



**UP
CLOSE**

Bravery As you read, look for the ways in which Ben Kamm and other young people showed bravery, and why they needed to.

LOOK FOR WORD NERD'S 11 TERMS IN BOLD



THE BOY WHO FOUGHT HITLER

By Lauren Tarshis | Art by Jake Murray

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

You probably know a kid like Ben Kamm—the boy with big ideas and a quick smile, the one who will lead you off on an adventure and make sure you get home safely.

Ben grew up in a different place and time than you. He grew up in Warsaw, Poland, in the 1920s and '30s. But he was enough like you and your friends that you should be able to picture him: He was short but strong. His clothes were rumpled from wrestling with his brothers. His eyes were bright and playful.

Picture Ben running through the city streets with his friends. They race past finely dressed ladies and fruit sellers and



men with long, gray beards. You can hear him laughing with his friends and shouting goodbyes as they all head home for dinner.

But wait. Do you hear that too?

As Ben walks by a neighbor, the man hisses something in Polish.

Brudny Zyd.

Dirty Jew.

Ben's skin prickles, but he doesn't look at the man. He is used to these words. **Anti-Semitism** (prejudice against Jewish people) is common in Warsaw, as it is in many European cities.

Like most of Warsaw's 350,000 Jews, Ben tries not to think too much about it. The man's words are like a cold wind. Ben shivers for a few moments. But he holds his head up and keeps walking. He quickly forgets about the man.

Keep picturing Ben in your mind as he enters his apartment. His four little brothers happily jump on him. His father looks up from his evening paper and smiles. His mother serves a delicious dinner in their cozy dining room.

HATEFUL LIES

This is where Ben's story takes a sharp turn into one of the most evil chapters in history: the Holocaust.

As Ben's family is enjoying their dinner, Germany's leader, a man named Adolf Hitler, is planning the destruction of Europe's 9.5 million Jewish people.

Hitler rose to power at a time when Germany was struggling. In 1918, Germany had been defeated in World War I. The German people felt **humiliated**. They felt tired and bitter too.

Hitler and his **political party**, the Nazis, used these feelings to gain power.

Jewish people had lived in Germany and throughout Europe for centuries.

But their unique religion and **rituals** often kept them separate. As a result, some people were prejudiced against them.

Hitler gave speeches filled with hateful lies about Jews. He said they were "subhuman" and "an **inferior** race." He said they could not be trusted. "**Eliminate** the Jews," he said, "and you will eliminate all of Germany's problems!"

Hitler's words spread from Germany to other countries in Europe. Many people turned against their Jewish neighbors. **Synagogues** were destroyed. Jewish-owned businesses were burned down.

By 1945, 6 million Jewish men, women, and children would be dead. Nazi troops and their helpers shot them, starved them, and worked them to death. Many died in prisons known as concentration camps. The Nazis built these prison camps just for the purpose of killing Jewish people.

But for most of Ben's childhood, he and his family were happy. No one suspected that this kind of hateful violence was even possible. "Who could imagine such things?" Ben would say years later. "Who could imagine?"

NAZI INVASION

Ben was 18 when German troops invaded Poland and World War II began. For Poland's Jews, life changed quickly. Many



THE RISE OF HITLER

Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party rose to power in Germany in 1933. By 1942, the Nazis controlled most of Europe.



THE WARSAW GHETTO

This photograph was taken in 1943 by a Nazi official. It shows Jewish people being ordered out of the ghetto. Most were probably murdered in concentration camps.

HULTON-DEUTSCH COLLECTION/CORBIS VIA GETTYIMAGES (WARSAW GHETTO); JIM MCMAHON/MAPMAN® (MAP)

lost their businesses or jobs. Jewish people were not allowed in public parks or libraries. They could not go out after 5 p.m. If they broke these laws, they could be shot.

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

And then, starting on October 12, 1940,

all the Jewish people in and near Warsaw were forced to move into one tiny area of the city. The area became known as the Warsaw **ghetto**. There was a 10-foot wall around it. The wall was topped with barbed wire and broken glass.

Armed police herded hundreds of Jewish people through the streets. Ben looked around. There were women holding babies. There were men in business suits, teachers from his school, little girls in their best dresses. No one was allowed to bring more than a few things.

Ben saw a policeman shove an old woman who lagged behind the crowd. The policeman's eyes were filled with disgust. Ben gripped his youngest brother's hand, his heart pounding with fear. He realized that the Nazis and their helpers did not see them as humans. Ben felt like a helpless animal.

