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Many of the lighter moments in Steven Spielberg's Oscar-winning film *Schindler's List* came when the industrialist Oskar Schindler protested to German officials that children and people with disabilities were essential to his wartime manufacturing effort.

Leon Leyson, who will speak Monday at the i wireless Center in Moline, was the youngest person in Schindler's factory, and one of roughly 1,200 Jews that he saved from the Nazi death camps.

At age 13, he ran a lathe in the factory. "I stood on a box so I could reach the controls better and see over the machine," Leyson said in a phone interview earlier this week. "I was a little short. I didn't grow much during the war."

Saved by Schindler: Leon Leyson, May 19 at the i wireless Center

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This is a story that Leyson, who was born Leib Lejzon in Poland, didn't tell for nearly five decades. After the war, he moved to the United States and had to learn English, and he eventually became an industrial-arts teacher in California. "They only found out about it when it came out in the paper," Leyson said of his students and colleagues. "Before that, nobody knew about my experiences. ... I was preoccupied with other things."

Plus, "I didn't think anybody would be interested in my experience," he added. "I was brought up that way, not to bother other people with my own experiences. ... And so I didn't until after the movie came out" in 1993.

Leyson noted that many of the "Schindler Jews" feel a strong connection to the charismatic and enigmatic man, who started out as a profiteer but eventually exhausted his financial and political resources to save Jews. "Everyone who was on Schindler's list thinks that they had some special relationship with Schindler," he said. "But I think we did, my father especially, because he was hired for his craftsmanship and not for anything else, and he was [hired] early in the war. ... And sometimes he [Schindler] would even point out when he did his PR work - he'd bring the German officials to show how well his factory was working, and how his Jewish workers were doing. He would sometimes point out my father at the other end, and point to me and my brother over there. I didn't know exactly what he was saying, but it must have been complimentary. ...

"Maybe he was just amused a little bit, seeing me operating the lathe and working on a machine."

Many years after the war, Leyson said, Schindler visited Los Angeles and recognized his youngest worker. "It was 20 years," he said. "I had grown. I was married. I had already been a teacher for several years. He still recognized me. ... I was 'Little Leyson' to him."

Still, Leyson had mixed feelings when Schindler - a member of the Nazi party - talked to him in the factory. Having spent a year in a concentration camp, he knew from what he had been spared, but "I was scared of him, just like I was of all Germans at the time."

Five members of the Leyson family - Leon, his parents, a brother, and a sister - were saved

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by Schindler. Two siblings died during the war. Leyson is now 78 and retired from teaching a decade ago.

He speaks about Schindler and his experiences "more often than I'd like to," he said. "I'm getting more and more requests. I know the secret. It's something to do with supply and demand. Fewer and fewer people are still alive, and there's more and more interest in it."

Leon Leyson will speak at 7 p.m. on Monday, May 19, at the i wireless Center in downtown Moline. Tickets are \$5 in advance and \$7 at the door. For more information, visit (<http://www.jewishquadcities.com>).