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11:00 a.m.

**USHMM First Person Series
Conversation with Marcel Drimer**

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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. This is our 15th year of the 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. I Am delighted to let you know that Mr. Louis Smith is here with us today.

(Applause)

Thank you, Louis.

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 twice weekly 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 that you will find in your program or speak with a museum representative at the back of the theater when we're done this morning. In doing so, you will receive an electronic copy of Marcel Drimer'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 there's time at the end of our program, we will then 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

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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 now part of Ukraine. The 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 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 Germany-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. Here we see an historical photograph of Jews being forced into the Drohobycz ghetto. Before the liquidation of the ghetto T family escaped to a small village. In August 1943 Marcel went into hiding with a Polish Ukrainian 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 US he was hired by the US Post Office Department to work on the design of mail sorters and conveyers. After a very successful period with the post office department, Marcel transferred to the US 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, although not entirely true because of the work he does for the museum.

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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.

As I mentioned although officially Marcel and Ania are retired they do considerable work as volunteers with this museum. They translate documents written in Polish. They translated portions of Emanuel Ringleblum'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 work on the current museum exhibit titled "Some Were Neighbors: Collaboration and Complicity in the Holocaust" which opened in 2013. To help with this exhibit they reviewed and transcribed several filmed testimonies and made recommendations about their potential significance to the exhibit. They are quite a team. Marcel also donated photographs of great significance to him when he may have the opportunity to discuss a bit later.

Marcel speaks publicly about his Holocaust experience in various settings. For example, he spoke to the Graduating judge advocate judge class at the university of Virginia in Charlottesville, as well as at synagogues and to students. He was a speaker with Mia Farrow at an event in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. He just recently spoke with cadets from our four military Academies who are now on their way to visit Auschwitz. Just yesterday morning he spoke to 300 7th graders.

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 online on the Museum's website.

And with that I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our first person, Mr. Marcel Drimer.

(Applause)

Marcel, thank you so much for your willingness to be our First Person today. It's just a pleasure to see you again.

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Marcel Drimer: Likewise.

Bill Benson: You have so much to share with us that we'll start right ah way. World War II began when Germany attacked Poland from the west quickly followed by being attacked by Russian from the east. Early in the war you and your family lived under occupation. Before we turn to that time of the war, tell us a little bit about your life, your family, your community in the years before the war.

Marcel Drimer: The town where I was born, Drohobycz, was Poland when I was born. It was also Hungary when my parents were born in early 20th century, and now it's Ukraine. So, you know, the place stays put in one place but the borders shift all around. And this is sort of a quite typical for central and eastern Europe until now. Now we can see Poland is trying to do something similar. But that's not the subject at all for our conversation.

(Laughter)

Bill Benson: Some things don't change.

Marcel Drimer: Some things never change. No matter how hard we work for them to change. So Drohobycz, the population of Drohobycz was about 40,000 people and there were about 12,000 Poles, about 12 to 15,000 Ukrainians and about 13,000 Jews in Drohobycz. The relations with the neighbors were friendly. The Jews had their own clubs, their own libraries, they had even a high school, a Jewish high school, and theaters. It was quite a cultural -- culture town. Most of the Jewish population in Drohobycz were religious Jews who made their life from being tailors and craftsmen and merchants but there was also a group of Jews that were more assimilated. They spoke good Polish, they were doctors, lawyers and leaders of the community.

At that time, starting in 1933, Germany became what it was during the Holocaust, Hitler came to power and some of his ideas were spreading all over the world and it also came to Poland. So there were groups in Poland that were supporting what Hitler was preaching and the life of the Jews became a little more dangerous or not as comfortable as it was before. There were -- there was, for

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example, something called numerus clausus, where Jewish students go to college and the Polish -- the Jewish, the Jews, could not be officers in the Polish Army. They could be privates and junior NCOs but not officers. And so forth. So those that wanted to study, they would have to go to western Europe and study. And my wife's parents -- my wife's father was a doctor, educated in France and Switzerland.

Bill Benson: Because he could not get the education in Poland.

Marcel Drimer: Because he could not get education in Poland. So it was, you know, we had -- we had nice synagogues and did -- life was normal until --

Bill Benson: Marcel, what was your father's occupation?

