

**Marcel Drimer**

**File 1 of 2**

**November 23, 1996**

**RG-50.106\*0056.01.02**

### **Abstract**

Marcel Drimer was born as Marcelli Drimmer on May 1, 1934 in Drogobych (?), a city in Eastern Poland, where he lived with his parents and younger sister until the War ended in 1945. The city was occupied by the Germans in September 1939 but a short time later it was liberated by the Russians. Some of their relatives survived by running to Russia when Germany invaded them in 1941. Marcel's family managed to survive via bribes and the generosity of others. Their former nanny helped them hide during an Action when the rest of their relatives were sent to Auschwitz where they perished. In 1943 the family had to move into the ghetto and Marcel's father was marched every morning to work in the lumber factory. He prepared an escape path for the family to live a week in his work shack and then move to an attic above an office. The father was caught and sent to jail so the rest of the family went home. He bribed the guard and was let out and joined them. A former neighbor who had five children and limited means volunteered to hide the family; later it amounted to 13 Jews. They lived in unhygienic conditions and eating mostly leftover scraps of food but managed to survive. Marcel was the only one who came to the US; the others immigrated to Israel.

Marcel Drimer talks about his family acquiring minimum knowledge of the War and the Holocaust from the Polish and German newspapers during the early 40s until he was liberated by Russia in August '44. His relatives who ran to Russia in '41 survived but others disappeared. It was difficult for him to get an education as first he was left back as had to start school late and then placed in a Ukrainian school where he did not know the language. Later with his father's influence, he became an engineer as this was a profession that could be used worldwide. Marcel experienced difficulty to get admitted to college because he was a Jew. He served as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the Polish Army. With the help of a cousin, he immigrated to the US in May '61, became a citizen in '66, got married, had a son and was a success in his career. The rest of his family immigrated to Israel and he keeps in touch with them. Now he is retired and works for a private agency, exercises, volunteers and is a Holocaust speaker. Marcel hopes for peace between the Poles and the Jews.

### **Summary**

00:00 **Tape 1, Side A.** Marcel Drimer was born as Marcelli Drimmer on May 1, 1934 in Drogobych (?), Poland and remained there throughout the war until it ended in 1945. It was a town of 60,000 people; about 1/3 Poles, 1/3 Ukrainians and 1/3 Jews. It was a

good town with good schools and several factories. The three groups of people were friendly toward each other. They had peace and harmony. His father, Yaakov was born on January 10, 1904. His mother, Lara Burde (?) was born in the same year. His sister, Lorena (?) was born in 1936 and now lives in Israel. His mother was a housewife and had four brothers and sisters. His father also had four brothers and sisters and was an accountant in a lumber factory where he made a satisfactory middle-class living. His father's father worked in a refinery where he later became a manager. His mother's father was a shochet, a butcher, in a small village nearby. Polish was spoken at home except the parents spoke Yiddish when they did not want the children to understand. His parents had only spoken Yiddish at home so found it difficult when they had to understand Polish at school. Therefore, when they married, they only spoke Polish to the children. Marcel understands Yiddish although he does not speak or write it. It enables him to enjoy the Yiddish theatre.

05:00 Marcel's parents observed the Jewish holidays to please their parents but they were not very religious though they loved Jewish music, culture and the language. His friends were Jewish. In high school his friends were of mixed groups. He had three best friends and, at first, thought he was the only Jew but two had changed their name and later, he found out that they were Jewish and the third was Polish. His father would take the family to a resort for the summer and leave them there while he worked and returned for the weekends. He was a lumber technician so would go to the forest and decide which lumber to buy and the quantity. His father went by sleigh and would take him which enchanted him. Marcel's toes would freeze as it was very cold. The family would take long walks to visit both sets of grandparents. They had a radio but no TV. The parents would visit with their brothers and sisters and with their friends and entertain themselves by singing. The family went on excursions and picnics to the woods. They enjoyed life. They became anxious when they learned about the Nazis from a Jewish Communist who escaped from Germany and stayed with them for several months. When Germany attacked Poland on September 1, 1939, they were not too concerned as they were in the Eastern part of Poland. Soon they became under Russian rule in June, 1941 due to the Ribbentrop (?) / Molotov agreement

