

**LIFE**  
*behind the*  
**WIRE**

Zamość 2015

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# *Introduction*

*T*he survivors of the Second World War living in Poland and worldwide become fewer and fewer. Among them, there are those who remember little and those who do not want to remember as their memories are disturbing and still painful...

Fortunately, there are also survivors who willingly tell their stories in order to warn the others and thereby prevent the events they witnessed from happening again. More than 100 senior members of the Volunteer Centre in Zamość have been officially recognized as victims of the Third Reich. They are former prisoners of concentration, transit and prison camps, forced labourers, partisans, soldiers and disabled veterans.

The youngest victims of Nazism represent the biggest group: they are “Children of the Zamość Region” who were between 2 and 16 years old at the time of war.

This publication, issued within the framework of the **LET ME TELL YOU A STORY** project, is about their stories.

The project brought together young participants from Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Romania, Hungary, Turkey and Poland who jointly immersed themselves in history of the City of Zamość and the region, visited places of remembrance, learned how to talk to witnesses to history and conducted interviews with them.



# AKTION ZAMOŚĆ

CHILDREN OF ZAMOJSKIE REGION ARE  
TELLING THEIR STORIES

German mass resettlement of the population of the Zamość Region began on the night of 27 and 28 November 1942 in the Skierbieszów village. The action lasted (with a few months break) until August 1943. The population of the relocated villages was transported to displaced persons' camps in Zamość, Zwierzyniec, and Budzyń, where, after the children were separated from the parents, and the selection was conducted, their fate was decided. The resettlement of the population of the Zamość Region was divided into three stages. Historians believe the resettlement of the Zamość Region to be unique due to the solutions implemented by the Nazis. The first stage was a displacement-extermination action, during the second stage the Germans used antagonisms between the Poles and the Ukrainians, and the third stage was a typical displacement-pacification action.

According to German plans, 696 villages were to be emptied and 140 thousand of their inhabitants were to be displaced and replaced with 60 thousand German settlers. In the end, during the resettlement action in the Zamość Region, 293 villages were emptied and about 110 thousand Poles displaced (including 30 thousand children). During the action also about 18 thousand Ukrainians were relocated. Emptied villages were colonized with 13 thousand German settlers. The resettlement action was conducted by: the Police, military police, SS, Sonderdienst, Wehrmacht soldiers, Volksdeutsche, and Ukrainian Police in German service.

## **CHILDREN OF ZAMOŚĆ REGION**

The most defenseless – the children – became most affected by the displacement action. It is estimated that about 30 thousand of the youngest children were displaced, and 10 thousand of them were murdered or died. Similarly to adults, they had to go through the Gehenna starting the moment they left their homes, and ending with a sentence delivered after the selection conducted in a camp. Children older than 6 months were taken away from their parents and underwent racial tests which determined their fate. Primitive living conditions in displaced persons' camps in Zamość and Zwierzyniec, both during the winter of 1942-1943 and in the summer of 1943, resulted in high incidence and death rate among that group of prisoners (for example, in the Zamość camp 199 children had died between 7 December and 22 April). What is more, the imprisonment caused severe psychological traumas resulting in personality changes that were often irreversible. Fear and terror were intensified by the image of desperate parents who were unable to protect their children. The new reality the children found themselves in was beyond their strength.

In the winter at the turn of 1942 and 1943, younger children were carried away from the DP camp in Zamość to the so-called rental villages in the Warsaw district. They were put in cattle vans, around 100 children and a couple of adults to look after them in each. During a few days' journey in harsh winter, without enough food nor water, many children died before reaching the destination. Part of the children

from the Zamość camp were sent in three transports to Auschwitz, where some of them were killed with phenol injections, but most died because of the living conditions in the camp. During the last stage of the resettlement, in June and July 1943, children and their parents were transferred from the camps in Zamość and Zwierzyniec to the camp at Krochmalna Street in Lublin and the concentration camp in Majdanek (where many children died because of difficult living conditions). During the whole resettlement operation children older than 14 (although there are known cases of younger children as well) were sent to the Reich for labour.

Children who met racial criteria and were selected during the racial tests conducted in DP camps fell into a separate category. They were sent to the Reich to be Germanized. Some of them were temporarily put in the so-called childcare houses situated in the parts of Poland annexed to the Reich. The youngest were adopted by German families. The exact number of stolen children is unknown, but historiographic sources estimate it at four and a half thousand. We know that in the camp at Przemysłowa Street in Łódź and at the race center at 73 Spoma Street, a few hundred children were registered. Transportation lists of July 1943 are also available, listing 4,454 children between the age of 2 and 14 transported together with their parents from Lublin to the Reich. We also know from various reports provided by the underground resistance, underground press, and eyewitnesses, that children were being sent to the Reich from the very

beginning of the displacement action. For example, some of them were to reach Pomerania. The task of retrieving the children after the War was entrusted to a special department of the Ministry of Labour and Social Care. One of its activities was a wide survey conducted in poviats in order to gather as much information as possible on the children who did not return to their hometowns after the War.