Marcel Drimer: My father was an accountant in a lumber factory but he also was a lumber technician. He would go to the woods and determine what -- what trees would be ready for -- for the factory and guide them and bring them to -- you know, some other people brought these -- cut them down and brought them. And I remember once in the wintertime he took me with him to look at these trees, this was before the war, I must have been four or five years old, and on a sled, horse-driven sled, and I was so enchanted with that that I didn't even tell my father that my toes were freezing, you know. I froze a couple of my toes but I was very happy to go on that trip.

Bill Benson: Marcel, shortly after the Germans invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. On the 17th of September, Russia attacked Poland and as a result of that you and your family would live under Russian occupation until 1941. Tell us when that period of time was like when the Russians came in and occupied your community and what life was like for you under the Soviets.

Marcel Drimer: Yes, the Russians attacked Poland on September 17, 1939, only 17 days after the Germans attack. There was a moment of agreement of non-aggression between Russia and the Germans. So the Russians attacked Poland and most of the Polish defense forces were on the western side fighting the Germans so the Russians just went through the eastern part of Poland.

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They took prisoners of war, about 25 thousand prisoners of war. They released the lower rank soldiers but they kept the officers in camps, in POW camps, and they killed them in the Katyn Forest on April 10, 1940. This is a very tragic date in the history of the Polish -- of Poland. 22,000 officers were killed in that Katyn camp. Some of them -- most of these people were civilians that were professionals and during the war they were taken to the Army and among them were some Jewish doctors and lawyers that were also killed. So you will see the cemetery or the monument for that slaughter, there are also Jewish names in there.

Russians tried to impose communism -- they tried to impose communism on the population. They forced people to accept Russian citizenship and again, my wife's parents didn't want to accept that so they were sent to Siberia for death. They also sent to Siberia people that they considered enemies of the state. They confiscated all the private factories, they confiscated homes, you know, big department -- apartment houses, and they send a lot of people that they considered enemies of the state to Siberia. And among them were also my wife's parents. She usually comes here and I point at her, but she -- since she listened to me yesterday and she said enough.

(Laughter)

Bill Benson: Marcel, your birthday is May 1, which is a significant day in the communist world. Tell us about the significance for you of May 1 as your birthday.

Marcel Drimer: Well, I -- this last May 1 I celebrated my 80th birthday so it was -- it was quite important to me. And my good friend from Poland, from grammar school and high school, said -- wrote me a letter and said you were destined to live only to 8, to the age of 8 because the Germans had their plans for you, but you lived so far to 80 so you are -- you are a lucky fellow, and I sure am a lucky fellow. But actually I was born on the -- April 30 about 11:00 or 11:30 in the evening but since I was born in my grandparents' house and the doctor didn't -- there was a doctor there but he didn't make any, you know, notes about that. My father went -- a few days later my father went to register

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the birth and he said he decided that maybe May 1 would be a better day.

(Laughter)

Than April 30, so, you know, it was the International Labor Day under the communist -- under the communist regime all over the world and I had some communists in my family, some of my father's siblings were communists, so to please them he just changed the date to May 1. But don't tell anybody.

(Laughter)

Bill Benson: It's our secret.

Marcel Drimer: Our little secret.

Bill Benson: And several of your uncles joined the Russian Army at that a time, is that right?

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

Bill Benson: They were drafted into it.

Marcel Drimer: Maybe I'll come to that.

Bill Benson: So you lived under the Soviet occupation until 1941. But soon after Germany turned on the Soviets in June 1941, German troops came in to Drohobycz and for Jews there, life changed even more dramatically and quickly. Tell us what it was like once the Germans came in and they were now in control?

Marcel Drimer: I will finish talking about the Russian --

Bill Benson: Okay.