10:00 They had some knowledge of what was occurring in Warsaw and the western part of Poland. In September 1939 the German planes struck and when the Germans arrived in September, 1939, they marched through the city. There was no harm to the refineries and the Germans left in a week. The Russians came in and were considered the liberators so the citizens threw flowers at their tanks. His father worked at the time and his uncles joined the Komosomol (?), the Communist Youth League. Life seemed normal. In '41 his father was in Lvov, a bigger town, for college courses and the war broke out. His father's two sisters and his brother ran to Russia and survived but his sister who remained perished. The young brother left without his belongings and got on a truck and went to

Russia and later to Israel. There was no telephone so his family did not know whether they should run. His father went to his Dean and said that since the war broke out he wants to go home. He was told to remain as the war is in Warsaw so won't affect him. Two or three days later, the Germans took over Lvov and his father did not want to run as his family was home alone in Drohobych (?). His father was in his 30s but he had leg trouble and could not walk much. He was with his aunt, his mother's younger sister who was in her 20s. When an Action (Germans taking Jews as prisoners) started, the aunt told his father to hide under the quilt.

- 15:00 She, along with the other young people, was taken to the cemetery and shot. When after a day the aunt did not return, he walked 67 kilometers home to his family. He was drafted into the Russian Army so the family felt they could not leave with the small children. Marcel's father's family was leftist, leaning towards the Communists. In 1942 they had route (?) Actions whereby items of value such as diamonds, fur coats and radios had to be taken to an appointed place and confiscated. In August 1942 there was an Action when people were taken to concentration camps. Marcel reported that there were always signs that something was about to happen. In 1941 his father's father and mother's father passed away so his father was the only male in the family so everyone looked up to him and stayed with his family.
- 20:00 They had a nanny before the war. She came to visit in August '42 and saw how crowded they were so took him to live with her. His sister missed him and kept calling him by his nickname, "Seshu" (?) so finally his mother brought her to him. The nanny was pregnant and went into premature labor. Marcel's mother helped her but the baby was stillborn. Just then, an Action started as they heard dogs barking, people screaming and sirens. After the delivery, the nana told them to leave as they would all be killed if the Germans found them in her house. She told them to hide in the fields and that her husband will get them by whistling when it is safe to come out. They ran to the wheat field as his mother was wearing a coat the color of wheat so they would be hidden. It started to rain and they heard the screaming, yelling, dogs barking and the Jews pleading for their lives. All was quiet when it got dark. They did not hear the husband's whistle but decided to return to the nanny's house, anyway. As they started to cross the street, they saw a German soldier patrolling. They felt that since he was alone, he just looked at them and walked away.
- 25:00 They returned to the nanny's house and slept there. Marcel's father came the next day and walked them home. They found no one in the house and the apartment was in disarray. The Germans had cut the feather-filled quilts and there were feathers all over the house. Later, they found out that all the relatives were sent to Auschwitz. A neighbor warned them that the Germans were coming but, luckily, they passed by Marcel's house. During the Action, his father was in the lumber factory as he had an Arbeit (work) Pass to work there to help the German war effort. He wore a Jewish armband. Marcel and his family did not wear Jewish insignia when they were in hiding in the field. This was the time

before the ghetto was established. Then in early '43, four square blocks were designated as the ghetto and was fenced off and all the Jews had to move there. They tried to make themselves a normal life. They had just one room with one bed for the four of them. The rations consisted of 200 grams for working people and 100 grams of bread for the nonworking – mothers and children.

