blood." Someone, anonymously, turned Eliahu in to the German authorities; he insisted that he wasn't Jewish. He affirms, "just being a Jew was dangerous."

In a house close by to the Yukira's home, Jews in hiding were found by German officials. They were all killed, together with the family hiding them. In spite of this, the Yukira family continued to hide their own Jews, but were careful not to let any of their neighbors know.

Irena states that the Poles hated the Jews as much as the Germans. The Poles helped the Germans. She says, "if they didn't, there would be many more Jews left."

Irena and Eliahu met during the war, in the hospital where Eliahu was head. In the beginning, she didn't know he was Jewish. They were married during the war.

Irena says, "I wasn't scared. It just hurt me very much to see what they were doing to the Jews...in war, a soldier kills a soldier. I didn't understand why they wanted to kill the Jews." She says that she knew there were at least a few thousand Jews in her town, but only ten or fifteen remained.

Irena and Eliahu Yakira have not been back to Poland since they left at the end of '45. She's happy she did what she did. All the Jews she hid survived. Eliahu says he didn't think he'd live during the war; he was sentenced to death twice for being a spy.

Now they have a family, and "a very good life together, but (they) will never forget."
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