### **FIRST DISPLACEMENTS**

On the night of 27 and 28 of November 1942, German Police and military police troops entered Skierbieszów. It was the beginning of the first stage of the displacement of the population of the Zamość Region, which lasted till January 1943. During this stage the population of the Zamość and Tomaszów poviats, and part of the Hrubieszów powiat, was displaced. The scenario was always the same. A village was surrounded by Wehrmacht soldiers and the Police. Part of the troops penetrated houses, informing their startled inhabitants that they had 20 minutes to gather their belongings. Any attempt at opposition was punished by beating, and sometimes even death (in the Zamość area alone, 117 people were killed that way). Then, the people were gathered in the center of a village, where preliminary selection took place. Most of the population was escorted, either on foot, or by wagons, to the displaced persons' camp in Zamość. Some of the young and healthy were left as forced labour later to be assigned to farms taken over by German settlers. First displacements took the population unawares,

therefore most of the people were captured and sent to the camp in Zamość. During the next few weeks the Poles managed to come up with a warning system. The Home Army Intelligence in Zamość managed to infiltrate the institutions responsible for the displacement, which allowed it to obtain necessary information. Thanks to this intelligence, part of the population managed to flee to the woods or take shelter in nearby villages. However, it was not easy to warn people about the displacement, as German orders announcing the action were given a day before the displacement, and the name of a village was announced on the day of the action. According to German data, between 27 November and 31 December 1942, 9,771 inhabitants of 60 villages had been captured, while German plans predicted 33,832 people to be imprisoned. The rest managed to escape, which in most cases equaled losing homes, all belongings, and sense of security<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Source of information: Agnieszka Jaczyńska "The SS Sonderlaboratorium the Zamość Region"

Town Hall of Zamość – year 1942



The only preserved picture of the Camp in Zamość – year 1943



A black and white close-up portrait of an elderly woman, Wanda Wnuk. She is wearing dark sunglasses and has a large, ornate ring on her left hand. The text "I was probably born to" is written in a white, cursive font at the top of the image.

*I was probably born to*

**LIVE**

*Wanda Wnuk*



**Good Morning and thank you that you have agreed for his interview.**

*Good morning, my dear friends.*

**How are you?**

*Fine, thanks. I'm retired, I'm 79 years old, I have 3 daughters. The eldest one lives in Italy, the younger one in Lublin and the youngest lives with me. I have also 6 grandchildren, 8 greatgrandchildren and... great great granddaughter. If only my husband had lived to see it... I'm grateful to God that after such an or-deal I experienced in my childhood, I can now enjoy the things the fate has given to me...*

**Let's talk now about your memories and difficult war times as your history should be told and preserved.**

*It won't be easy but I will try to tell you everything.*

**What about your childhood?**

*I was born and I lived with my parents and siblings in Józefów. My parents had only a half of hectare of field so my dad also worked in the forest. My mum was a housewife and she looked after the house, garden and children. There were six of us. I had 3 elder sisters and a brother. We weren't too rich but we were happy.*

**When the war broke out you were only 5. How did such a child react to this news?**

*I remember my mum crying and her conversations with neighbours. I didn't understand but I knew something bad was happening.*

**When did you first saw the Germans?**

*It was an autumn day. Mum was cooking dinner when suddenly we heard the voices outside. My mum looked out of the window and cried: the German are coming. Soon the door opened and they came into the kitchen. They started shouting and placed us next to the wall but we came close to our mother and started crying loudly. "Where is this bandit!" – they asked about my dad. My mum said he was working in the forest. One of the German pushed her and wanted to shoot at us but the other one took him out of the house and they went away. My mum was in 7th month of pregnancy. This event led to the earlier birth. The girl was born but she died after a few days. She was so little...*

**What was this camp like?**

*Terrible. Luckily, we weren't separated and the whole family was in the same barrack. There were a lot of people, the smell was horrible. Next day the men were taken for hearing. My dad was terribly beaten. He was all covered in blood and bruises but he survived. Our neighbour died. I remember how much afraid I was. This day they gave us chestnut and green peas soup. It was so salty that it was impossible for us to eat although we were hungry. There were also small slices of bread. Mummy gave us ours. Hunger, stench, lack of water and worms were the worst.*

**How long were you in this camp?**

*We were for six weeks. One day, through the holes in the planks, we saw lorries coming. We were trans-*

*ported away from the barrack and packed onto the lorries. We were all hit in our backs and given curse as a farewell. We didn't know where we were going but the men guessed that to Majdanek.*

**Did you know then what Majdanek was? That it was the factory of death?**

*I think so...*

**Were you still together at Majdanek Camp?**

*No, we were separated there. Daddy was taken to work and we: children and mum were taken to the barrack.*

**What was it like there?**

*We were sleeping on the bunks, where there usually some blankets and some straw. The roll call was always at 6 a.m. It lasted usually for an hour, but it was longer if somebody was late. All the people were punished for that – we had to do squats – dozens of them, if anybody fell down, they were beaten. Those who were late or did not come were killed. The prisoners were beaten frequently. It was obvious that the Germans liked it. It was in autumn when it got cold. We did not have boots. Before the roll call we tried not to urinate as urine could heat your feet... There was a kind of line before the barrack, you could not cross it. If someone did it, the guard who was on the tower shot immediately.*