Marcel Drimer: -- occupation. The western part of Poland was under German occupation from September 29 until the end of the war and the Germans started the -- the extermination of the Jews right away. They -- the Warsaw Ghetto was opened in 1940 and the pogroms and killings were prominent. Of course there was no radio, there was no -- there was no television, but some people from western Poland managed to escape and came to our -- to our town and they told us what was

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going on. So when the -- when the Germans attacked Poland in the -- in '41, June 22, 1941, my siblings -- my father was the oldest of five siblings and my mother was the oldest of four siblings. So some of the siblings of my father's, the men, all of the men that were at the -- at a certain age, I mean, you know, all of them were, were taken to the Russian Army and two of my aunts with children of two or three months, Ryfka and Mirka, followed the Russian Army as they retreated to Russia. Of the uncles that were taken to the Russian Army, two of them fought and died on the front and the others survived, another three survived and came back to Drohobycz. At the end -- this was -- they were very brave because the children were very small and they knew what waited for them if the Germans came so they -- so they left with the Russian Army and they also survived. And those that were deported, like for example my wife's parents were deported, they -- and she was born actually in Siberia because she -- her father was a doctor so he delivered her so there were -- they also survived. So it was sort of ironic that these people were actually saved by deportation. 90% of those that were deported to Siberia survived, or maybe 85%. On the other hand, those that stayed in Poland, about 90% were killed. So now we --

Bill Benson: Now the Germans come in now.

Marcel Drimer: The Germans came to -- before the Germans came to Drohobycz and moved our territories, they contacted Ukrainian national groups under -- don't remember his name, and they agreed with the Ukrainian -- Ukrainians supported German attack because they thought the Germans will give them their independent country, which never -- which they never planned to do. And so they -- they contacted the Ukrainian nationalists and told them that the first day after they come to Drohobycz to move to other towns, they could do whatever they want to -- with the Jews and their property. So in Drohobycz when the Russians were leading, they killed about 100 of the Ukrainian nationalists and left their bodies in the middle of the town and put out a rumor that the Jews did it. So with the agreement of the Germans to put -- not to look at it, the Ukrainians started a pogrom, a, you

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know, slaughter of the -- of the Jews in Drohobycz and they were -- they brought very primitive, uneducated peasants from nearby villages and they went from Jewish home to Jewish home and beat people up and took their things that they wanted to take. One of the victims was my mother's father who was beaten so badly that he died ten days later because there was no access to doctors, there was no medication. But the robbers, when they left my grandfather's -- grandparents' house, they took whatever they wanted to take among their things. Things they took were the albums of photos. They didn't need the photos, they just wanted to take the leather-bound albums, so they shook out the photos in the mud on the ground and a neighbor, Ukrainian neighbor, Mr. Kutschick picked up these photos and kept them. After the war my father went to see what was left of the grandparents' house and of course everything was ruined. But the gentleman came out and gave my father about 50 photos.

Bill Benson: Some of which we saw.

Marcel Drimer: All of them -- we only saw one but --

(Laughter)

The one that I am with my mother in the carriage, picture was taken August of 1934. And I donated all these photos to the Holocaust museum and if anybody's interested, if you Google my name, you could see these photos and you could see my stories that I write.

Also, at the same time, my father was involved -- he was sent from his -- from his work to some -- to take some courses at university and my -- and Ryfka went with him. The Germans came there June 30 and they started -- the Ukrainians started the pogrom at the same time. So they -- they announced that they will take the people, the Jews, to do some work and then they'll let -- let them go back home. My aunt told my father that he shouldn't go because he had some problems with his leg, so she -- so she covered him with a cover in the bed when the -- they heard the Germans coming and the Germans -- well, Ukrainians actually. When they came, she went to supposedly going to work

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and she never came. The Ukrainians slaughtered and humiliated 5,000 Jews. In Drohobycz they killed -- they killed 200 -- 200 Jews and 80 -- wounded 1800. Some of them died. These were the first two or three days of German occupation. And my father waited for my aunt to come, but she never came, so he walked to Drohobycz. And I can imagine my mother's feelings when he came by himself without -- they hoped that she will come, but she never did.

Bill Benson: Marcel, I know there's many, many things that you won't have the time to tell us, but one thing I would like you to talk about, if you don't mind, is when you went with your nanny, if you wouldn't mind telling us that.