About 400,000 Jewish people were crammed into the ghetto. Ben's family moved into one small room. The gates to



the ghetto closed.

No one was allowed to leave.

Life in the ghetto got worse and worse. One day, a policeman drove through the streets with a smile on his face, firing his gun. An **epidemic** of the illness typhus swept through the ghetto, killing thousands. There was very little food.



THE REBEL FIGHTERS Jewish partisans like these young men and women built secret bases in forests and launched attacks on Nazis.

JEWISH FIGHTERS

Like many young people, Ben soon found ways to sneak out of the ghetto and find food for his family. There were holes in the wall, and tunnels that led to the other side. With his blond hair and blue eyes, Ben could blend in with the rest of the Polish people. Plus, he had an aunt on the outside. None of her neighbors knew she was Jewish. She helped him.

Still, Ben and his family were slowly starving. It seemed they could do nothing but wait for death.

But Ben would soon learn that he could do something after all—if he dared. Tens of thousands of people, including thousands of Jews, were fighting back against the Nazis. They were called *partisans*. They worked from camps in forests. Some were hardened fighters. Others were teens—mostly boys, but a few girls too. They blew up factories. They **sabotaged** railroads. They stole weapons shipments. They kept German troops from getting supplies.

In some partisan camps, fighters also protected Jewish families who had escaped the ghettos. The most famous partisan group was led by the Bielskis, three Jewish brothers

who had fled a ghetto in Belorussia (now the country of Belarus) after the Nazis murdered their family. The brothers fought German troops. They also protected a community of about 1,200 Jewish people.

Stories about partisans spread through the Warsaw ghetto. The stories gave hope to boys like Ben. One day, Ben's aunt told him about a Polish partisan group in a forest 100 miles away. With his family's blessing, Ben joined up.

TERRIBLE RUMORS

Life with the partisans was a big change. Ben learned to shoot, to sleep on the cold forest ground, and to sneak up on policemen and steal their weapons. He had to be careful. Poles could earn rewards for turning in Jewish people to the Nazis.

But Ben had grown tough. His bravery and skills soon earned him respect in the camp.

A few months after he joined the partisans, Ben learned that his family was in trouble. He rushed back to Warsaw. What he found in the ghetto shocked him. Orphaned children begged in the streets. His family was sharing their one room with three other families. Each week, the police rounded up

more people and sent them away to work as slaves. None returned. There were rumors that the Nazis were murdering Jewish people in concentration camps.

Ben stayed in the ghetto for two days, sneaking in and out to steal food for his family. He wanted to take his brothers back to the forest with him. But many people thought the war would soon end. Ben's parents believed the younger boys would be safer in the ghetto.

Ben left his parents and brothers to rejoin the partisans. He would never see his family again.

LUCK AND SORROW

For the next two years, Ben fought with a group of about 1,600 partisans. Their base was in the forest. It was almost like a town. There were cooks. There were cobblers who

repaired shoes. There were musicians.

Ben volunteered for risky missions blowing up trains that carried supplies to German troops. Often, he and his fellow partisans found Jewish people hiding in the forests. "Old, young, children," Ben said. "We took them with us, and they survived the war."

In 1945, the war ended with Germany's defeat. Many Nazis were **executed** for their crimes. Hitler, a coward in the end, took his own life.

Ben was 24 years old when it was finally safe to come out of the forest. Little was left of the laughing boy who had

once run through the peaceful streets of Warsaw.

But Ben was determined to rebuild his life. The Nazis had stolen his family. They would not steal his future.

Ben got married. He moved to America. He started a family and a business. He died in 2010. Before that, he was interviewed about his life. You can see him on camera, his eyes still bright, his face amazingly free of anger and bitterness.

"I can't forgive people who killed innocent people," he said. But he considered himself lucky. "I'm alive and can tell the story." ■



This photo of Ben Kamm was taken in 2002. His family includes two daughters and three grandchildren.



THE END OF THE WAR By the time the war ended in 1945, more than 60 million people had died. Many cities in Europe, like Warsaw, pictured here, were left in ruins. Rebuilding them would take years.

WRITE TO WIN

Write a speech for a Holocaust remembrance ceremony explaining the brave actions Ben Kamm took and why they were necessary. Send it to "Ben Kamm Contest" by June 1, 2018. Ten winners will each receive a copy of *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry. See page 2 for details.



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