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**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. We are in our 16th year of the First Person program. Our First Person today is Mr. Marcel Drimer, whom we shall meet shortly.

This 2015 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 experiences during the Holocaust.

Each of our First Person guests serves as a volunteer here at this Museum. 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 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 we have time toward the end of the program, we'll have an opportunity for you to ask Marcel a few questions.

We have prepared a brief slide introduction to help with his introduction.

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.

Marcel Drimer was born in Drohobycz, Poland. The arrow on this map points to Poland. Marcel's father, Jacob, worked as an accountant in a lumber factory while his mother raised Marcel and 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 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 who 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 the 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 his 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 United States 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 but not really.

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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. Not really.

Marcel and Ania have a son Adam who lives in Richmond. They have two grandchildren, Mary, age 13, and Jack, who is 15. They are both in the International Baccalaureate program. And I just wanted to -- Ania, if you would raise your hand so people know you're down here. There you go. Thanks, Ania. Although officially, as I said, Marcel and Ania are retired, they both do considerable work as volunteers with the 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. They also recently translated personal memoirs by two Jewish young women who suffered terribly during the war. In appreciation for the translations, the families of these women donated generously to this Museum. 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. They are quite a team.

Marcel speaks publicly about his Holocaust experience in various settings. He was a speaker with Mia Farrow at an event in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, and he spoke to cadets from our four military Academies who were on their way to visit Auschwitz. Two weeks ago Marcel spoke to students and faculty at the University of Virginia and recently at several federal agencies including the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Next week he'll be speak to go the Army.

Marcel has recently donated photographs of great significance to him as well as a ring which played a role in his survival, which we will hear more about today.

And with that, I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our First Person, Marcel Drimer. (Applause)

Marcel Drimer: Thank you.

Bill Benson: Marcel, thank you so much for joining us today and for your willingness to be our *First Person*. Thank you for being here. You have so much to tell us and we have such a limited time, so we'll start. World War II began in September 1939 when Germany attacked Poland from the west followed quickly by the Soviets attacking Poland from the east. Early in the war you and your family lived under Russian occupation. But before we turn to the war, tell us a little about your family, yourself, and your community before the war began.

Marcel Drimer: My father, Jacob, was the oldest of five siblings and my mother Laura was the oldest of four siblings. They both were born in 1904. And we lived in Drohobycz. The town was a small town, very picturesque town in the foothills of Tibetan mountains. And the Jews, the population of Drohobycz was ability 60, 70,000 people, equally divided between Poles, Jews, and the Ukrainians. The situation in Poland, even before the war, was getting a little tough for being a Jew, for the Jews. I think that this was the influence of the 1933 Hitler's getting to power. There's local nationalists and fascists managed to get -- establish a college ghetto. University students had to sit in the upper rows of the university. There was something called numerus clausus for Jews to attend university. There were certain restrictions as to profession. The Jews could not be officers in the Polish Army, they could be privates and lower rank and COs.

But the situation, when the Germans attacked, as Bill mentioned, when the Germans attack Poland on September 1, 1939, the -- the 17th of September Russia attacked Poland from the east. There

was agreement of non-aggression so that Germans did not fight the Russians against Russians. Poland was at that time divided western Poland became under the German occupation and eastern Poland, including Drohobycz, was a part of the Soviet Union.

The situation under the Soviet regime was quite tough. They -- if I could get a little light lowered Bill Benson: I don't know that they can turn that down. What I tried to do is do my best to look down here.

Marcel Drimer: Okay.

Bill Benson: If they'll do it, they'll do that.

Marcel Drimer: They would take away people's factory -- private factories, big farms, big buildings. They nationalized it. They send a lot of people to -- Polish people and some Jewish people to Siberia. The people they do not consider friends of the regime. Among these people that were sent to Siberia were my wife's parents. They did not want to accept Soviet citizenship. Did not want to take their passports so they were sent to Siberia. Well, this was sort of fortunate because those people that were sent to Russia, most of them survived. Those that stayed behind, I would -- I would say that about 85% of those deported survived whereas those 90% of those that stayed behind under German occupation perished.

Bill Benson: Marcel, didn't some of your family members join the Communist Party?