**What did you eat?**

*Nettle soup, rutabaga soup – it was disgusting. Everyone had to have a dish for this soup and had to*

*take it. If someone did not take it, they were beaten and not given bread. The bread was black, crumbly like sawdust.*

**Could the children count on somebody?**

*There were women in the camp who were cooking, cleaning and washing for the Germans. We called them “striped sisters” because they had striped dresses. They often brought us food. But when the Germans found out they were transported away as a punishment. I don't know what happened to them. We sometimes went to the trash can where some potato peelings could be found.*

*Hunger and fear are what I remember most from Majdanek.*

*After 3 months, at the beginning of November, I don't remember what day it was, we were standing on the roll call for a long time. After it, we were forced into the baths and were ordered to take off our clothes. We were standing in a cold, concrete place, but there was no water from the showers.*

**Were you aware it was a gas chamber?**

*I wasn't but my mum was. The women started crying, praying. We were standing against the wall. I heard someone walking on the roof and the Germans' laughter... Later, after the war I found out that there were cyclone B containers which would have killed us in an hour.*

*Those were the terrible moments, terrible and unknown.... And suddenly... a miracle! The gate opened and a German in leather coat ordered everyone to leave! The people started running and trampling one*

*another. A child and an old man were trampled. My mum kept us to the wall and waited till everyone left – and we were the last people to leave.*

**Why did this happen, it was incredible?**

*It later turned out that we were bought by a farmer (bauer) who needed workers on his farm.*

**You were chased away naked from the chamber and what happened later?**

*The clothes were thrown to us, everyone caught what they could. I was wearing a jacket with sleeves to my knees for a few weeks. We were put on the lorries and driven to Krochmalna Street in Lublin. Our father was there. He looked different, he was very thin – but he claimed he was healthy! After a few days we found out we were going to the German Reich to work... We were put on the lorries which earlier were used for coal transport. After a few days we arrived at Wizów town, 160 kilometers away from Berlin. The was a big mansion, palace there.*

**What was it like in this place?**

*At the beginning – terrible. Although we weren't hungry, we slept under the stable, the place was very sultry and stinky. After a few days we were given a room. We were horrified when a German arrived to take my 17-year old sister... it turned out later she became a servant. The mansion owner's wife dressed her and treated her well. It was also useful for us, as my sister brought us different things: blankets, bedding, better food. My mum shared with everybody. The German woman was kind but her hus-*

*band wasn't. We were there till May 1945. When we learned about the capitulation of Germany, my daddy and a neighbour stole a suitcase, went to the pantry and packed food for the way to Poland.*

**Who liberated you? And how did you came back home?**

*The Russians. They arrived in tanks, demolished the gate, the whole yard and terrace... all the Germans hid in the bunker, but they were found. Bauer was killed and his wife managed to hide, Maybe she survived? The Russians took us to the station. We travelled by train a little and later we were given a cart and two horses. We went to Warsaw. I will never forget this sight... only ruins... We came back to Józefów on 17th May. Home... but our house wasn't there.*

**Was it difficult to start from the beginning?**

*No, because we were all together, no one died, we survived this horrible war. It was a miracle! We managed to rebuild our house quickly thanks to our neighbours' help. Life started to go on from the beginning, but was it the same? Surely not...*

**Thank you so much for the this conversation.**

*And I also say thank you. These are difficult memories for me but I am glad that I could tell someone about them. Just to warn everyone so you, young people would never be forced to live in such times like I lived. To make you believe how important the peace in the world is.*

**Interview conducted by Krystyna Rybińska-Smyk.**

A black and white close-up portrait of an elderly woman with short, wavy hair. She has a serious, somewhat somber expression. Her face is wrinkled, particularly around the eyes and mouth. She is wearing a dark garment with a white, ribbed collar. The background is out of focus, showing some indistinct shapes and textures.

*Stolen*

# LIFE

*Stanisława Kierepka*

**This is one of a million stories about an ordinary Polish girl who went through the process of the German Displacement during the Second World War. But the story is not ordinary at all. Without inhibition she showed us her “Arbeitskarte” (working card), that she was really scared on it, but now she started the whole story calmly and without fears.**

**Name, age, date and place of birth:**

*The history of her name is complicated. During the war she was called Stanisława Ryba, because her grandmother wanted to protect her and she presented the girl as her daughter. Actually the real surname is Kierepka.*

*She was born on 20. February 1936 in a small village called Górecko near Osuchy, where she lived as a child. She is already 79 years old and currently lives in Zamość.*

**How about her family?**

*She was born into a family of farmers. She was one of six siblings: four sisters and two brothers. She was the second child. Her eldest brother was born in 1931.*

**How was the life before the war?**

*They lived and worked hard all the time on the fields in Osuchy, she was only 3 years old when the war started.*

**How was the life when the war started?**

*Everyone was afraid of the Germans, they just wanted to kill all the partisans and it was like that*

