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For Pound Ridge man, the new movie "Defiance" is the story of his family

*Gary Stern
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For Alan Bell of Pound Ridge, the story told in the new movie "Defiance" is not just Hollywood entertainment, but a family memoir come to life.

He grew up hearing tales of how his father and uncles fought the Nazis during World War II, saving Jewish life after Jewish life. Not until he was a teenager did he understand that most Jews had no such protectors from the Holocaust.

"My whole life, it was like there were two different wars," Bell said. "I had always heard about my father and his family fighting Germans and killing Germans."

His uncles and father were the now-famous Bielski brothers, who - as "Defiance" shows - led Jews from a ghetto in what is now Belarus to the forests, where 1,200 survived until the end of the war. Bell's father, Aron, was the youngest of the 12 Bielski siblings, 11 years old at the start of the war, and is today, at 81, the only survivor.

Aron Bielski took the name Bell after making it to the United States after postwar stops in Europe, Israel - where he fought in the war for independence - and Canada.

Alan Bell, his wife, Robin, and their five children have been swept up in all the publicity surrounding the opening of the movie. They attended the New York City premiere with Liev Schreiber and other stars and are reveling in telling the family story.

This week, Alan Bell, 49, attended a special screening of the movie in White Plains for J-Teen, a countywide service organization of Jewish teens, and talked a bit about what it's like to see your family history become a public event.

"It is very surreal to have your family life turned into a feature film," he told the crowd.

Bell said that he always knew that his family's story would make a great movie. He had shared the tale with the Holocaust and Human Rights Education Center of Westchester, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington and many others.

"Then (director) Ed Zwick came out of nowhere," Bell said. "He wanted a film out there that tells people that the Jews did fight back."

At the start of the movie, the Bielskis' parents and two of their children are among many Jews in their town killed by the Nazis. Three surviving brothers, Tuvia, Zus and Asael - played by Daniel Craig, Schreiber and Jamie Bell, respectively - are the main characters in the film.

In the movie, Aron Bielski is played by a young English actor, George MacKay. Not long after the brothers take to the forest, the character of Aron comes across a gully filled with corpses and is left in shock, hardly able to speak.

Today, Aron Bell, who once drove and then owned taxis in New York City, lives in Palm Beach, Fla.

In a bizarre twist, Aron Bell and his current wife were charged in 2007 with tricking a 93-year-old neighbor into signing over her life savings to them and then abandoning her in a retirement home in Poland. The shocking arrests received significant media coverage.

But last year, criminal charges against the Bells were dropped when the couple agreed to pay \$260,000 in restitution to the former neighbor. The Bells and their lawyers maintained that the couple were trying to care for the old woman and did nothing wrong.

"It was really a misunderstanding," Alan Bell said.

Bell, who has sisters in New City and Teaneck, N.J., is in Boca Raton, Fla., today to attend a screening of the movie with his father.

The family is focused on helping Jews and others to understand that Jews did resist the Nazis. Between 20,000 and 30,000 Jewish partisans actively fought back, Jan Greenfield of the Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation told the teens at the screening.

"This is a true story, one we can all be proud of," said Jason Unger, a J-Teen leader from Chappaqua.

One person in the audience was 81-year-old Ben Levin of Ossining, who was among 240 Jews who fought and hid from the Nazis in the forests of Lithuania. They were in constant radio contact with Russian troops, who provided weapons.

"We were constantly fighting, attacking the Nazis on highways and blowing up trains," he said.

Of the movie, he said, "I was like sitting there with them."