Marcel Drimer: Yes. Yes. As a matter of fact two of my father's sisters were members of the Communist Party before the war. They were imprisoned and they -- you know, they were known to the police. And my father would -- you know, when they would go on demonstration, his sisters would go in the middle of the street and my father would go on the side of the street. And when the police would come, he could hear horses coming, he would run to the middle of the street and point them out. But they still went to prison. But because of that, when the Germans attacked Poland in June of 1941, June 22, 1941, the -- the aunts, who husbands were taken to the Soviet Army, they took the -- their infant children and ran with their receive yet Army. They also survived. All of my uncles of the age of serving in military were taken to the Russian -- to the Russian Army. Two of them were killed fighting the Nazis and the others came back.

Bill Benson: Were you able to start school during that time under the Soviets?

Marcel Drimer: Well, I was ready for kindergarten but there was no Polish kindergarten, so I went to -- I went to a Ukrainian kindergarten and was treated just like everybody else. The Jews were not selected for special treatment. Special I mean bad treatment under the Russians.

Bill Benson: Of course all of that would change when Germany turned on the Soviet Union in June of 1941. Very quickly German troops occupied Drohobycz and life for your family, for Jews throughout all of the occupied area but certainly in Drohobycz changed dramatically. Tell us about the Germans coming in and what happened.

Marcel Drimer: The Germans contacted the national -- the nationalist Ukrainians and said -- and they gave the Ukrainians three chance to do whatever they wanted to do with the Jews. So the Germans came to Drohobycz on July 1, 1941, and the first day -- they came days before but on July 1, 1941, there was a pogrom. In other words, the people -- the Ukrainians could kill -- rob, kill, beat up the Jews and what happened in Drohobycz, they would come to my grandfather's, maternal grandfather's house, and beat him up so that he died ten days later. There was no access to hospitals or to doctors, so my grandfather died ten days later. About 200 people, 200 Jews were killed in that aktion. At the same time my father was involved with my mother's sister. He was sent there for some university courses and the Germans -- local Ukrainians did the same thing as they did in Drohobycz. They killed about 5,000 Jews, just murdered on the streets. But when they came to the place where my father lived with his -- with my mother's sister, and covered him with covers in

the bed and she said I don't wanted you to go because she was already -- it was considered over at that time. So she was -- she says, I'll go and the Germans said this is going to be to work and then we'll let you go. And left my father in the apartment. When the Germans came she said she was only living there. She went to -- with them and of course she never came back. She was murdered too, on the first day of the German occupation my grandfather and his doctor Ryfka was killed. My father had to walk to Drohobycz, about 60 miles. When we came -- when my father came home, there was no telephone. When my father came home, he -- my mother was very happy to see him. We didn't -- you know, we didn't have any phones. We didn't know what was going on. But she was very upset about her sister. And we hoped, they hoped, that she will come back, that she'll be working. She was only 24 years old. But she never came back.

So this was the first day of the German occupation. The Germans, when they came, they -- they established rules of existence. The Jews -- the Jews were supposed to wear an armband with the Star of David. They were not allowed to work -- to walk on the side of the street. They were -- the Germans would confiscate whatever they wanted to confiscate. Fur coats, for example, because they needed it for their eastern front. The Jewish kids were not allowed to go to school. The Ukrainian and Polish kids were allowed to go to the fourth grade because their plan -- the German's plan was to kill the Jews and Jewish kids and there was no need for their education if they were supposed to be killed. But the Poles and the Ukrainians were supposed to be slave labor and they -- the Germans decided that fourth grade education was enough for a slave laborer. So I couldn't -- this was 1941 was the year that I was supposed to start my education. Of course I did not. I missed three years of my education.

The situation -- you know, if they -- if they would see -- everybody had to wear an armband, you know. And if they would see somebody that think suspected this is a Jew without an armband, they would -- they would -- well, only Jewish men in Poland were circumcised so this was like a, you know, sign that you were Jewish. So if they would see a man walking on the streets that looked like a Jew they would ask him to drop his pants and if he was Jewish he could be killed on the spot or taken to the camp.

So they also had a ration system that they allowed the Jews to like 300 calories a day food. And of course, there was all the black market. In our apartment where my father, mother, and sister lived, we also had -- we also had my grandmother whose husband was killed by the Ukrainians, my grandfather who was a widower, you could see his picture here, Isaac Drimer and one of my father's sister's, Ryfka, with her two little children. So it was very crowded and it was -- there was no food. The situation was getting quite bad.