30:00 They bartered for food as had a diamond ring and clothes to sell. Once a Polish woman came to the ghetto with a sack of potatoes and they told her to pick whatever she wants for them. She picked his sister's coat but they refused as she needed it to protect her from the cold. The Polish woman said that the sister would only live two months and meanwhile would have food to eat but they gave her the ring instead. They hid a fur coat to use later. The ghetto was guarded by German and Ukrainian police. In the mornings, a soldier came and formed a column of working men and marched them to the lumber factory. At evening, he marched them back to the ghetto. When they decided to escape from the ghetto, this was the guard they bribed. To escape, his mother dressed like a man and carried Marcel's sister and his father took him and they got out of the ghetto. The ghetto was organized by the Judenrat, the Jewish organization which consisted of the pillars of society such as doctors and lawyers. At one Action, a Jewish policeman, a school friend came. Marcel's uncle was hiding in a hole covered by a mattress and he asked them to do something. They took a collection of all their money and gave it to the policeman and they survived.

35:00 There were many shortages for no apparent reason. Bruno Schultz (?) who recently published, was in the ghetto and taught drafting in the local high school. His writing was in the style of Kafka. A German officer liked him. He might have been homosexual as they had an affair. Another German officer had a fight with a third German officer over beer and took out a gun and shot Bruno. His intention was to hurt the officer who Bruno was associating with. **Tape 1, Side B** There were always signs that something will happen. For example, Marcel's uncle's wife was a seamstress for the wives of the German officers. They ordered dresses for a certain date so they realized they would be deported on that day. Through the German papers they read and their clandestine radio, they knew that Italy capitulated in late '43 and the war was close to Stalingrad, Russia. They felt the Russians were coming and that the Germans were going to liquidate the ghetto and they would be moved to concentration camps.

40:00 Marcel's father had a shack to work in as the Jews were separated from the Poles. His duty was to dry lumber for flooring. He arranged it so he could remove two or three pieces, leaving a hole with room to hide. He thought they would then transfer to an attic of an office building. He prepared an opening in the fence by removing some planks so they could get through. Then he arranged with the tramway guards to take Marcel's mother, Marcel and his sister early in the morning when it was dark. They marched with the workers who went to the factory and they hid in the woods. Marcel's father would

escape through the gate that he prepared but could only take out one person at a time. Since he was already a man at age 11, his father took the others first. Marcel had heard stories of children who were abandoned so he got scared and ran out. He ran through the street yelling, "father, father, don't leave me along." The guard saw him and his father said that he is just taking his wife and the children out for the day and bribed him with his jacket. They remained for a week and his father prepared a place in an attic over an office building. His father slept at the shack as the ghetto was liquidated. They knew they couldn't move during the day as there were workers below so his father came at night with food and removed the waste.

45:00 This continued for two or three weeks. Marcel looked out and saw his father removed by the German and Ukrainian police. His mother's brother was a butcher and worked in the refinery and kept in touch with the father. The family was desperate as they received no food nor was the waste removed. Then the uncle (Abe) came with food and removed the waste and told them the father was temporarily removed and he would continue to care for them. The uncle's wife and child had been killed by the Germans. There was an Action taking place at the time with the Germans removing Jews. The uncle took the family home via tramway and they postponed their escape. The uncle had some food as he was a butcher. The father returned with his clothes bloodied and he appeared beaten up but they were happy to see him. He said that someone squealed on him. He had planned to hide Marcel's mother and sister. He made contacts for them to hide by using the diamond ring that he hid in his heel and the fur coat and money. Someone squealed on him as it was illegal to have a fur coat and diamonds so they took him to jail in Berizmuf (?).