*every day. Once she and her grandmother had to go over a bridge which was the connection between two villages. The bridge was occupied by the Germans, and they asked who they were. They lied they were mother and daughter. The soldiers didn't believe it, but luckily after all they left them to go.*

*The fear was in the air and even the animals could feel it. She remembers once she had to be on guard at cow slaughter, and report to her parents if the Germans came. That time she saw one of their neighbor's with some Nazi soldiers. Later she found out this person was killed probably by the Nazis. Because of this case and the rumors of the displacement one of her neighbors took her and hid her in his house. If somebody was asking, she had to say that she is a member of the family. She spent one week there. Everyone was talking about the occupation by the Germans, it was not a secret anymore. After a week there wasn't enough food and her father decided to bring her back but she was already taken to her grandmother's sister. Then her father took her aunt instead of her. After that they tried to hide in the forest and they wanted to live there, but one night they heard shooting and her uncle was killed. The forest wasn't safe enough because the Germans wanted to kill the partisans, so they went back to the village. Her family was split up, they weren't together.*

**What happened when they went to the village?**

*When they came to the village they were told/ commanded that the next day they have to go near the church in the morning. They had to pack in short*

time because the Germans came at 3 AM and they started to take them earlier from their homes. They didn't have time to pack their things, they had to make fast decisions. When she got to the place of the meeting with her grandmother there were a lot of people. On the square there was a table and they had a list of people who had to be displaced but they didn't take Ukrainians because they cooperated with Germans. One Orthodox priest tried to save the Polish people saying that they are Orthodox but Germans didn't believe him at all. Germans didn't take those people who had necessary jobs. Her mother, father and siblings weren't displaced but she was with her grand-mother, her grandmother's sister and her son. The Germans was shouting, they also had dogs and people didn't know what would happen with them. There was a barrack five kilometers from the village, they went there by cars and on foot and they had to spend the night there with around 200 people. Everyone was shocked and they couldn't sleep but she was able to do that because she was very young and tired.

### **What happened the next day?**

The next day big trucks came and took them to Zamość which was located 30 km far from their village. She was afraid of being separated from her grandmother. Then they just arrived in the camp of Zamość.

### **Could you describe the camp?**

She could clearly remember there were three different parts of the camp; one for old people and children, one for men, one more for women who were able to

work. The married couples were also separated. The very old people were situated in a stable where horses were and the Nazis just left them to die there because of being useless. The barrack was quite huge and it could take more than 200 people but there wasn't place to sleep and they had to lie on the desks and on the ground. She could tell us that the food was horrible, they just got a slice of awful bread and sometimes some beetroot soup. They didn't get enough water a day.

She has a scary memory that she shared with us. Once she went out from the barrack and heard screaming, she started to run. She saw a tortured man lying on the field.

In her memories there is a very huge, crowded barrack and lot of screams. That's why she had fear of closed places. Also she had a fear of curtains because they bring dark and it reminds her of the barrack which had only small windows.

### **What did they use to do a day?**

She cannot remember it as well as how those three weeks passed. Everyday they were taken outside of the barracks and Nazis checked if everyone was there.

### **What happened after those three weeks in Zamość?**

The German soldiers brought them to animal wagons and told them that they are going to Majdanek. They spent one night on the train in Lublin and they were supposed to continue the road to the concentration camp next day, but no one knows why the plan had changed.

### **How did the plan change?**

*They were transported to Hamsen, Germany. The journey took more than two weeks and they only ate bread during those days.*

*They were taken to the camp 13 where the Germans took photos of them for “Arbeitskarten”. She worked on the fields with her grandmother.*

*The owner of the fields really liked her because she was working hard even though she was so young. She found the owner quite strange, he took her on his site and told her stories and showed her some family pictures, by the way she could not understand anything at all. She remembers that the man had to be a prisoner, because of having prisoner’s clothes and machine gun. She found the whole situation weird, but she declared that person was not a pedophile. She guesses he liked her just because he had two grandchildren in the same age as she was at that time.*

*She spent two years there.*

*In 1945 the Liberation Army bombed all around Germany, of course Hamsen was damaged too.*

*After the war she came back to Poland with her grandmother. They found their whole family at home and luckily the house hadn’t been destroyed. It is a kind of miracle. Her aunt had enough money to raise her up. She started school after the war. Thank to the Train of Memory project which was in 2006, she was allowed to go back to Germany where she was during the war but she couldn’t meet with the old soldier’s family because only his grandchildren are still alive.*

*After all these things she said that the main point of that time was that she was sent from one place to another.*

**Interview conducted by Karolina Seben, Peter Jonas, Margaret Poppetrova, Gökçe Islam, Katerina Suchánková, Razvan Balcu, Karolina Szczepanik.**

Memorial of „Childern of the Zamość Region”



*They stole my*

**CHILDHOOD**

*Weronika Surma*



It was the fifth day of our project when we had the opportunity to meet Mrs. Weronika, one of the survivors of the Second World War and, consequently, of the Nazi Polish policy. Five people from different countries were now facing a woman whose childhood was literally ruined by the war. She agreed to share her memories so that the new generations can learn from the past and know what level of atrocities the people living then had to endure.