Bill Benson: Marcel, tell us, if you would, about when you went to stay for a little while with your nanny.

Marcel Drimer: I was just going to.

Bill Benson: Okay.

Marcel Drimer: So I -- before the war I had a nanny. Her name was Jancia, and she loved me very, very much and I loved her. And she came -- this was before the ghetto, this was August of 1942. The ghetto was established in October of '42. So she came to our place and brought us food quite regularly, about once a week, and milk and, you know, played with me a little. And she once came and told me -- I was sick with something, I don't remember what, some childhood sickness, and she told my mom that she would like to take me to her home and feed me better food and give me a bath and keep me for a week or so. While I was with Jancia, my sister started bothering my mother that she wants to -- she wants to have me back at home to play with me. And so my mother gave in and she took off the armband from her arm and went to Jancia's house. And when she came to

Jancia's house, Jancia was lying on bed and in -- giving birth to a child, getting ready, but I was the only other person there, was sitting in the corner and crying. I was eight years old, what could I do? So my mother saved actually Jancia's life and helped her to deliver the baby, which was born stillborn. And it took quite a while. It got dark and so she asked us to stay there overnight. In the morning her husband came who was on the -- he was on the night shift. He came home and was very surprised that he -- to see us there because we didn't have the phone, we didn't tell Jancia that we were coming. And he says that what's going on, he says don't you know what's going on in the town? She lived in the suburbs. And we don't -- we didn't know anything. He said there is an aktion going. The Germans have to say a few words about aktion. It was killing of Jews on the east -- eastern part of the world was called pogrom when the Russians killed the Jews, Ukrainians killed the Jews. The Germans had aktion, they called it aktion. They had two different kinds of aktion, one was a killing aktion and taking people -- or taking people to the concentration -- extermination camps and another was raup aktion. They would come to the Jewish houses and take everything they wanted. He said there was a killing aktion going on in town and if they would come here and see you here, they would kill you and us. This was one of the rules of the engagement, the Germans said if a non-Jewish family gives help to the Jews, they would be killed. Jewish family -- if a non-Jewish family gives a Jew a slice of bread, they would be killed. Now, again, if the Germans that would come there, I was the only Jew that was circumsized, they would recognize. This was a giveaway. So he says you have to leave the house and go and hide in the forest. There was a wheat fields in front of their house and there was some woods behind the road. So we -- early in the morning, you know, that day, we would -- he gave my mother some bread and water and we walked over the street and went to the -- to the wheat field and my mother noticed that there's a indentation in the ground and we all laid down. She had a raincoat that was the color of wheat. Covered us up there and sit and we're laying there very, very quiet. Mother told us not to scream, not to cry. Then we started hearing shots, screams, Germans crying rous! Rous! Out! Out! Get out! And hurry up! And then you could hear shots and people screaming of pain and people praying. It was a, you know -- it quieted down for a while, for 15, 20 minutes, and then it started all over again. It lasted like three or four hours.

Bill Benson: I think, Marcel, that you told me that your sister had described it as a concert of death.

Marcel Drimer: A concert of death. We -- after the war we -- we called it concert of death. And I told the story, called it concert of death and then changed it to another term.

But then it stopped for a while, stopped and we waited for another hour or for two and got up and started walking towards Jancia's house. As we came to the road, the -- there was a German soldier with a big dog on the road. He looked at us, we looked at him. My mother had my sister on her arm and she had me by my hand. And my sister was blond and blue eyed and so was my mother. I am also blue eyed but I am not blond. I was dark hair. And then -- then he looked at us and we looked at him and it lasted forever but he just turned around and walked away.

My mother and my sister looked like Christians. Because Jewish features are totally giveaway and dark hair and so forth. So we wondered why he did this. So either the -- he could have thought maybe that this was a farmer woman with her children on the walk or maybe he was, you know -- he had his quota of kills. And another thing, he was by himself. The German strategy was that when they went out to hunt Jews, they would always go in pairs so that they would not get the chance to let the Jewish person go. He would have a human feeling and let them go. But evidently -- but this guy was alone and he let us go. He just turned around.

Bill Benson: You described that as a miracle really.

Marcel Drimer: Well, right. I changed it to coincidence.

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Bill Benson: All right.