50:00 His father thought death was a certainty so he would try to die decently by running in the middle of the street. Thereby, he would be shot and end his misery but the guards got hold of him and beat him up. He asked them why they did not shoot him and they responded that there are special people to perform that duty so they put him in jail where he met Mr. Hoffman. Marcel's father did not want to eat and Mr. Hoffman said that he must try to save his life. He knew the policeman and he would bribe their way out so his father told him about the diamond and gold rubies that he owned. He gave them to Mr. Hoffman and the guard let the two of them out. His father and Mr. Hoffman became good friends and immigrated to Israel together. They remained in the ghetto a few weeks and went to the lumber factory. There were 15 or 20 Jewish laborers and they dug a hole in the ground in the dormitory where they lived. There were tables in the middle of the room and beds all around. They hid in the hole during the day and came out at night. Marcel's father looked for places for the family to hide. He spoke to Mrs. Sevinsky (?), (who is in the "righteous gentiles" file) a childhood neighbor of Marcel's mother.

55:00 She was illiterate but religious and liked his mother when she was a child. She agreed to take the mother and daughter and say that cousins were visiting. His sister was blond

with blue eyes so could pass. Mrs. Sevinsky (?) came at night and hugged his mother and sister and asked if they were ready to go. Marcel's mother felt that she was saying good-bye to Marcel forever. Mrs. Sevinsky (?) had five children of her own and realized it was too difficult to separate them so took Marcel who had a package of clothes ready. They passed through many villages to her house which had a straw roof. They were very poor so did not have a chimney and the smoke came through the attic and out through holes in the attic. They were hidden above the stable which was warm, food was brought to them and the air was fresh. The place was decrepit and one day he walked across the attic to the potty and the roof collapsed and he found himself down among the pigs. This was September '43 and they were there 11 months until liberation in August '44. His mother requested that his father be permitted to come live with them as she thought the war would soon end. That made 13 people in all.

60:00 It did not matter if there was one or 50 Jews, they would get killed if found. It was difficult for the family as they could not go to the store and buy lots of food as others would know extra people were there. Their uncle worked in a nearby refinery and his youngest son who was two years older than Marcel would go to the factory's restaurant with a big container to get all the table scraps to feed the pigs. This was what they ate. Occasionally the uncle was able to get some meat to them. The uncle befriended a woman with a child who joined them which made the situation more difficult. They were hungry all the time but they survived. The Russians liberated them in August '44. They hid all the time and only got out when the allies or the Russians bombed the refineries. After the war, he was 10 and he could not walk as his leg muscles had atrophied. Also, Marcel could not talk loud as he had whispered all the time that he was in hiding. His teacher kept telling him to talk up. His sister was sickly—bleeding from the nose. There was no doctor and they did not know how to treat her but, luckily, she survived.

65:00 His father was Technical Director of the factory but he had no shoes. When the Russians took over, they saw he had no shoes and gave him military boots and rubber boots for the children. When they were in hiding, they would come out at night and speak to the children. One son played the mandolin and sang. They would talk one to two hours each night and then the family went to bed early as they were farmers. When winter came, it was cold in the barn and now they were 13 people. The woman's child is now Professor of ceramics in Israel. The Sevinskys put half of the people in the attic and dug a hole behind a closet that housed five or six people. They would rotate between the two places. The hygienic situation was poor as they only bathed once a month. There was no running water so the water had to be carried in. The children would bathe first and then the adults to save water. They all had lice and scabs which itched and were painful. It was a miserable life but they survived. The couple were decent but poor. The husband was Polish and the wife was Ukrainian. All the children have since passed away. Marcel's uncle, the butcher, gave a job to one son and found him an apartment. The uncle had

moved there and when he passed, his son inherited it. They visited the Sevinskys three years ago. Now, the Sevinsky's grandson is a taxi driver.

70:00 The couple's youngest son is two years older than Marcel as he was born in 1932. The children had to keep it secret that Jews were living in their house and it was inconvenient to keep 13 people in hiding. They had to sacrifice and share their meager portions of food. Marcel carried a little bag of magazines, papers and books but did not learn to read as his parent did not have the patience to teach him. He would have his mother read to him. His father would sing in a whisper and they talked a bit, mostly about food and how life would be after the war. His father said he was tired of being Jewish and would ask the priest to convert him to Catholic. Then he won't be the "chosen people" as they were chosen to suffer but he never converted.

