



## BACKGROUND READING FOR **FISHEL PHILIP GOLDIG**

Fishel Philip Goldig is a Holocaust survivor who immigrated to Montreal in 1948, where he lives now. You can learn about his experiences by reading his memoir, "The Survival Story of a Six-Year-Old Boy," in the anthology *At Great Risk: Memoirs of Rescue during the Holocaust*. Below is some background information that will help you understand Fishel's story.

### BIOGRAPHY

Fishel was born in the small town of Mielnica, Poland (now Melnytsia-Podilska, Ukraine), in 1933 and lived with his parents, Baruch and Rachel, in a loving home where Jewish education was emphasized. Mielnica was in eastern Poland, near the border with Ukraine, and many Ukrainians lived there. Fishel's life was interrupted by the outbreak of World War II, when the Soviet army occupied the town and forced his family to move. Then, with the German attack on the Soviet Union, this part of Poland faced another more deadly occupation, this time by the Germans, who put in place increasingly restrictive anti-Jewish measures. Soon Fishel's family was forced into a ghetto in the town of Borszczów (now Borshchiv), where they lived in inhumane conditions. In 1943, they narrowly escaped the destruction of the ghetto and fled into the woods. Through some local contacts, they found a hiding place on the farm of a Ukrainian family named Kravchuk. Fishel, his parents and three relatives lived there, in a tiny cave, wholly dependent on the farmer for their survival. They stayed there until the spring of 1944 as the Germans were retreating from the area. After the war, Fishel's hometown became part of Soviet Ukraine, and the family faced continued threats from the Soviet regime. They escaped from the country and spent time in a displaced persons camp in Germany before arriving in Canada in 1948. Many years later, Fishel got in touch with the descendants of his rescuers, who were honoured as Righteous Among the Nations in 2009.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Poland is a country in Central Europe, located between Germany and the Soviet Union, that had a large Jewish population before World War II. Jews faced antisemitism and discrimination in Poland, but many also participated in Polish culture and society. World War II began with the German invasion of Poland in September 1939 and the occupation of western Poland. Soon afterwards, Germany's then ally, the Soviet Union, occupied the eastern part of Poland. The town of Mielnica was part of the Soviet-occupied zone until the summer of 1941, when the German army attacked the Soviet Union and occupied eastern Poland. The German occupiers began persecuting Jews and forcing them into ghettos. Ghettos were small, crowded areas with poor living conditions that were guarded by Germans. In 1942, the Germans started deporting Polish Jews to Nazi camps and killing centres in Poland. Jews in Poland who managed to escape ghettos and deportation needed help, but people who helped Jews did so at a great risk because they would likely be killed if the Germans or their collaborators found out. The Soviets liberated Poland between 1944 and 1945. Approximately three million Polish Jews were killed in the Holocaust, including many of Fishel's relatives.



"Once a day, early in the morning, Kravchuk would bring us some food and remove the waste. He would also bring us a big pitcher of water to wash with and for drinking. Once in a while he would spend some time talking to us. He was a nice, gentle man, though he and his wife were afraid of hiding us — they were often afraid to even come into our hole because they were worried neighbours would see them. There was always the fear of betrayal." (page 174)