We had been very nervous before we met her. There were so many questions to be asked but we didn't want to offend her in any way or to make her remember the most traumatizing experiences she had back then. This could have been a once in a lifetime opportunity so we really had to act very carefully with the more sensitive questions. All this anxiety was long forgotten in the first seconds we met Mrs. Weronika. She looked very happy to meet us and our first impression was that she is really looking forward to share with us all her memories. This made us extremely confident.

We all told her a few words about us and she was really pleased to know that a handful of young people from all around Europe were there just to listen to her story and learn about her past. „Let Me Tell You a Story“, she said, and our adventure was ready to begin. We felt like kids sitting near the chimney and listening to grandma's tales during the evening of a cold winter day. This is how we perceived her, as if she were our grandma. This is how she was to us.

Remembering her family and the events before the war started brought a very big smile on her face. It was obvious why she had a very normal and happy childhood. We noticed that when she told us about a game she used to play back then. She was extremely enthusiastic and even wanted to explain us the rules.

We all felt very comfortable with this but we knew that we need to approach the hard subjects too. It was pretty hard at the beginning, not because she didn't want to talk about this but because it was a very hard moment, given that she was less than ten when the war started.

We did our best to continue in a very professional and diplomatic manner and we succeeded in it. We needed a lot of patience but also we had to stay very focused in order to choose the best moments when we could ask more sensitive questions in an unharmed way.

The first tears we saw in the corner of her eyes made us try calling for a break, but she didn't want to. She was willing to continue no matter how difficult it was for her to face those memories again.

„People should know about this, people should know what happened then and you are the ones that have to tell them, so this would not be possible ever again.“ Her words hardened our opinion on her – she really is one of the most powerful women we've ever met. At the point when we've reached the last part of our interview, her smile returned. Fortunately,

Weronika's story had a happy ending. She survived the War, the Third Reich and the Nazis and also managed to live again a happy life with her family“.

The only thing I regret was that they stole my childhood“ – she considered. This moved in a way we couldn't believe. Now Weronika is one of the few survivors that are still willing to share their story. Talking to her and spreading her memories was more than a pleasure for us. We saw it like a duty. Humanity owes this to the ones that lost their lives because of the war, the Nazis, the Third Reich.

Weronika Surma was born in 1932, in the village of Grabowiec. Her family was a typical one: their parents were farmers. She also had an older brother with whom she shared most of the difficult experiences during the war and the displacement process.

Their life before the war was peaceful, as Mrs. Weronika remembers now. She was just a child, so her only concerns back then were some basic chores, like helping her mother cooking and baking. Actually, this is the happiest memory she has from the times before the war. Thinking on the bread they were making then brought a huge smile on her face. “The smell of fresh bread me and my mother baked was incredible“. It is really amazing to see how a pretty common thing can have such a huge impact on a young child.

This wasn't the only memory she had from the period before the war started. Being just a little

girl, she also remembers the time spent playing with other kids in Grabowiec. Her reaction when thinking about this was unbelievable. There are so many emotions involved. The happiness and enthusiasm levels were at their highest.

The hardest part is that what happened next was so sudden that she couldn't have the opportunity to understand the complexity of the idea of war. She and her family just lived through the war and did their best to adapt in order to survive these difficult moments. Some people that are reading this might think that there is a gap from her life between the war and her memories from during the war but that is not right. All happened suddenly.

Weronika was 7 years old when the war started, on the 1st of September 1939, when the Germans attacked Poland. Two weeks later the Soviets invaded Poland also and Grabowiec was taken under control by the Soviet Army. She should have started school then but only had gone there for several days until the schools were closed. The life they were living was pretty similar until the Germans declared war on the Soviet Union in June 1941. Quickly, Grabowiec was controlled by the Third Reich and the displacement plan was ready to begin.

It was the 19th of February when Weronika's village turn came. The German displacement methods were always the same. Soldiers were surrounding the village so that nobody would try to escape. In this case it was also extremely cold outside, around -30°

Celsius. Families were told that they have only 20 minutes to pack up their belongings and head to the center of the village. Even though there were rumors about displacement, people didn't expect this could happen to them. German soldiers were very brutal, they were yelling at them and hitting the ones that were moving too slowly. The ones that didn't want to get out of their houses were killed. This happened also to the ones who tried to escape. Families were in panic, everybody was screaming and crying and they couldn't understand what was going on.

It's very hard to make a decision in only 20 minutes. Basically, you have 20 minutes to prioritize your needs while someone is threatening you with a gun. Being farmers, Veronica's parents chose to take first their horses and the cart, and put all other belongings into the cart. They packed up some food and clothes and wrapped them up in sheets.

The trip from Grabowiec to Zamość seemed to be an endless one. Even though there were only around 30 kilometers, being forced to do this may leave the impression that it was truly a road to hell. All this time, Weronika and her brother didn't stop even for a second from hugging their mother. They were freezing because of the extremely low temperature but, what is the most important, they were scared because of not knowing what is happening to them. They arrived in Zamość very late in the evening and they were literally shocked about what they found there. The barracks were already full of people.