75:00 There was some disagreements when they were in hiding so those who were antagonistic were separated with some in the basement and some in the attic. They could not be too troublesome in order to survive. He is not in touch with the others who were in hiding with them. One got killed by a stray bullet in '45 by a drunken Russian. Marcel is the only one who immigrated to the US; the others went to Israel.

78:00

**Marcel Drimer**

**File 2 of 2**

**November 23, 1996**

**RG-50.106\*0056.02.02**

### **Summary**

00:00 **Tape 2, Side A.** Marcel indicated that he had some knowledge of what was going on in Poland during this time but not in Western Europe. It was illegal to own radios but they read the official German papers and occasionally the Polish paper. The German papers merely were propaganda and did not admit to having concentration camps. They spoke of Thereisenstadt, a place where Jews could be with their own people. They knew of the invasion of the allies in Italy and hoped it would only take days or weeks to get through Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia to liberate them. It turned out that the Russians liberated them. They knew of agreements between Stalin and Roosevelt but felt they were only pawns. Their main focus was to survive and be liberated by the western allies. They were very joyful when they were liberated in August '44 and hoped to live in peace and find their lost relatives. Those who had run with the Russians in '41 survived. His

youngest uncle had run and volunteered in the Russian army but the Russians suspected the Poles or Jewish Poles in exile so were sent to labor battalions instead. It turned out that he was lucky as his unit had been bombed before it even reached the front.

05:00 His aunt's husband was taken by the Germans in August '42 and disappeared on the Russian front and never showed up. Marcel's cousin's father, now a professor of Japanese in Warsaw was also taken by the Russian Army and disappeared. The cousin was adopted by his uncle. Her real father was in the Russian Army and taken as POW by the Germans. Since he was presumed dead, her mother got married and became pregnant and the first husband showed up. They had been Halutzim (?) in Israel and in love but she decided to remain with the new husband. There were many tragedies and problems like that. At liberation, Marcel was 10 years old and was placed in the second grade in a Polish school. His parents hired a tutor for him in the summer of '45 and this enabled him to skip to the fourth grade. At that point, the Russians closed the Polish school and he entered the Ukrainian school where he did not know the language so he left school and was tutored privately. He had only lived a short time in Drogobch (?) which was under Russian rule.

10:00 The family moved to Lower Silesia, a territory that Poland had given to Russia. His father worked at the factory and his goal was to move as far west as possible and prepare for life in Palestine, America or Western Europe. Marcel was interested in philosophy and literature and his father asked him what he would do with a degree in Marxist philosophy or Polish literature. Therefore, he became an engineer so he could find work wherever they moved to. His sister did the same so they were able to make a good living. Marcel admired his father who passed away 20 years ago. The family was in contact with his father's aunt and cousins who lived in Washington, DC. They corresponded with them and received packages. They were told not to claim any relatives in the US as it was the 50s, the time of the height of anti-American sentiments. The correspondence was through a Polish cousin who was a businessman so every few months they received a reply. The family admitted they had relatives in the US but denied contact with them. Marcel had been a good student in Poland and obtained diplomas which excused him from college entrance exams.

15:00 He applied to a school which was equal to the West Point Academy and had an interview that lasted two or three hours. At the end, the interviewer said that he was supposed to tell him that he was not qualified as he belonged to Zionist organizations. His organization was declared illegal in 1949 and was disbanded. He was the only member who did not go to Israel. When he was denied admission in Poland, Marcel went to Russia but was denied admission there, too. He was able to leave Poland in 1961 as he had been in service so did not owe a pay back. The anti-Semitism in Poland was just like the later anti-Semitism he experienced in the US. Marcel could not go to Saudi Arabia as he was not baptized. Immediately after the War, he found out about the death camps. At



first they did not know the dates that the relatives had died so prayed for them on Yom Kippur. In 1947 when he was 13, his father decided he should be Bar Mitzvah because he was Jewish and going to the West. There was no Rabbi in their town but Mr. Bender, an accountant, had been ordained as a Rabbi and helped him prepare. It took about 4-5 weeks and they had received a helpful package from America so they got together a minyan and held his Bar Mitzvah. It was quite different from holding a Bar Mitzvah in the US. They left Poland in '61 when he was 26 and a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the Polish Army. His father's aunt and family remained in Poland except for one son.

