

Piotr Zettinger, born in Warsaw, Poland in 1938, talking about growing up as the only child in an assimilated Jewish family; his father being a lawyer; his mother working as a biology teacher; only speaking Polish at home and no Yiddish; his parents belonging to the intellectual elite, having both Jewish and Gentile friends; his childhood being very happy; his first memory of the Warsaw ghetto being of a crowded apartment where the adults were sad, talking about death; asking his mother why a homeless boy his age, who was begging on the street, didn't just go home; being afraid of a very thin woman who was selling white armbands with a blue Star of David that all Jews over the age of 11 had to wear, because she looked like a scarecrow; being afraid of the bridge between the ghetto and the rest of the city because he felt the fear of the adults; being afraid of bridges for a long time after the war because of this; his mother taking him to her work in a German owned factory where she sewed buttons onto uniforms; her maternal grandparents, the brother and two sisters of her mother and their families also living in the ghetto; the Germans starting to round up Jews the summer of 1942; people talking about Treblinka; seeing the bodies of dead children on the street; hiding in the basement, hearing dogs barking, people screaming and not being allowed to cough; escaping in fall 1942, when he was four; describing how he and his cousin (a girl who was the same age) waited in a doorway with an arch, with their parents behind them, and counting the footsteps of the German soldier on patrol; feeling a hand on his shoulder and in retrospect hoping it was his father since this was the last time he saw him; the adults telling the children to run when the soldier had taken 30 steps past them; running across the street; a manhole opening and a hand grabbing them; the stench of the sewers; following a man through the sewers and being met outside the ghetto by a Gentile friend of his father's; later hearing his parents also escaped from the ghetto, but his father being captured and executed in April 1943; Piotr getting a new Polish last name (Shentovski); being taught to say that his parents had died when their house was bombed early in the war; it being difficult to find a home for him, partly because he was circumcised and easily identified as a Jew; ending up staying with 4-5 nuns on small farm; learning the Lord's prayer and enjoying church; feeling loved by the nuns; guarding the geese and the chicken; hiding in a closet in the attic when visitors came; once having to stay all night in the closet and feeling proud of finding a potty and go to the bathroom without making any noise; understanding the nuns were risking their lives to protect him; in fall 1943 having to leave the farm, not knowing why; going to an orphanage east of the river Wisla, on a carriage hidden under a blanket and feeling extremely lonely; the nuns running the orphanage being strict; the other children being bigger and too rowdy; trying to go unnoticed; not looking Jewish; no Germans coming to the orphanage at the nunnery; not knowing if there were other Jewish children there; the war ending for them when Soviet troops arrived in July 1944; accepting the nuns and the priest were his family now; making a snowman in February 1945, when Sister Gertrud told him his mother had come to get him; not recognizing his mother; feeling his mother's tears were strange, how could she be his mother if she was not happy to see him; his mother having passed for a Gentile, surviving the Warsaw uprising in fall 1944 and being deported with other Poles to work at a German ammunition factory 50 kilometers east of Auschwitz until the end of the war; walking across the frozen river with his mother; being cold and wanting to return to the nunnery; on the third day getting on a freight train, but his mother somehow not getting on and running next to the train screaming; the train stopping, his mother getting on and him starting to cry for the first time in three years, thinking how good it is to have a mother; arriving in a small town 30 kilometers from Warsaw where his maternal grandparents had a house and had survived the war; his grandfather having gone blind; his grandmother being mentally ill and dying shortly after the war; his two aunts and two cousins also being there; going to school but already having learned to read from the nuns; telling his mother he wanted to be a priest when he grew up; moving to Warsaw and finishing school there; his mother not remarrying, working at the Ministry of Education; going into research in chemistry; being accused of sabotaging the research during the campaign against Jews in 1968; leaving Poland with his mother and emigrating to Sweden; having his Polish citizenship revoked and becoming stateless; being met by someone from the Jewish community at Stockholm Central Station; staying at a refugee center

in Avesta, Sweden; reflecting over being one of the 4 000 Jewish children in Warsaw who survived, out of the 80 000 children who lived there before the war; still wanting to go unnoticed and being afraid of conflicts; in spite of that talking to groups of students and adults about his life and about the mechanics behind the dehumanisation of a group; meeting and receiving letters from students who said they learned more during his lectures than during all their years of school; quoting the Rabbi Hillel "if you have saved one life you have saved the whole world"; being an agnostic.