Marcel Drimer: Yes, yes, yes, of course. So situation in our house was quite critical. The Germans, when they came, they put out the rules of existence. The Jews were not allowed to sit in the parks, the Jews were not allowed to walk on the sidewalks but in the middle of the road. They were -- they were supposed to wear Star of David on their armbands or on their jackets. And so on and so forth. There was also a system of food rations that people were entitled to about 200 calories per day. Can you imagine that? So my -- my father's father, the one that you saw the pictures, the bold one, he was a widower so he came to live with us and my mother's mother who became a widow very first day and my father's sister Ryfka who with her two children came to live with us because her husband was one of the uncles that were taken to the Russian Army. Because only my father could -- they just couldn't take care of themselves by themselves because there was absolutely no chance. So they did stay with us and Father managed to barter things for food. He would exchange a wedding ring for a loaf of bread. But we -- we were hungry but we were not starved. But it was quite crowded in our two-room, three-room apartment. I don't remember. There were my family and my aunt with two children and my grandfather and grandmother. And it was -- it was very crowded and not very, you know -- hygienic. Jancia was my nanny and she loved me very much. I was a very cute little boy.
(Laughter)

And so she came -- at that time she would come and bring us some milk or a loaf of bread or, you know, she was a friend of the family really. And one of the visits she looked at me and I -- I looked sort of pitiful and she said to my mother, I'll take him -- I'll take him with me to my house and give him some -- fed -- give him some food, give him a bath and then I'll bring him back in a few weeks. And so she did. I went to her and two or three days later my sister, my sister Irena, started bothering my mother about I want my brother back, I want to play with my brother. Why don't we get and pick up and bring him back home? And so my mother said okay, we'll do it. And she took off her armband, which was -- if she would be caught, she would be killed immediately. This was a -- a crime that, you know, deserved killing by the German soldiers. So she took it off and went to -- we went -- with my sister she went to Jancia. And Jancia was pregnant at that time and was in labor exactly at the moment when my mother came. I was sitting in the corner of the room scared. I was eight years old. I was absolutely of no help. And my mother -- so my mother started boiling water and did what she could do. Because there was no -- there was no talk of getting a doctor or even a --

Bill Benson: Midwife.

Marcel Drimer: Mid wife or anything like that because we were Jewish and this was dangerous. So my mother helped deliver the baby, but the baby was stillborn. And then it sort of became evening, so Jancia said why don't you stay with us and you'll go home tomorrow. So we stayed there, and the next morning her husband came back from work, he was working the night shift, and he was terribly surprised and unhappy to see us there. He says there is an aktion. The Germans called them aktions. There were a killing aktion and robbing aktion. This was a killing aktion. He said the Germans are killing the Jews. They are gathering them, taking them to the camps and if they would come here and see you, we would all be dead. You have to -- you have to leave. You have to go. So he gave my mother a couple of slices of bread and told us to go. There was a dirt road in the front of the house and then there were wheat fields. It was August of 1942, wheat fields and then there

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was some little trees behind that. So he said well, you can go there and try to find a place to hide. Early in the morning we left and went to look for a place to hide. We didn't get to the woods because there -- my mother found the indentation in the ground and this is where we -- this is where we laid down. And Mother had a raincoat that was the color of the ripe wheat, covered us there and we lay there quietly waiting for what would happen. And soon we started hearing the Germans screaming rous! Rous! Which means out. And shots. And people -- people screaming of pain and begging of mercy and shots again and it lasted maybe 15 or 20 minutes and then it quieted. And then another maybe another half hour later the same story. It was four or five times. My sister called that the symphony of pain, symphony of terror. About 7:00, 8:00 in the evening it stopped. The screaming and shouting and shooting stopped, and so we got up, waited until another hour or so. And we got up and started walking toward Jancia's house. As we came to the road, looked around and there was a German soldier with a big dog and so we thought this is it. You know, he would -- because he was armed and he wasn't going for a walk. He was looking for Jews obviously. But he saw my mother was blond and blue-eyed and my sister was very light blond and also blue-eyed. I also had blue eyes. It was in the family. He looked at the two women and didn't see me because my Jewish nose would give me away, and he just turned around and walked away. You know, it was sort of a miracle, but I think there's two reasons that it went like that. Normally the Germans would go in pairs. They never went hunting for people single because -- because they could get a human reaction and sort of try to save the person and the other one would squeal on him. But he was by himself. There was nobody that could tell his commander that he let some people live, so he turned around and walked away.