Marcel Drimer: And then we came to Jancia's house and stayed there overnight. The next morning my father came from -- to pick us up. My father was at that time in a labor camp factory where he works. A lot of Jewish men, lady, they have lost their families and they have stayed in the dormitory where they could sleep and eat and they also -- while they were working, they had another badge with an A that they are *arbeiters*. So they were not killed immediately. They could live as long as the Germans needed them. They didn't need the children or the parents or the wife if they were not working.

So he came to pick us up, and then we went to our apartment. As we came there, the door was broken in, feathers were flying all over the place, furniture was turned over, and the apartment was empty. My aunt with the two children, my grandmother and my grandfather Isaac, they were taken to an *umshatz platz*. That's a place they kept people two or three days without food, without water, without sanitary facilities, and then they took them on the cattle trains to the killing -- killing place. Now, the concentration camps utilized people to work, like Auschwitz and other camps. There is a gentleman here who is a survivor of these concentration camps. But the extermination camps were the ones that very, very few people stayed there any longer than 24 hours. They were killed on the spot. So my family went to such a camp. It was Belzec in the eastern part of Poland.

Bill Benson: Marcel, in -- I know there's so much more you want to share with us, so let's talk now about when you were -- you and your family and all the other Jews in Drohobycz were forced into the Drohobycz ghetto.

Marcel Drimer: Yes, this was -- we already know here, in October of 1942, the ghetto was established. They want to -- there is a Polish saying that
(speaking non-English language).

There is never so bad that it couldn't be any worse. So this was really the situation. We were put in a one-room -- one room with several families in other rooms. The beds were taken out. The Germans took out everything. So we all -- the four of us slept on the -- one mattress. The food situation was bad and getting worse. But my father, how we managed to live is that my father bartered things for food. He would, for example, take his ring. There were farmers coming to town to sell their goods, their fares, and my father, since he worked outside of the ghetto, he would manage to -- to exchange his ring from his wedding ring for a loaf of bread. His theory was that we are not going to worry about things. We are going to worry about people. We have to live. So this is how sometimes Father managed to get some food and maybe sometimes some neighbors that he knew would help us.

But the situation in the ghetto was getting very, very, very physical. And so Father decided that he wants -- he will take us out of the ghetto and hide us at the lumber factory where he worked. He prepared the place for us on the -- in the shed where the wood was drying naturally for floors and so forth. And also, loosened some part of the fence so we could get through the fence. He bribed the guard that was taking the Jews out of the ghetto and bringing them back. It was -- it was just -- he would take a big column of Jewish men and then put them into different factories where they were working and then pick them up.

And so my mother put on the men's clothing and took my sister under her arm and my father took me under his arm, and we marched out of the ghetto. Then he put us out on -- of course, there was a street near the -- near the factory, he put us out behind some bushes and told me, you'll stay here. You're a man. And I'll take Mom and Irena to the inside of this factory and then come to pick you up.

As soon as my father walked away with my mother and sister I got very panicky and I started

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screaming, Daddy, Daddy, don't leave me here. Because I heard that people -- a bunch of their children had went -- trying to get alive. Of course the guard came to my father and he knew him and he said that you -- you know, you can't do it. Again, my father took a jacket from his back and gave it to the guy. And we walked in. And Father put us on the -- on that -- on the shelf where the drying wood was. Put us in the attic there. There was no steps or anything, so we would have a string and Father would bring us food, sometimes took the waste away. So we would put the string down and get the food and this is how we lived for about two or three weeks.

Bill Benson: This is incredible, though, that he built a hiding place for you inside the lumber factory where he was doing forced labor.

Marcel Drimer: Yes.

Bill Benson: Astonishing.

Marcel Drimer: They wouldn't let him work the regular office. They built a little shed for him. They needed him but -- so this was going on for a week or two weeks. And a friend of my father's came to him and says, Jacob, there is a woman here, her name is Theresca, who suspects that you are -- that you have somebody in hiding here. And she says that she'll do -- she wants to make sure she's right and she'll do the right thing, which meant to go to the Germans and renounce us, that was the right thing. Father was terribly upset and had to come up with some way of saving us. He had a friend, a good friend who was a doctor. He was the doctor in the local clinic. Of course he was Jewish but he was educated in Vienna like, you know, this was -- when my parents were young, Drohobycz was under -- there were colleges people could study here now. So they got together and the doctor offered my father that he will write a letter to the SS saying that he is an SS man on leave from the front and that this specific girl infected him with syphilis. And he did. And he did write that letter. And the next day two SS men came and took Theresca away. And of course they took her to the clinic where the doctor was and the doctor confirmed -- I don't know how it works but he confirmed that she was infected and she was sick and she was put away to be seen only after the war.