20:00 When they reached the US, the cousins showed them around and decided that Marcel would not require support. One cousin was a watchmaker and had sent an affidavit which indicates that he needed an assistant and since Marcel is an engineer he could learn the trade. In May '61 Marcel took a Polish boat to Montreal and stayed overnight with an acquaintance as only permitted to take \$5 with him. Then he telegraphed for money as his train ticket to the US had expired. Marcel arrived in the US and worked for his cousin until he obtained a contractor position with the Post Office. In '63 he brought over the girl who he was dating and they got married. In '66 he became a citizen and was able to get a civil service position as a GS-12 for the Post Office. Marcel transferred from the Post Office to the Corps of Engineer where he worked until he retired in July '94 as a GM-14.

25:00 He considers himself lucky to obtain such a position. His wife obtained a degree in Pharmacy from Howard University in '72. They have a son, Adam, who is 32 years old so he feels they have a happy life. He feels normal after his early experiences. His friend with a similar background is sick and under psychiatric treatment. His friend had mainly lived under a dark stairwell for 8 to 9 hours a day while his parents were at work. His friend has never held a normal job and cannot stay alone. Marcel feels normal, successful in his career and now works for a private firm. He also exercises and volunteers for B'nai B'rith and other charities. His sister got married in '62 and the entire family left Poland the following year for Israel. Marcel's father worked until he died in '76 and his mother died in '94. Both are buried in Cologne. His sister is a civil engineer in the Ministry of Construction and has two children. The son is married and has a medical internship in Philadelphia and the daughter lives in Israel. Marcel's sister travels a lot as her husband is a biologist. They were in Florida and Australia. Both are well-adjusted and happy.

30:00 Marcel had a cousin in Poland whose brother is in Denmark and sister is in Israel. He finds that Polish Jews are scattered all over the world. His relatives are happy and healthy and keep in touch. He talks to his sister every Saturday. In the years from '39 to '41 when Russia occupied his area, Jews were favored rather than discriminated against. Many joined the Communist Party which rejected anti-Semitism. That was the way that Jewish youth showed resentment. His father's two sisters ran to Russia and survived. He

recalls that during a May 1<sup>st</sup> demonstration when mounted police came, his father grabbed his two sisters who were demonstrating and pulled them to safety. Jews were able to obtain jobs with political or economic responsibilities and the Russians did not persecute them. The Polish Communist party was not favored by the Russians and their officials were called to Moscow and shot. The rank and file supported the Russian regime and were not persecuted. His father joined the Polish workers party, the Communist party. As an accountant, he had to join them if he wanted to succeed. Marcel does not condemn the Polish nation for what happened to the Jews despite their excesses. He has Polish friends who are not anti-Semitic and would like to see better understanding among the younger Jews and the Poles but there are few Jews left in Poland now. He hopes that in the future, Jews and Poles come to agreement though it is not necessary for survival.

35:00 Marcel believes that the effort that the Holocaust Museum makes for people to agree is a noble and good idea. He is happy that he was able to come to the US and is American first and a Jew second. In Poland, he was only considered a Jew. During his military time, he was a corporal and could swear like a corporal. Once at the movies, someone told him to go to Palestine and he spoke like a corporal and the person said, "I thought you were Jewish." The person did not realize that Jews could swear. Marcel finds it painful to talk of the past but he does so at churches, high schools and optimist organizations. He does not want to let revisionists who say there was never a Holocaust to get away with their ideas. Although he was not in a concentration camp, he lost education and family and had to relearn how to laugh and live (cries here) and does not want the world to forget about it.

38:00