We came to Jancia's house and then we -- we stayed there again through the night and the next morning my father came. Of course there were no telephones, there were no ways of communicating. We didn't know if Father was alive or not. But Father was -- Father was staying in

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the dormitory at the factory where he was working. They made a special booth for him because he was not allowed to work with the Gentiles. He was Jewish so he -- but -- and he -- the Jews whose families were killed, they stayed there in the dormitory, they ate and slept there. So Father slept there, came to pick us up and took us home. We walked to the house, we came to the house, came in and the doors were broken in and there was feather flying all over the place and the house was empty. The family was gone.

Bill Benson: All of those family members.

Marcel Drimer: All of those family members that I was telling you about, they were gone. They were put -- the Germans put them on an umshatz platz, a place where they kept them for two days without food, without water, without sanitary facilities and those that still survived were put in cattle trains and taken to the camp. What's the name of the camp.

Bill Benson: They were taken to an extermination camp.

Marcel Drimer: They were taken to an extermination camp. I'm having problems with my memory. And there were two kinds of camps. There were labor camps and extermination camps. Camps like Auschwitz where people would work, would work until they fell down and were killed. And they were -- and then there were camps that they were killing camps. This camp was a killing camp and they were -- they were killed.

In this one aktion 800 people were killed in Drohobycz and two and a half thousand people were taken to the extermination camp, out of the 12,000 in one aktion. And there were more aktions like that.

Bill Benson: So Marcel, it's now you and your parents and your sister, and in the fall of 1942, the Nazis forced you into a ghetto in Drohobycz.

Marcel Drimer: Yes.

Bill Benson: Being mindful of the time that we have, tell us, if you don't mind, about you were forced

into the ghetto but your father got you out of there. He found a way to get you out of the ghetto.

Marcel Drimer: Yes.

Bill Benson: Tell us about that. Because I know you're not going to want to leave here without talking about that.

Marcel Drimer: Absolutely. He was an accountant but he was a very brave man. When it came to saving his family, he was really a tiger and I love him. And I'm very happy that my son is named after him. And my -- sorry. Father realized that the ghetto would soon be liquidated because the plans of Germans were very well-known, so he decided that he has to take us out of the ghetto and hide us. While he was working in the lumber factory he prepared a place for us to hide. He also put some planks of the fence down and prepared for us to get there. He bribed the policeman that took -- what they did, the Jews lived in the ghetto but they worked in all kind of places, all over Drohobycz. So a policeman came to a certain place like 5:00 in the morning and the Jews were waiting there to be taken to their places. And they would take them to each -- each group to a different place and in the evening he would pick them up also. So Father one day, one other person wasn't supposed to come, so Father took my mother, got dressed in a man's clothes and took my sister under her arm and Father took me under his arm. Of course we were very, very thin, if you can imagine, 200 calories a day. So Father took us to the -- his factory. He put -- he put us behind some bushes across the street from the -- from the fence to the lumber factory and said to -- said to me, you stay here. You are the man now, and I'll take Mother and Irena and take them inside the factory and then I'll come and pick you up. As soon as he got up and left with them, I got quite panicky. I heard some stories about parents leaving their children behind and I wasn't really a man. I was eight years old, a scared, hungry kid. So I started running after my father screaming "Daddy, Daddy, don't leave me here." So father had to turn around and pick me up, and there was a guard, of course, who started telling my father how -- what a terrible thing he was doing. And my father bribed him. I don't know where he

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had any more things to bribe, but he bribed him -- he took his jacket off his back and gave him the jacket and he says, well, we are just going here for a few days. Anyway, so we -- we all came in. Father -- I remember Father spanked me. I never -- he never before or after that he spanked me, but he spanked me there. He said that I don't -- I'm not angry for you to running after me, but I'm angry that you saw that I could leave you. How could you think that I could leave you. Well, anyway, we came to the factory and we -- the place was prepared for us. It was a attic of a big drying shed where the wood was drying. So we were there on the -- on the attic and Father would come at night. He would come and bring us some food and take the waste down on strings, you know.

Bill Benson: And just so we know, understand, this hiding place he constructed, he had it inside the lumber factory where he was working was where the hiding place was, in the attic.

Marcel Drimer: Yes, in the shed where the wood was drying.

Bill Benson: And there you are hiding in there.