My father -- after the war my father told her that -- how it happened that she went away.

Bill Benson: And so, Marcel, of course this was a situation that's such that you can't stay there very long so your father at the same time is thinking about where he can take his father to protect them. So tell us what happens from there.

Marcel Drimer: Well, you know, we were afraid that -- this was getting absolutely impossible because we couldn't be there forever, plus, we all thought that the war is coming to an end and that the Germans would kill everybody. They would keep the Jews only as long as they needed them and they would kill them. So Father said we have to go and find another place.

He took his armband off his arm and went to villages, to the villages nearby to find a place for us to hide. Some people treated him nice and some people not so nice. One place they asked him for his watch or else. And/or else is always we'll give you to the Germans and you'll be dead. Then he ran into the Sawinski family who were neighbors of his mother's and they knew my mother since she was a little girl. They offered to take my mother and my sister to hide.

We again, because Jewish men were branded, you know, and so my -- his philosophy was that we had to save anybody that we can. So Father agreed, to take my mother and my sister. So Mrs. Sawinski came to the dormitory where my father worked and he took us down from the shed where we were and she came and we were saying good-bye to my mother and my sister. Of course, it was a very, very traumatic situation. Everybody was crying and Mrs. Sawinski, who had four children of her own, grown children, she says well, whatever will be will be, just take the boy too. So she took us and we went to forests and rivers and we hid at the farm.

The farm was a very, very poor farm. They -- they had a house with a thatched roof, the floor was unfinished. The food situation was also very critical because the farmers also had -- they couldn't get much more than anybody else and they were not allowed to slaughter any animals because Germans kept a very good record of that. And they had to give first thing to the German Army to eat. So they had a very, very hard situation.

We -- we were hiding -- they dug up a hole under the house and so some of -- you know, so we would hide. I have to jump forwards a little bit. And then there was about 13 of us

Bill Benson: Don't jump quite that far yet. So first, it's your mother and your sister and you in hiding in their little tiny farm house with dirt floors. And you make a hole under the ground. And at some point, as you mentioned, food for them, even though they had a farm, was very tough to get. And of course you had no medical care.

Marcel Drimer: Absolutely.

Bill Benson: No medical care. And at some point your sister became ill and I want to be sure you tell us about that.

Marcel Drimer: My sister, when we were hiding on the attic she would look out of the attic and say look at the chickens running around free and she would say why can't I be a chicken? I could run around and live free. But she also had a -- she was bleeding from her nose and she was very, very weak, underfed, you know. And we were thinking about how could we bury her without having giving us away. It was -- it was quite bad.

But another -- the way that we -- we did get some food, the -- there was a refinery, oil refinery about a mile and a half away from the farm where my uncle Abraham Gruber worked, he was a butcher.

Bill Benson: Again, so people know, he worked but he was forced labor.

Marcel Drimer: He was forced labor, of course. This was a labor camp. So the youngest boy would take cars with the big container and take it to the -- to where my uncle was working and they would get scraps from the cafeteria where the laborers were eating and my uncle would give them sometimes a loaf of bread or some meat, for which if the Germans see it they would have killed him for it. So when they brought back the scraps from the tables, the people, we had the first -- the first choice and then the pigs got the other part.

It was -- you know, we would bathe once a month. In the wintertime, which was most of the time of our hiding, we would hide in the attic of the house and we were being smoked because there was no -- no chimney. The situation was very, very critical

Bill Benson: And Marcel, as you were starting to tell us, over the -- you were there in the Sawinskis' home for almost a year. And as you said, eventually there ended up being 13 people in hiding.

Marcel Drimer: Right.

Bill Benson: Tell us how that was even possible.

Marcel Drimer: Okay. Well, there was -- this uncle of mine that helped to feed us, I -- while still in the ghetto he fixed up some crystals from a chandelier because Germans were robbing things and the chandelier fell down. He picked up some crystals and asked a jewel --

Bill Benson: A jeweler?

