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Summary

Zygmunt Bryce was born in a small town near Lodz, Poland on June 6, 1929. His father's name was Chaim Pick, but Zygmunt changed his last name in Australia after his mother remarried after the war. His father was a jeweler. His mother, Estera, was a midwife. The family was comfortable if not rich and lived in a three-story building where both Jews and Poles lived. Zygmunt and his family mostly associated with other Jews, though they were not religious. His parents spoke Yiddish to one another but Polish to him. He only spoke Polish. His maternal grandparents and two aunts and an uncle lived nearby. His father's parents lived in another town. With the exceptions of Zygmunt, his mother, and a niece none survived the war. He was called names and harassed on the way to school by gentile Poles. His school was divided into two parts, one for gentiles and one for Jews. All his Jewish friends except for one were killed in the Holocaust. His parents talked about Hitler when he came to power in Germany but did not expect to be affected. They did not talk about emigrating.

The war came to his town when the Germans started bombing. The Germans were helped by the Polish Volksdeutch but at first were pushed back by Polish army. Soon, however, the Germans defeated the Polish army and imposed anti-Jewish laws and required the wearing of the yellow star on Jews. The Germans also hanged a dozen Jews as a warning. The family was put into the Jewish ghetto in their town, but Zygmunt's mother was able to go out on occasion because she was a midwife. Zygmunt's mother decided to leave permanently with him deeper into Poland, which the Germans occupied, because his town was being annexed to Germany. Zygmunt's father decided to stay and was never heard from again. His mother asked to be taken by a Pole who had a horse cart but were abandoned at the border. She decided to return to the ghetto but on the way another Pole offered them a ride, and they were able to cross over. They stayed at a farmhouse for a while but were warned by partisans that they should leave. They left and made their way close to Warsaw where they were told that a nun could help them. The nun took Zygmunt to a convent boarding school for boys, and Zygmunt's mother worked in Warsaw as a gentile. No one knew he was Jewish, but the "brothers" who led the convent treated him and the other boys badly. One day he saw the Warsaw Ghetto burning down. But his mother stayed in Warsaw until the Polish uprising in 1944. She came for Zygmunt as the Germans and Poles fought. She left with him and Polish gentiles. Later she placed him in another convent where he was better treated. By this time, the Russians were liberating Poland from the Germans.

Two months after the Russian victory Zygmunt and his mother took a train back to their hometown. Very few Jews were left, but a man who she knew before the war returned from Auschwitz and they married. They had a child. By then Zygmunt was old enough to be drafted into the army. When his mother could not get him out of it the new family decided to emigrate to Australia. On the way they spent two months in Paris supported by the Joint Distribution Committee. Zygmunt was happy with his stepfather, and though Zygmunt claimed the Australians were not friendly to the Jewish immigrants he integrated into Australian society and became successful. Zygmunt warned, however, that Jews must always be on their guard and not feel that they will ever fully be accepted.