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Summary

Adam Spiro b. Warsaw 1905, family highly involved in political life; 1905 Revolution leads to a brother's execution, prompting family move to Lodz; engineering studies, father's background-Prof of Ethics/Philosophy; discussion Russian suppression of Polish sentiments, also Polish national life & Hebrew national life; after completing schooling, returns to Warsaw 1931, engineer govt work, ministerial office/Polish Army, two co-workers pretending to not be Jewish, Adam continues presenting authentically as Jewish protected by Polish co-workers; 1938 Anti-Semitic article accuses Adam's office of protecting Jews but co-workers continue to support Adam; WW2 breaks out, Russia invades Poland, Adam, wife, daughter evacuated on govt bus to Romania; witnesses interrogation of a Jakob Silberstein who has to deny being Jewish; 6 mo. work in Romania to thwart enemy, in charge of sabotaging function of things he had built/engineered; transfer to Nice, France, having to leave behind wife & daughter; discussion Jewish holidays & how Adam met his wife; memories last time Adam saw his 73 yr. old father who was in denial that Hitler would bother France & England – father later killed in either Warsaw Ghetto or nearby concentration camp; brother, a pianist/conservatory grad, he & his family deported from Warsaw Ghetto, killed - Adam's wife did not lose family in the war; Adam while fleeing into the woods is captured, placed in forced labor, discussion re: his punishing experiences with one exception, while in 50 men crew where they were fed more substantially, foreman discovers he knew Adam's father as a professor & becomes Adam's protector; prisoners transferred to labor camp near Paris Nov 1940 then to Stalag 17 labor camp/Austria, separate barracks for 800-900 Jewish men; enduring lice, sickness, suffering, among prisoners, doctors & lawyer who prompted Adam, being an govt officer & negotiator to appeal to commanding officer for transfer; men brought into mess hall where foreign dignitaries meet and are fed, a Prussian surgeon is put in charge of men; newly built barracks assigned & before entering, anal imprisoned doctor alerts authority on their need to delouse to avoid infecting clean barracks, men given showers; enduring punishing slave labor but never put under SS supervision; discussion re: all the white collar talent killed in the Holocaust because they did not have hard labor skill; hearing from German soldiers arriving to pick up materials of "all the terrible things happening in other camps," Adam recalls; hearing of Warsaw Ghetto uprising 1943, realizing his father & other family have been killed, friends request foreman to give Adam day off & Adam goes into the forest to mourn; another incident, enduring harassment from an authority, feeling he has to pay him off with his gold watch but authority returns watch; 300 men awake to guards/bayonets, ordered, to pack, transfer to prison cell, worried "This is the end," says Adam but after 2 wk transferred from town to town, arrive to western front, war has ended, surviving on farms, American forces enter; had survived war but in post-war almost killed by a Russian soldier; return to France, stay in a rehab center; walking through Strasbourg looking for Jews but cannot find any; writing to wife who sends money; disappointment in first 5 yrs living in US, feeling ostracized, feeling that they should go back to Poland, struggle to maintain work as an engineer; discussion wife's war experiences in Nice, their child had been placed in a convent, wife assisted by Society of Prisoners of War, Polish Officer's Organization, had survived by evacuating & sheltering in an Alps hamlet.