Marcel Drimer: A jeweler to make him a ring. And he made him a ring and the ring looked -- the crystal looks like diamond. And when my -- when my uncle decided to get out of the labor camp, he came to the Sawinskis and said -- asked them to take this and he lives with a woman at this time who was a widower. He was -- who was a widow and he was already a widower because his wife and child were killed. So he came to the Sawinskis and showed them the ring and said I'll give you this diamond ring if you'll hide us, take us and hide us until the end of the war. Sawinskis said -- lost their last cow and they were -- and they were desperate, so Mr. Sawinski said here, we'll take you

but I'll have to sell the ring to buy the cow. Uncle had to beg them not to sell the ring because it's family --

Bill Benson: Family heirloom.

Marcel Drimer: Heirloom and he promised he would buy him a cow right after the war. So they let him be there, they let him come with the lady friend and the little girl. So there was another three people. And then -- this was quite close to the end. If it was another two, three months, we wouldn't survive. Then some of the Sawinski family had some Jews in hiding and they didn't want to keep them anymore. So the Sawinskis took them so there were 13 of us hiding.

Bill Benson: So some of you are hiding in a little bit of space between the ceiling and the thatched -- top of the thatched roof where the smoke comes through.

Marcel Drimer: Right.

Bill Benson: Some are in a hole in the ground. Some are in a woodshed?

Marcel Drimer: No, the -- in the summertime we hid in the barn where the cows were also. And then what happened is it was a very poor farm. We were hiding in the barn and the floor -- we were on the -- the floor of the attic fell down and we fell to the cows with the cows and the pigs. So then we would all hide -- we switched. Some people were hiding in the -- in the attic and some were in the hole.

Bill Benson: And of course now the Russians are advancing and they're getting close and then bombardments begin and you told me that the bombardment actually gave you a chance to go outside, right? Say something about that.

Marcel Drimer: Well, the allies were quite close to the front from the west and they would come and bomb the factory where my uncle -- refinery, oil refinery, which was very close. And this was the only time that we could -- that Jews, we could get out and stretch our legs and breathe some clean air because everybody was hiding. We were the only ones there. And we -- so, you know, this was -- plus we knew that the end is close. We also heard the artillery coming from the east and bombs coming from the west. So we knew that this was going to be the end of the war. And it was August 6, 1944. I don't remember the date but I read about it obviously. And we -- the farmers looked out and they said there's Russian soldiers marching on the road. And we would get out and started hugging them and kissing them, which didn't make them very happy because we were dirty and stinky.

(Laughter)

But -- but this was -- this was the end.

Bill Benson: So for you the war ends in August 1944.

Marcel Drimer: Right.

Bill Benson: And of course it would continue elsewhere until the end of the war in spring of 1945.

Marcel Drimer: May 5, 1945.

Bill Benson: Coming up 70th anniversary. What happened for you now that you're, quote, liberated? Now the Soviets are here, they're on the march. So what happened?

Marcel Drimer: Well, first of all, I could not -- my muscles, leg muscles were atrophied because I was most of that last year I was lying down or sitting. I didn't play. So I couldn't walk. I had to learn how to walk again. We were whispering. We did not -- we are not allowed to talk loud. We are whispering. My father entertained us whispering songs, Polish and Jewish songs to us, whispering. So I had to learn again how to talk normally. And my teacher first time school teacher complain to my mother that the boy doesn't play with other kids and he just doesn't talk anymore and there's a problem. And my mother said he'll overcome that. I did overcome it.

But the situation -- this was -- we were liberated from the Germans but we are under the Soviet

occupation. It was a hell still but not as hell as the Germans. My father was director of -- he was made director of that factory that we had to --

Bill Benson: He had been a forced laborer in, slave laborer.

Marcel Drimer: Right and the generals -- the Russian generals would come and ask him to provide lumber for the front because the front was nearby. And my father was sitting behind a big desk but he was barefoot. So the general says that's a shame that the director of the factory is barefoot. He said I don't have any shoes. You know, everything was gone. And so the Russian Army gave him some shoes and they gave me a pair of boots. And -- but the Russian system at that time, and I think that it's coming back to what it was at that time, they considered you guilty until proven innocent. This was their motto. So one day he was called to the KGB and my father was called to the KGB and they said it's something -- something is very strange here. You and your family survived and 90% of the other Jews were dead. You must have collaborated with the Germans. So can you imagine, you know, he fought like a lion to get -- and then he had to apologize for being alive. Well, he managed to get some other Jews that were survivors and some Gentiles that knew him based on before the war and during the war and he had to convince them that they were -- that he was not a collaborator.