Marcel Drimer: Yes. So this is how he gave us -- he provided food. One day a -- a friend of his, a woman, young woman, approached him and said this other friend of mine, Theresca, says that she suspects you. She says I don't know whether you have anybody or not, but she suspects that you have somebody hiding here at the camp, at the factory, and she says that if she -- she just has to determine that it's -- that she's correct and she will do the right thing. What she meant by the right thing is to denounce them to the Germans for a kilo of flour or sugar per person. That's what the bounty for Jews was at that time. Father was -- again, what to do. There's no place to run. My father had a friend who was a physician and he was the director of the little clinic that they have in that factory. And talked to him and said we have to come up with some -- with some solution. The doctor was educated in Vienna, spoke German perfectly, and he came to a very ingenious plan. He wrote a letter as -- anonymous let that are he's an SS officer on leave and that he had an encounter with this woman and she infected him with syphilis.

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(Laughter)

The next day the -- two SS men came and took her away and took her to the clinic where the doctor was. And of course he certified that this is indeed -- I don't know the medical, you know, procedure, but he certified yes, indeed, she has to be put away because she's a danger to the society, especially to the SS men because they were very touchy about things like that. Well, she was put away not to be seen until after the war. So this was a -- this was a -- another miracle in our survival.

Bill Benson: And Marcel, given that miracle, of course your father realized that you just could not stay there permanently. So he had to find another place for you. So we absolutely, I know you want to tell us about going to the Sawinskis.

Marcel Drimer: Absolutely. Not only this was not a long-term hiding place because people could see but also the Germans were going to liquidate the work camps and everybody -- everybody would have to go. So my father took his armband off and as I said -- well, the Jewish men were in danger going out of the ghetto or going out of the working place because only the Jews were circumcised in Poland. And if a German or a policeman suspected a man to be Jewish, he would just say drop your pants and you are guilty, if you are circumcised you are guilty of being a Jew. But he took off his armband, went to different -- to the village actually where my mother was born, and talked to certain people. And some were not so nice, they asked for his watch or they'll give him -- denounce him. Finally he went to a family that knew my mother since she was a little girl and they were very friendly and they agreed to take us. Of course, they -- the deal was that Mrs. Sawinski will come to the camp to the lumber factory where my father was hiding -- working, and she will take my sister and my mother. The deal was just because if I would be in that group and somebody would come and see me, determine that I am Jewish, the whole family would be killed and the Jews would be killed. But -- so my father was -- my father was -- he was ready to let my mother go and my sister, that we should save whoever could be saved. And we were ready -- of course, Mrs. Sawinski came to the place

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where my father -- the dormitory and it was at night, of course. And we started to prepare to saying good-bye. And my mother had -- I don't know if you remember the "Sophie's Choice" movie, she would have to stay with father and go to camp together with us or go with my sister and save my sister. Of course it was a very, very hard decision, and we all cried. And then at one moment Mrs. Sawinski said, "I can't take it anymore. Whatever will be will be. Take the boy with you." So by the way, the Sawinski's names are here on the righteous among nations, they are there and their four children.

And so there wasn't much luggage to take with us. We had absolutely nothing. So she -- she took us, my mother and my sister and me, to their house, to their farm. They were very poor. They were -- the law that applied to everybody about rationed food applied to farmers, too. They were not allowed to slaughter any animals without telling the Germans. Every -- they had to have a -- a permit to slaughter animals, even chickens. Everything -- the Germans had lists of all the things that the farmers had. On the other hand, they couldn't go on the black market and buy food for -- I should tell you that after -- after a few months when we were hiding there, there were 13 of us, 13 Jews. Some came from other members of --

Bill Benson: The Sawinskis started with just originally taking your mom, your sister and then you and before long there's 13 in their house. And it's a teeny little place.

Marcel Drimer: It was a very -- the house covered with straw, how is that called?

Bill Benson: Like a thatched roof.

Marcel Drimer: Right, right, thatched roof. Thatched roof and no chimney. And so when they cooked things, the smoke would go to the --

Bill Benson: Up to the attic.

Marcel Drimer: Up to the attic and out and this is one of the places that some of us hid.

Bill Benson: In the attic where the smoke is.

