

**VIDEO**

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# THE BOY WHO FOUGHT HITLER

Thousands of Jewish teens fought the Nazis during World War II. Ben Kamm was one of them.

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**Y**ou probably know a kid like Ben Kamm. He's short but strong. He has big ideas and a quick smile. But Ben grew up in a different place and time than you. He lived in Warsaw, Poland, in the 1920s and '30s.

Picture Ben running through the city with his friends. They zigzag around fruit sellers. They rush past men with long, gray beards. You can hear the boys shouting goodbye as they head home for dinner.



But wait. Do you hear that too? As Ben walks by a neighbor, the man says something in Polish.

*Brudny Zyd. Dirty Jew.*

Ben shivers. But he's used to these words. Anti-Semitism (**prejudice** against Jewish people) is a fact of life in Europe at the time.

Like most of Warsaw's 350,000 Jews, Ben tries not to think about it. He holds his head up and walks on.



**PAUSE AND THINK:** When and where did Ben Kamm live?



### THE RISE OF HITLER

Adolf Hitler (shown above with arm raised) and his Nazi Party rose to power in Germany in 1933. By 1942, the Nazis controlled most of Europe.

## Hateful Lies

Picture Ben as he gets home. His four little brothers greet him at the door. His father looks up and smiles. His mother serves dinner.

Ben is happy. But his life is about to change. As his family eats, an evil leader is rising to power in Germany—about 300 miles away. That leader’s name is Adolf Hitler.

At the time, Germany was struggling. It

### VOCABULARY

- prejudice:** dislike of a person or group because of their race, religion, or other factor
- political:** relating to politics or government
- synagogues:** buildings where Jews meet to worship and learn about their religion
- sabotaged:** damaged or destroyed on purpose
- executed:** put to death

had lost World War I in 1918. The German people felt embarrassed. They felt tired and angry too. Hitler and his **political** party, the Nazis, used these feelings to gain power.

Jewish people had lived in Germany and Europe for more than a thousand years. But their religion and traditions were different from those of most Europeans. As a result, some people were prejudiced against them.

Hitler gave speeches filled with hateful lies about Jews. He said they couldn’t be trusted. He blamed them for Germany’s problems.

Hitler’s words spread across Europe. People turned against their Jewish neighbors. **Synagogues** were destroyed. Jewish-owned businesses were burned to the ground.



**PAUSE AND THINK:** Who was Adolf Hitler? Who were the Nazis?



### WARSAW GHETTO

This photo was taken in 1943 by a Nazi officer. It shows Jewish people being ordered out of the Warsaw ghetto. Most are thought to have been murdered in concentration camps.

## Nazi Invasion

In 1939, Hitler ordered German troops to invade Poland. This started World War II. Ben was 18.

Life for Poland's Jews changed fast. Many lost their jobs. They couldn't enter public parks. They couldn't go out after 5 p.m. People who broke these laws could be shot.

Ben's parents wanted to leave Poland. But the Nazis quickly took over most of Europe. Escape became impossible.

Then, in 1940, all the Jewish people in Warsaw were forced to move into one small part of the city. This area became known as the ghetto. It was surrounded by a 10-foot wall topped with barbed wire.

About 400,000 people moved into the ghetto. Ben's family got one small room. The gates to the ghetto were closed. No one was allowed to leave. There was not much to eat.

Ben and his family were slowly starving. It seemed like there was nothing they could do.



**PAUSE AND THINK:** How did Ben's life change after the start of World War II?

## Jewish Fighters

But there was something Ben could do. Tens of thousands of people were fighting back against the Nazis. They were called partisans. They worked from bases hidden in the forests of Eastern Europe.

Some partisans were experienced fighters. Others were teens. They blew up factories, **sabotaged** railroads, and stole weapons. This affected the flow of supplies to German troops. The partisans also protected Jewish families that had escaped the ghettos.

Ben heard about a partisan group 100 miles away. It gave him hope. With his





**THE REBEL FIGHTERS** This photo shows Jewish partisans. These young men and women built secret bases in forests throughout Eastern Europe. From those bases, they worked to rescue other Jewish people and fight back against the Nazis.

family's blessing, he snuck out and joined up.



**PAUSE AND THINK:** How did the partisans fight back against the Nazis?

## Terrible Rumors

A few months after joining the partisans, Ben heard that his family was in trouble. He rushed back to Warsaw. He was shocked by what he found. His family was sharing their single room with three other families.

Each week, the police rounded up more people and sent them away. None returned. There were scary rumors. People said the Nazis were killing Jewish people in prisons called concentration camps.

Ben spent two days in the ghetto. He got food for his family. Then he went back to the partisans. Later, he was sad when he thought

of that day. He never saw his family again.



**PAUSE AND THINK:** What were concentration camps?

## Luck and Sadness

For the next two years, Ben was part of a group of about 1,600 partisans. He often found Jewish people hiding in the forests. "Old, young, children," Ben said. "We took them with us, and they survived the war."

Others weren't as lucky. By 1945, 6 million Jewish people would be dead. Nazi troops shot them, starved them, and worked them to death in concentration camps.

This became known as the Holocaust.



**PAUSE AND THINK:** What happened to Ben's family?



**CAUSING CHAOS** The partisans blew up factories, derailed trains (like the one shown above), and stole weapons. This affected the flow of supplies to German troops.



**SURVIVORS** Prisoners wait to be freed from Auschwitz—a concentration camp in Poland—in 1945. Many others weren't as lucky. By the end of the war, 6 million Jewish people had been killed by the Nazis.

“Old, young, children. We took them with us, and they survived the war.”

—PARTISAN BEN KAMM, SHOWN HERE IN 2002



## Rebuilding a Life

The war ended in 1945. Germany lost. Many Nazis were **executed** for their crimes. Hitler took his own life before he could be punished.

Ben was 24 by the time it was safe to come out of the forest. There was not much left of the boy he had been. But Ben rebuilt his life. The Nazis had killed his family. They would not take his future.

Ben got married. He moved to America. He had a happy family. He had his own business. Before his death in 2010, he was interviewed about his life. “I can’t forgive people who killed innocent people,” Ben said. Still, he felt lucky. “I’m alive and can tell the story.” •



**PAUSE AND THINK:** How did Ben rebuild his life?

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