

RG-50.002.0084

Summary

Leonard Woloski was born October 14, 1920 in Przemyśl in Southern Poland. Population 100,000. Several schools. Jewish population: 10-15000 people. Family: parents and three brothers. Father: merchant of fabrics, mother: homemaker. Elder brother studied in Medical school in Slovakia in 1940. Majority of Jews in his town were Modern Orthodox. Jews had good relations with everyone. Five other Jewish students in class. They did not write on (Shabbat) Saturdays. Does not remember any religious courses in elementary school. In High school, afternoon classes on Jewish history. Saturday afternoon prayers. Jewish students expected to perform better to gain respect. Anecdotes from school life. Many German Jews came to Poland after Hitler came to power. One German Jew stayed with the family for a year. No other changes in their family life. Parents were Austrian citizens. Belief that they would be safe. Presently Chairman of Jewish committee on scouting. 1st September 1939, the Germans came to their town. Germans were there for 2 weeks. Killed 1000 people. Close friend burnt holding his father. After two weeks Russians came and stayed till 1941. City divided between Russia and Germany. Woloski was on Russian side. Describes Russian rule, differences in systems from Poland. Dealing with German refugees. Went to Engineering school from 1938 to 1941. Some Jews were sent to Siberia. Shortage of food. Was forced to join student union in college. May 1st, Russian day, Mandatory parade. Obligatory Russian history, seminars and speeches on communist ideology in school. Increase in mistrust. Many Ukrainians in town. Was home for the summer. Could not go back to school. Germans came in September 1941. Some were happy to see Russians leave and Germans come in. Jews apprehensive. Individual killings, but not mass killing. Army passing through the city. No coal. Limited wood. Got a letter from camp to register. Curfew after 6pm. Elder brother finished medical school in 1938 and left for USA. Sent letter home telling about war. Had to give away silverware, treasures, radios. Organized ghetto. Family found a place in military barracks. Ghetto was very big. Estimated population of ghetto: 25-30,000 people. He lived in a camp within the ghetto. Potato soup in the evening. Bread in the morning. No clothing, no shoes. Hard manual work. Harsh winters. In 1942 parents taken. Only had prayer book with them. Brother survived. When camp was liquidated. (Year and month not sure). Some people were sent to another camp from where no one returned. Younger brother elsewhere as electrician. Woloski did odd jobs in the ghetto (500 people) to survive. Fall 1943. People called to Assembly area. Woloski did not go, stayed hidden with 5-6 other people. Most people were taken to a prison and shot. Later on freight train to Chebnia. He was there for a week. Caught by Gestapo guards for stepping on the sidewalk. He ran. Later to Auschwitz. Division in lines. Smell of burning bodies everywhere. Complete physical examination. Took up a proxy name. Younger brother worked as Electrician. Volunteered as to do specialized jobs as a survival strategy. Someone complained to the Sergeant about him. He was given 50 lashes on the back. Could not lie on the back for 10 weeks. Piece of bread, margarine, soup and watery coffee, jam – food on a work day. January 23, 1945 – around 1000 people taken to another camp 'Mauthausen'. Shows his armband with number. Describes living conditions. In February/March taken from Mauthausen to Wels. Memories of family life inspired him to live. From Wels to Ebensee, Austria. 200 steps to walk to the camp. A factory near the camp. Worked in knee high water digging with hands. May 5th Liberation. At the time of liberation, weighed 70 pounds, no hair. Crawled, because he couldn't walk. Voice was like a monkey. Couple of months to recover. In Bagnoli and Naples, Italy working in DP camp for 4 years. Then came to United States.