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Summary

Leon Rytz, born 1927 in Warsaw, Poland, discusses his father Shlomo and mother Leah (née Shwarts); his oldest sister Nesha and brother Israel, and younger sister Esther; his mother having a tea importing business with her aunt; during the first days of the war, seeing dead horses and soldiers from the Polish cavalry on the streets after German air raids; his father dying as a soldier defending the castle of Warsaw; being able to trade tea from their warehouse for food during the food shortage; the city starving; in 1941, Jews being taken from the ghetto to be shot and buried in mass graves outside the city; Polish neighbors of the family taking care of the tea warehouse when the family had to move to the ghetto; the Polish neighbors helping them smuggling food into the ghetto; in 1942, being caught with a rucksack with smuggled food; spending a few days on the Umschlagplatz; being sent to Majdanek in a cattle car; thinking there were 10,000 people on the transport; the camp not being finished yet; there being 100-120 people in each barrack; sleeping 4-5 prisoners in each bunk; using their shoes as a pillow; being transported to Treblinka; a tall prisoner recognizing him at arrival and pulling him out of the line; learning the man's name was Joseph Kaufman and that he was his father's best friend; women's and girls' hair being shaved at arrival; prisoners' gold teeth being pulled out; Kaufman having privileges since he had been at the camp from the beginning; the guards shooting entire families if their children cried; working with Kaufman in three cattle cars where they sorted clothing; Kaufman killing an especially cruel Hungarian Nazi guard by tricking him into the train car; Kaufman taking the guard's pistol and shooting off the lock of the train car; jumping out, one of the fellow prisoners ending up under the train; hiding in the forest near Lublin; meeting Partisans; there being two groups; 360 Jews, Poles, Russians and German deserters in one group; joining the other group working with espionage; the partisans running tubes acting like chimneys from their camp fires and hundreds of meters away to trick the Germans who bombed partisan camps; learning to sabotage train tracks and blow up bridges; being injured in the back by a bayonet; believing Jewish partisans were killed by gentile partisans who were Fascists; being hit in the legs at a failed bridge attack; 14 days later Kaufman deciding they had to leave out of fear the partisans would kill them; end 1943, walking to Warsaw for 5-6 days; a villager capturing them to get an award but Kaufman killing him; being picked up by a group of older Wehrmacht soldiers who took them to the biggest ammunition factory in Poland; working with Kaufman in the machine room at the C Werk; escaping through the ventilation culvert; being caught and taken to the A Werk; being paraded in front of 25,000 workers with a sign around their necks saying that they would be shot for trying to escape; being saved from the cruelty of the commander Battenschlager by a woman who bribed the commander with a diamond; staying in a cell for a long time; being taken to the B Werk; being evacuated to the Warta factory in Czestochowa as the front approached; being evacuated again, the train being shot at and only half the train arriving, with him, in Buchenwald; Kaufman disappearing; ending up in a political block with Adenauer and Leon Blum; being transferred to Dora Nordhausen where the first rocket system was built; in February 1945, hundreds of prisoners freezing to death; joining Soviet prisoners and being on a train to Bergen-Belsen for a week because of British air raids; half of the prisoners on the train dying; the Soviet prisoners protecting him; after British liberation joining the Soviet soldiers;

seeing the Soviet soldiers taking revenge by stealing cars and killing one man; not seeing any Soviets raping women; being left next to a highway close to Hannover; being rescued by a Black American soldier in a jeep from the 122 army division; understanding his family was dead; going to Sweden with a Red Cross transport; hating the perpetrators but life goes on; for the first time being able to talk about his experiences when his grandchild wanted to do her final project in High School about his life, 40 years after the war.