

## Lernen aus der Geschichte e.V.

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Das mehrsprachige Webportal publiziert fortlaufend Informationen zur historisch-politischen Bildung in Schulen, Gedenkstätten und anderen Einrichtungen zur Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts. Schwerpunkte bilden der Nationalsozialismus, der Zweite Weltkrieg sowie die Folgegeschichte in den Ländern Europas bis zu den politischen Umbrüchen 1989.

Dabei nimmt es Bildungsangebote in den Fokus, die einen Gegenwartsbezug der Geschichte herausstellen und bietet einen Erfahrungsaustausch über historisch-politische Bildung in Europa an.

### Wanda Bartoń, born 1933

From our house, we could see the Germans coming from the Dębowiecka hills. The light was so bright as if there was a fire. They came to our house at 5 o'clock in the morning. We were ready and had put on all the clothes we could wear. They ordered us to leave the house at once; they all spoke German, and we couldn't understand a word. My father brought out the vodka which he had received for delivering some tobacco and filled glasses for them. But they refused and put the glass to father's mouth. Then he poured a glass for himself and drank. Only then they drank, too, and it turned out that one of them spoke Polish. He ordered us to take everything we could carry. My older brother took a bag of flour, father, mother and my other brothers took bed linen and clothes, and I took a bag full of slaughtered chickens.

We went to the square in front of the school. Many people had already gathered there; there were carts with horses hitched up and bales of straw. They called out our family names and we had to get onto the carts. We were very crammed for space. Some of the older people went behind the cart. They took us along a minor road because the new settlers were coming along the main road from Zamość. Sleet was falling, it was muddy and very cold.

At the camp in Zamość we slept on wooden pallets stretching from one wall to the other. The lower pallets were at waist height, the second one at head height. People slept like "sardines in a tin", tightly squeezed to each other; some slept on the floor. We were only given water for drinking and cooking. Nobody changed clothes or washed. The shack was heated by a tiled stove, but it was very cold as we were given only one bucket of coal per day. Our diet consisted of black coffee without sugar in the morning and in the evening, together with a piece of bread and some sugar beet treacle. For lunch, we had a kind of soup made from animal blood. Sometimes we were driven to the square where we had to stand with all our belonging for hours on end, freezing. If somebody's name was called, it meant that they were leaving the camp. The others returned to their shacks.

In the night of 11 December 1943 we were once more driven from the shacks. Then they split up our family. They separated me (9 years old), my mother and my brother Władek (12 years old) from my brothers Bolesław (17 years old) and Waclaw (15 years old) and our father (40 years old). Everybody was divided into three groups: one to work in the Reich, one for resettlement and one for the extermination camp. Nobody knew which group they belonged to. We could hear the children wailing and crying in the yard. We all cried when I said good-bye to my father and my brothers. I liked my father very much and did not want him to leave. Then I saw one of the Germans turn around to us with tears in his eyes. I have never forgotten his face. He told my father to run away, but Dad said that his sons had already joined the group destined to go to Auschwitz, and he would not let them go alone. I never saw my father again.

After three days, I, my mother and my brother Władek were taken to the railway station by car. We were put into cattle wagons. It was very cramped and cold. At night we drove, and during the day we sat locked up in the wagons in remote places. We relieved ourselves through a hole in the floor in a corner of the wagon. Twice a day we had bread, jam and coffee. We finally arrived at Garwolin station, and from there we were brought to different places by horse cart. [...]

When the house owner saw that he was going to get resettlers, he destroyed the room assigned to us. There was nothing left. The stove was broken, there was a hole instead of a fireplace, and a hole in the floor reached down into the cellar. The house owner would not believe that the Germans had expelled us just like that. He thought they had expelled us because we were criminals.

In 1945, my brother Bolesław came back from Auschwitz. He was very exhausted. He told us that Dad had died on 29 January 1943 and that he had never met our brother Wacek and knew nothing about him. He himself had fallen sick with typhus twice while he was in the camp. He had been a strongly built man. When he came back from Auschwitz, he weighed not even 40kg. He was weakened, malnourished and suffered from tuberculosis. Mom nursed him, but he died after four years, in June 1949. My brother Władek died two years later, on 15 May 1951. And thus I was left alone with my mother.