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Summary

Czeslaw Chester Smolecki was born on January 7, 1932 in Rabka, Poland. He had one younger sister. His mother was Rosaria (née Stolarczyk) who had two siblings; his father was Wojciech with four siblings. The families of both parents had long lived in Rabka. His parents ran a boarding house serving the tourist trade for the local spas and resorts. Czeslaw describes his father's service in the Austro-Hungarian Army in WWI and in the Polish Pilsudski army that repulsed Russian Communists shortly afterwards. Two of his father's brothers came to Minnesota in the 1920's. The family was devoutly Roman Catholic. His family had two Jewish family friends, named Rosenbaum and Friendlich.

At the onset of the war in 1939, many fled to the forests for a week, then returned home. German troops occupied their boarding house, while his family stayed on nearby farms. Later, he witnessed the round-up of Jews for execution in the forest as well as deportation by train. The Friendlich family survived, though he doesn't know how, eventually making it to Canada. Some members of the Rosenbaum family were executed. Some Jewish families were hidden in the basement of the boarding house.

Czeslaw described the existence of SS and Hitler Jugend schools in Rabka, and what he witnessed there, and as trains to Auschwitz passed through. A Gestapo official, Rosenbaum, abused the local Jewish Rosenbaum family. He also describes the actions and imprisonment of his relative, Joseph Baron, who was a local Polish resistance leader.

He describes what he saw in January 1945 when the Russians liberated Rabka. After the war, he remained in Rabka as a microbiology analyst in a children's sanatorium. He also studied music and became an industry technician. When he was living in Warsaw, he applied for a visa to the U.S. where he immigrated in 1963 via Canada.

Czeslaw has a daughter named Elsa.