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Marcel Drimer: In the attic. So food was a very, very big problem. We were very hungry. We were very -- were in danger -- my sister, I remember we would look out -- there were different hiding places on the -- in the stable. She would look through the cracks in the wall and see the chickens and say "Why couldn't I be a chicken? I could be free and running around and when the time comes to be killed, I would be --" I don't think she really said it. But she said, "Why couldn't I be a chicken? I would like to be free."

Bill Benson: Marcel, some of you were hidden under the floor.

Marcel Drimer: It was a dirt floor.

Bill Benson: And you're hiding in a hole, a hole, somewhere in the attic where the smoke is, somewhere out in a woodshed. 13 people hidden. And there was -- the Sawinskis, there was no way they could let anybody outside know they had extra mouths to feed.

Marcel Drimer: Exactly. So they would -- the youngest son would go to -- there was a factory -- there was a -- there were wells, oil wells and refineries, oil wells nearby and there was a refinery nearby and he would take a cart with a big container and go there after lunch and take the scraps of the plates of the people that worked there and ate there. Of course food was very scarce so there wasn't much left. It was supposed to be for the pigs. And this was something that we had the first choice before the pigs got it.

We bathed once a month, and it was like first the children in the same water, then the parents, and then -- you know the saying, "Throw the water -- don't throw the water with the baby." That's because people in the Middle Ages did that in the end the wharves so dirty the child could be thrown out. We were in that situation. The water was --

Bill Benson: Of course there was no medical care. If something went wrong you couldn't get a doctor. At one point that was a major concern with your sister, wasn't it?

Marcel Drimer: Yes, my sister was a bleeder, she would bleed from her nose. She was very pale.

Of course we were malnourished and we didn't play outside. We were lying down, so we were worried what will we do with my sister's body when she died because you couldn't put a grave in the neighborhood or something like that. Luckily she did -- she did survive.

Bill Benson: Marcel, you would live in those circumstances for almost a year. All those folks hidden in that house with the Sawinskis. Tell us how it ended, how liberation came about for you.

Marcel Drimer: We were liberated by the -- that Army on August 5, 1944. I don't remember the date, I just know the date. I read a lot about these things. April 5, 1944. The -- as we left the Sawinskis got out of their house, we -- we wore the same things that we came in. The shoes were gone. There was just -- there was just -- we were -- I couldn't -- actually I couldn't walk because my muscles -- my leg muscles were atrophied. I couldn't talk because we were not allowed to talk loud, only to whisper. Then after the word came to us that all the Jews that survived are going to gather in some place in the town and so we all went there and there was about 350 of us. People came from the woods, from hiding with farmers. It was about 12 to 13,000 Jews in Drohobycz. There were those who came later that survived in Russia. One of my uncles was taken prisoner of war. He was in the Russian Army and was taken prisoner of war by the Italians and we didn't know about it. His wife thought -- that's a different story but I just have to finish that. His wife thought that he's dead because the Germans killed all the Jewish POWs. And she married my uncle, who lost his wife. Well, among those that came after the -- you know, after the war was -- the Italians took POW, they didn't expect it. This was another 300 to 400 people out of 12,000.

Bill Benson: Marcel, before we close, there's a couple of things I'd like to ask you before we close. When -- right before you were liberated there was a fierce bombardment, the Soviets and Germans and a bombardment going on around you.

That was significant for you because it gave awe opportunity to get fresh air. Would you say a little bit about that?

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Marcel Drimer: Yes. There were two refineries. One was a national refinery, Polish, and one was a private. So somehow the Americans or the British managed to fly into these territories and bomb the government-owned refineries. They didn't touch the private. Evidently somebody in America was part owner of that thing.

(Laughter)

But anyway, when the bombers came and were, you know, bombing the factory, this was the only time we could get out and straighten our legs and get some fresh air.

Bill Benson: While everybody else is hunkered down.

Marcel Drimer: Everybody was hiding.

Bill Benson: You were out there getting fresh air.

Marcel Drimer: We were out being free for a few minutes.

Bill Benson: When you were liberated, when you knew you were liberated and the war was over for you, your family and other Jews that had survived came under suspicion by the Soviets.