The children were separated from the parents. Weronika and her brother went to Barrack 10, while their parents were taken to Barrack 14. First one was designated for the children that they planned to kill, while the second, the one their parents were sent to, was designated for people that will have to do slavery work in Germany. The conditions in the camp were inhumane. The food was completely awful and they couldn't even sleep well because of the worms that were crawling everywhere: on the ground, on their food, on their bodies. Their parents were very quickly sent to Germany. Her mother was sent to do slavery work in a military factory while her father was sent to a farm. Weronika and her brother stayed in the Zamosc temporary camp for one month. Their final destination was Warsaw and the only way they could travel there was by train but it was not just a common train for people. The Germans were transporting all the people in cattle wagons. They were given food in small ratios during the road. Basically, as Mrs. Weronika remembered, they got only little pieces of bread and two spoons of marmalade. The trip lasted for 3 days and the wagon doors remained closed all this time. The marmalade bowls were pretty useful in this situation because they had to improvise a toilet. This time spent in the wagon was one of the roughest moments. An old woman died inside on the first day, and even more people during the next ones, and nobody did anything.

The miracle happened after 3 days spent in that wagon. Right before Warsaw the train stopped and all the people inside were asked to exit the wagons and

they were taken into the village nearby. It seems that some Polish men in that area had some information about the arrival of this train and collected money to bribe the Germans and buy the train.

The children were taken to the school building and received special treatment and also had a very good meal. Some of the families there were willing to adopt these children and to take care of them. This is the moment when Weronika and her brother were separated. Luckily, the families that adopted them lived in the same village so they had the possibility to meet every weekend. Weronika describes the women that took her as a “nice Polish lady” that treated her like she was her own daughter. She was very grateful for all the nice treatment she received. The chores were the usual ones: helping in the kitchen, milking a cow, going to the shop to buy bread.

She was very happy when she remembered about this last one, saying that it was a very difficult task because freshly baked bread had such a great smell and she had to wait until she came home to have some. She just wanted to be a respectful person.

One day a letter came from one of her aunts telling her how they found them and suggesting that they should come back to the village. Weronika didn't want to leave this woman that adopted her but her brother insisted and she had to go. Even though she tried to find this woman when the war ended, this was the last time when she saw her.

Unfortunately, the time spent with their aunt's family was pretty short. The house was overcrowded so Weronika and her brother left them and decided to live alone somewhere else. They found their own house so they lived there alone until the end of the war.

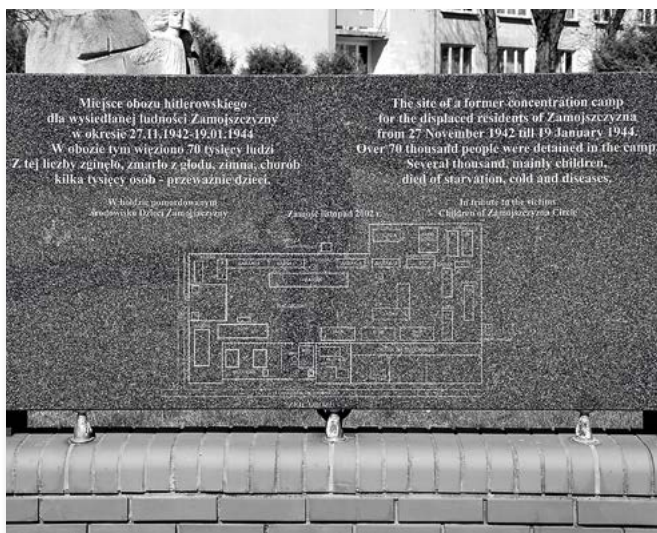
She remembers that every time she woke up she was very confused and did not know what to do. The only thing she had done before was baking bread so she started to do this for a living.

When the war ended Weronika was very happy and every day she was thinking about the moment when her parents would come back from Germany. She remembered exactly how this day looked like. The words she used were: „When I woke up that day I knew they are coming back. In that moment I went and started preparing a meal for the time when they will arrive“. On that day their parents returned from Germany.

Their life after the war was basically the same like before. They were together again and that was the most important. They were farmers again.

Her brother got married but he didn't have any children. Weronika also got married with a man that had a similar story. Her husband was displaced and when Poland was liberated he fought along the Soviet Army, being involved in the conquest of Berlin.

**Interview conducted by Tanja Grginić, Lenka Strachoňová, Klára Životská, Elif Tuğçe Çil and Mihai-Daniel Cercel, Andrzej Smyk.**



The Commemorative Plate at the location of Zamość Nazi Camp



Project participants on the Rotunda of Zamość

Rotunda





*Childhood behind the*

# **WIRE**

*Janina Jabłońska*

We met Janina Jabłońska on the 5th of March in Zamość. It was a program called „Let Me Tell You a Story”. The point of the project was for the young people from seven different countries to meet the survivors of the Second World War. The objective of this meeting was to have an interview and talk about the past with the hope that this experience will blossom into a new understanding of it.

We met her in the conference room of the venue. We had a long conversation during which Mrs. Janina told us about her life and, more precisely, about her experience in the Zamość temporary camp.