Bill Benson: Marcel, the Sawinski family, the family you stayed with, they must have been incredibly brave. They put their lives on the line. Say something about the Sawinskis and what you folks -- you and your family did for the Sawinskis.

Marcel Drimer: Right. Well, my sister who lives in Israel now nominated them Righteous of the Nations and their names are here in this museum as Righteous. And if you look for Sawinski, S-A-W-I-N-S-K-I, you will see their name there. We are in touch with -- after the war my -- of course, the ring. They never knew that the ring was fake.

(Laughter)

They never knew because my uncle bought it back from them, got it back from them, and for the first money that he could spare he bought them a cow. So they were -- they were very happy and we were very happy that we are alive, of course.

In December of 1945 we left Drohobycz, Drohobycz became at that time the Republic of Ukraine, the Republic of the Soviet Union and most of the Poles and Jews were allowed to leave that and go to the territories that Poland inherited from Germany. Poland shifted westward. East became part of the Soviet Union and the territories like Lower Silesia, Lower Silesia became Polish. So we went there and we lived in a town called Baldrich (phonetic) and nearby by a university town. And I lived there until 1961, got my -- I got my degree in mechanical engineering in '57. I came to the United States in 1961 and brought my wife here for a visit in 1963 and three weeks later we got married. So the authorities were a little surprised that she came here and visiting a stranger and got married three weeks later.

(Laughter)

Bill Benson: Marcel, I'm going to turn back to Marcel in a moment to close our program, but one last question for you. There's so much more I wish you could share with us and I wish we had you for hours this afternoon, but you -- as you mentioned you had got a degree in mechanical engineering and you had a tremendous career here in the United States. But before you settled on mechanical engineering, what advice did your father give you about your university studies?

Marcel Drimer: Right. I -- when the time to choose a university came I was -- you know, I was lost three years of education but I caught up too but I was still older than other friends. And my sister followed me a year later. And I discussed my future with my father. We didn't do these things at

that time. You consulted the parents.

(Laughter)

And I said to my father that I would like to study philosophy or literature, humanities, and Father said I have a better idea. You better study something that you can make a living anywhere in the world. How about medicine or engineering?

(Laughter)

Well, medicine was not my schtick so I studied engineering. By the way, my sister, I'm a mechanical engineer and my sister is a civil engineer. With a master's degree. And she is now in Israel. She has six grandchildren and two children and six grandchildren and she has a wonderful career in the industry. And I didn't do so badly either. I retired from the Army as a GS-15 supervisory engineer and did very well. I had -- as I said, I really, really lucky person. I had a wonderful wife, I had a very loving son married with two children living in Richmond and I'm grateful -- and I'm grateful for being in America.

Bill Benson: I'm going to turn back to Marcel just for some final remarks to close the program, but before doing so, I want to thank all of you for being here. Remind you that we'll have a *First Person* program each Wednesday and Thursday into the middle of August, so we hope that you can return and have another *First Person* program with us at some point. Before I turn back to Marcel, I would like to say a couple of things. One, when Marcel finishes, I'm going to ask -- our photographer Joel is going to come up on the stage and we're going to ask you to stand because he'd like to take a photograph of Marcel with you as the backdrop. So we'll ask to you do that. Then when Marcel is done, because we didn't have a chance for question and answer period with you, if you have a question you want to ask him or if you just want to shake his hand or take a photograph with him, Marcel will remain here on the stage. And so just absolutely feel free to come up on the stage, use the steps, please, come up here and just visit with him. So please, absolutely, we'd like you to do that if you feel inclined to do so.

So it's our tradition at *First Person* that our *First Person* has the last word. So with that, I'd like Marcel to have the last word

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 a witness that this did happen. By listening to the stories of my childhood you become witnesses also. Our good friends the late Charlene Schiff said that we have to fight the four evil I.'s, intolerance, injustice, ignorance, and indifference. Those 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 these behaviors is a path to preventing Holocaust and genocide and this is what this Holocaust is all about. And I also would like to read what Pastor Niemoller said when he was saved -- liberated in Dachau about indifference. 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.

I would also like to mention that the museum opened a new exhibit titled "Cambodia: 1975-1979" and it's about the killing fields of Cambodia. It's a very good exhibit. And thank you.

(Applause)

[Program ended at 12:05 p.m.]

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