Marcel Drimer: Yes. My father -- my father was -- he was made the director of that -- CEO of that factory where he was the accountant before the war and he was -- the war was still going on. So he was providing wood to the -- that Army and he was happy to do that. But he was barefoot. Once Russian general comes in and he's how dare you be barefoot. You are a big director and you don't -- you don't have any -- you don't wear any shoes. He said well, I don't have any shoes. So he gave father a pair of shoes for him and a pair of shoes -- boots for me. But Father was called to the KGB and he was accused of being a collaborator. He says 12,000 people were killed and you survived. How come did you survive? You must have been a collaborator. So Father says well, I was no collaborator. I just was lucky and I was -- you know, I survived. But he got some people, some other survivors that confirmed that father was not a collaborator, that he was a decent, honorable man. But the other part of my life started right there. I had to -- I wasted three years of my education. I grew

about one inch in all these -- all these three years because there was no food, so I had a lot of catching up, a lot of -- to do to become normal, to have a normal life. This is a long, long other long story.

Bill Benson: One last question, and then we need to wrap up. You told me that your father made good on promises that he had made to himself about the Sawinski family after what they had done. Would you say a little bit about them and about the Sawinskis and your father?

Marcel Drimer: Well, it was actually my uncle that when he wanted to come to hide he -- during one of the -- during one of the aktion, a crystal chandelier fell down and broke and my uncle picked up some of the crystals and asked a friend, jeweler, to make a ring that looks like a diamond ring. And the friend did it and when my uncle went to ask the Sawinskis to take him in, he gave him the ring. He said this is a diamond ring. You know, you can just keep that ring but because Mr. Sawinski said my cow just died and I'm going to sell it and he says no, no, this has a tremendous emotional value to me so keep it and I'll -- you know, and I'll get you -- you return it to me and I'll buy you a cow right after the war. And so it was. The Sawinskis got -- a few of these 13 were the three of them. He was with his new wife and her daughter, and just recently I went to the -- my wife and I went to the warehouse where the things like that are that my father's and everything, and I was telling them -- and something mentioned about the ring. And they said oh, we all know about that ring. I know the story about it. The story is called "The Diamond and the Cow" and it's not -- it's like three pages story.

Bill Benson: It's online, right?

Marcel Drimer: It's online. It's one of my stories that's online. The people there, they knew it. They took the pictures and they just registered that ring.

Bill Benson: After all these years.

Marcel Drimer: Well, because we didn't have that ring. Only when my uncle's last -- the third wife died, they didn't know what to do with the ring. And my sister got the ring and donated it to the

Holocaust museum.

Bill Benson: I wish -- I know our audience does too, Marcel, that we had more time with you because you had to really skip over many, many, many different things during that, you know, six-year period that you've described for us. So thank you. And I'm going to turn back to Marcel to close our program in just a moment. I want to thank all of you for being with us at *First Person*. Remind you that we will have programs each Wednesday and Thursday until the middle of August. So hope you can come back and join us. If not, perhaps maybe in 2015 and our website will have information about our programs then.

It's our tradition at *First Person* that our first person has the last word. And so I'm going to turn back to Marcel to close our program. Because we didn't have an opportunity for you to ask some questions, Marcel, you can stay behind for a little bit?

Marcel Drimer: Absolutely.

Bill Benson: When we're done, Marcel will step off the stage. Please feel free to come and ask him a question or just say hi or --

Marcel Drimer: Or give me a hug.

(Laughter)

Bill Benson: He likes hugs, gratefully accepted. With that, Marcel.

Marcel Drimer: I'm 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 witness that it did happen. By listening to the stories of my childhood, you'll become witnesses also. Our good friend, the late Charlene Schiff, which you knew very well, said that we all have to fight the four evil I's, ill tolerance, injustice, ignorance, and indifference. These are the roots of men's moral corruption that allowed Hitler and his helpers to come to power and torture and murder millions of people he considered under, not worth living. Not

only Jews, but people with disabilities, gypsies, homosexuals, and many other groups. Changing this behaviors is the path to preventing Holocausts and genocides, and this is what this Holocaust museum is all about. I also want to read you what Pastor Niemoller said, "First they came for the socialists and I did not speak out because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, 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."

We cannot be bystanders. We have to be active in trying to prevent genocides, homicides, hatred of all kind. Racism of all kind. Thank you.

(Applause).