Talking to Mrs. Janina was very inspiring and, even though she is 80, she doesn't feel so old. The time we spent together was lovely and dynamic. After the interview we felt connected to her. This lovely lady shared her poetry and her life. She has shown bravery by sharing her story with us.

She was born in 1935 in a small village near Grabowice. She lived there until November 1942 when the displacement started. Even though she doesn't remember a lot of details, she remembers that it was a good, peaceful life. She lived there with her brothers and her parents. Her strongest recollection is the memory of going to school. She remembers it because it was a big moment in her life, a moment which was violently cut short by the beginning of the displacement. The people from her village heard some rumors about the displacements but they didn't believe that.

One day when the displacement started her father decided to hide his family in the attic. It was very cold, they were really scared and had no idea what was

about to happen. The Nazis came to the barn and took the children out. The father was preparing his best horses and a carriage for the Nazis, when he realized that Germans found his children. He tried to protect them and secretly placed them in a hole in the ground, which was next to the road; after that he covered the hole with straw. They stayed there scared for some time until the Germans cleared out the village.

The village was later filled with the Ukrainians who were sent to live there by the Germans. Mrs. Janina was living there almost illegally; she had to hide, she had to hope that people will give her food. After a few weeks, the mayor of the village got an order from the Nazis „Give out all the Poles or you will die!”. Later the old Ukrainian decided to be merciful to the Polish people and gave them one evening to leave the village. She does not remember much, only dirty black horse carriages. She was sent to the camp which she kept calling „behind the wire”. The first thing she remembers was walking into the camp with other people and seeing her father standing in the crowd that gathered to see the new arrivals. She mentioned that her father was paralyzed with fear at the sight of his children in the camp. She was placed into the barrack number five which was a temporary sorting place. There she was reunited with her mother which was taken to the camp along with the father and the rest of the village. Life was difficult there because the conditions were very poor. The barrack was just the wooden building with very small windows and it had no furniture. All the luxuries they had were a plank and a small shelf.

Mrs. Janina remembered one accident she had seen. She was there with her brothers and a lady that was her neighbor. That woman had a bad leg, she was limping. She had a wooden crutch and relied on her daughter's help. During their stay in the barrack there were a lot of rules. One of the rules was no trash. Mrs. Janina remembers that a German soldier entered the barrack and saw small pieces of paper on the floor. It might have been wrappers from candy, she does not remember. The soldier ordered the woman to clean that up. She said she can't do it because of her leg. She said that her daughter would clean that up. The soldier did not like that and wanted to force her to do it herself. He took her crutch and using his full strength started beating her over the head with that piece of wood. After he had finished the woman was covered in blood. The other females from the barrack wanted to help her. They took her to a bath house – a pool of water outside where they could wash herself.

Mrs. Janina was a child while she was there. This, of course, meant that she had to spend her free time in some way. During the interview she remembered a particular moment. She had a best friend whose name was Krystyna. One day they were walking around the camp and trying to fill out their free time. They decided to go to the edge of the camp in order to look outside. The wall of the camp was a big, fenced wall that had a drainage system on the ground. It was a grate over a pit of water. The spaces between the metal bars were over twenty five centimeter wide, enough for Krystyna to fall through them. Young Janina started calling for help and crying, her friend was drowning in the

rainwater. Eventually a worker came by and saw the scene. He rushed to help and managed to pull out the girl with a piece of rope he had with him. During that moment a lot of commotion was raised in the camp, people were curious and noisy, that could attract the attention of the guards. Krystyna's mother quickly took the daughter away from the scene because going near the fence could be easily punishable by death.

After a while they moved to the barrack number ten. They stayed there with other four families. Her father was in the barrack number twelve where he was working in the kitchen. Discretely he visited them and brought some food potatoes and fresh bread was a luxury. In her opinion they were jealous of her because the regular food they got everyday was a black soup without any taste and a loaf of black bread per family. Staying in that barrack her mother tried to make them comfortable as much she could. Her mother used her scarf to make a pillow for the children. This barrack after a while became very dirty and infested with bugs and rodents. After that they got moved to barrack number one.

Barrack number one was close to barrack two which was the most feared barrack. It was the place of torture within the camp. Mrs. Janina could often hear screams coming out of that place. She does not remember many details; she heard only the rumors of terrible things inside. Things like pouring boiling water on the victims or simply beating someone to the brink of their life.

This camp was a temporary camp, which meant that people were often moved. This was the fate of Mrs. Janina's father. After a while he was sent to a physical labor camp in Germany, to Wittenberg.



She did not have a lot of information about him but she knew he was working on a railway. She had never heard from him again. He was presumed to be dead. She spent a total of five months in the camp in Zamość. After that she was moved along with her mother and brothers to be a worker on a farm. Her mother was a cleaner in her owner's house. Mrs. Janina and her brother were too young to work efficiently so they were kept in a barn on the estate. The life there was hard but a little bit of luck shined through. A friend of the family saw them there and contacted their uncle, who quickly went to that place to try and negotiate the release of his family. The landlord decided that he can sell the mother with three children because they were useless to him. The uncle had a newly built home, which he had to sell in order to get enough money to pay the steep price.

