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Before Hitler moved his troops east - to take more *Lebensraum* (living space) for Germany - about 3 million Jews lived in Poland. That meant Poland had the second largest Jewish community in the world, after New York.

Before the Fuhrer ordered his "Final Solution" (for what he considered "The Jewish Problem"), about 360,000 Polish Jews lived in Warsaw. That meant nearly thirty percent of Warsaw's citizens were Jews.

Warsaw, then one of Europe's leading cities, was a place of culture. Wladyslaw Szpilman, a Polish Jew, lived at home with his parents and adult siblings (younger brother Henryk and sisters Regina and Halina). Blessed with "piano fingers," Szpilman studied hard and played beautifully. Working for Polish Radio, he frequently gave live concerts "on the air."

Rumors of war had been swirling around Poland for some time during the summer of 1939. By August, Warsaw officials had imposed a blackout on their city. On August 31st, the noise of explosions woke people who were still asleep at 6 a.m. Hitler's troops had arrived. Their plan was to besiege the Polish capital.

In his stunning book, originally published in 1946 as *Smierc Miasta*, (*Death of a City*), Szpilman observed how the Poles were preparing for war:

People sealed the rooms they were planning to use as gas shelters and tried on their gas masks. Gas was feared more than anything else. (The Pianist, page 22.)

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/JEWS-IN-WARSAW-Pianist-The>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/JEWS-IN-WARSAW-Pianist-The>

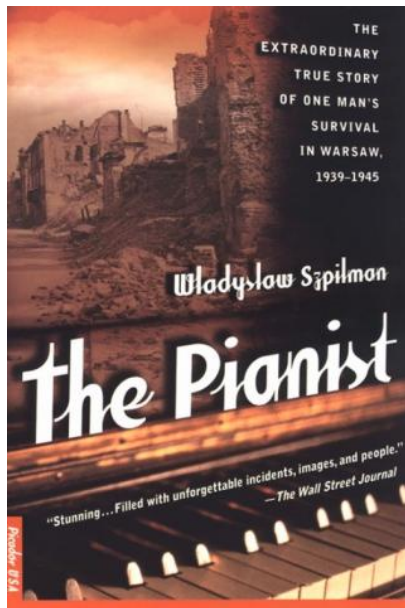
Media Stream



Szpilman Children

Image online, courtesy the [szpilman.net](http://www.szpilman.net) website.

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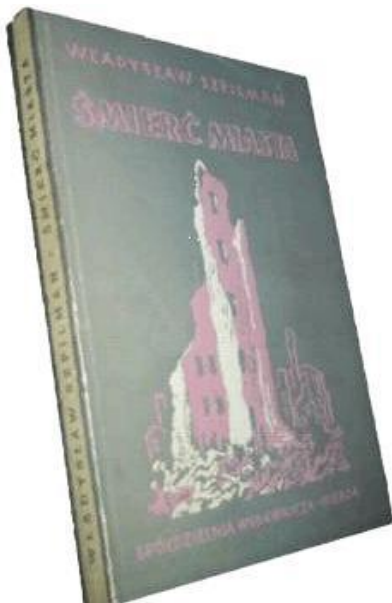


The Pianist - by Wladyslaw Szpilman

Image online, courtesy [amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) website.

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Smierc Miasta - by Wladyslaw Szpilman

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