Eventually the family was free. They decided to go back to their home, to a village next to their own. At that time the Ukrainians who were trying to settle the area were driven back by the coming Red Army. The family found their old house, which stood now abandoned and forgotten. Everything that could be moved was stolen but the family returned once again to their home.

After some time at home, her mother and she started to feel ill. Her uncle decided to take them to the doctor at the hospital. To protect himself he put garlic in all of his pockets because he believed that it will protect him from their illness. At the hospital they found out they have typhus so they stayed at the hospital until they got better. Mrs. Janina got better faster than her mother but she stayed at her side.

As she was spending so much time at the hospital she became friendly with a nurse and one Russian soldier that would often sing to her „Katchushka”. Nurse liked her so much that she put some bread and berries in a cupboard for her to eat. Since there was so many sick people at the hospital and people were dying all the time, she was so happy when her mother finally got better and was able to go home.

When the war ended Mrs. Janina got a letter in which she found an information about the death of her father. The work he did in Germany was railroad construction and he was killed by the train.

When the interview ended we asked Mrs. Janina what is her opinion on the Germans today. Her answer was that even though she lost her brothers and parents she has found a meaning in her life and has done everything in her power to continue living. She writes beautiful poems today that we had a privilege to hear. The first poem was about her memory and survivors of children in the camp in Zamość. The second poem she wrote was about love and the last one was about passing summer and waiting for the cold time to pass, for summer to come again.

The interview ended with the cup of tea and a lot of admiration from all of us. We are truly grateful to be a part of this amazing moment and that she allowed us to share her story with others. We will remember Mrs. Janina forever because she was a true inspiration!

**Interview conducted by Bogdan Cazimir, Mustafa Dede, Igor Dobec, Klára Pálková, Sanja Radoš, Златомира Кулчева, Krzysztof Bruzgul.**



*The voice from the*

# PAST

*Marianna Kloc*

*How to tell the terrible truth?*

*And how to write down the unprintable?*

Can you imagine an 8-year old little girl who has to do tough labour just to survive? The one that does not remember any games from her childhood, which was full of hunger and poverty? This woman is a victim and a survivor of the Second World War. Her name is Maria Kloc and she comes from Poland. Since history is the science of human nature, we should never forget how it tragically repeats itself. Maria was born in 1928. She had 2 older brothers and a younger sister. Her family worked in a farm and lived in poverty. She was forced to leave school and to work since the age of 8. In 1942, people were starting to talk that they would be displaced and were beginning to hide. It was a typical situation not only for her family but also for many families in Poland. Maria worked for Germans only for food but she hoped that it would also save her from being taken away.

The Germans entered her village – Chyża – in January 1943. The people had only 10 minutes to gather their belongings. Soldiers also went to her house and gathered them in the centre of the village, where they were interrogated. At this point Maria showed them her paper which was confirming that she was working for them at the time. She thought that this paper would save her from the resettlement or anything what they were planning to do. She was shocked pretty badly when the German soldiers in the committee just coldly tore it in front of her. She thought that these committees were deciding who should be displaced. Since her uncle's children had lighter hair, fair skin and blue eyes,

they were being allowed to stay. While people were being interrogated in the centre of the village, her brothers fortunately managed to sneak out and save themselves. Her parents and her younger sister were sent into a camp in Zamość which was only 2.5 km away. The transportation was organised in horse carriages.

When they arrived in the Zamość camp, they were taken into the barrack number 8. At this point, she was still with her family. There was also a committee in the camp which sent both her and her sister into the barrack number 16. This second one was only for work incapable people, while her parents were sent to barrack number 12. It was known for everyone that they would be sent to Auschwitz.

Her barrack number 16 looked like a horse stable. There was no floor, they slept on the wooden boards, and it was very cold. Since only children and old people were in this barrack, the older ones were supposed to take care of the kids. When another round of people came to the barracks certain problem occurred. The camp got overcrowded and the insects appeared among these already weak people. It was really hard to get rid of them. As the weather was pretty cold, they tried to freeze the insects by getting out and getting their skin wet.

What could someone do in this kind of irrational situation? There is no right or wrong reaction. She was desperate and she was spending a few of her days just crying. Maria knew that she had to be strong, not only because of her-self but also because of her sister and the little neighbour boy who was also in the same barrack.

Conditions in the camp were inhumane and humiliating. The weather was especially freezing, and to make it worse, the people were sleeping without blankets. The meals were really small and disgusting. In addition to that, the guards were bringing them rarely, which means that all of the people were starving. Also, the prisoners who did not have their own bowl simply did not get their meals but the ones who did have it were given a soup made out of grass and cheap vegetables. For breakfasts, they sometimes got small amount of bread and black coffee. Apart from that, hygienic conditions were also horrible. Improvised toilet looked like a wooden construction without any walls, it only had a roof. In the middle of it, there was a big hole in the ground.

The most horrifying thing was that a lot of kids accidentally drowned in it.

While she was imprisoned, she had some strange experiences where her intuition maybe saved her life. For example, there was this guard that she met when she was going to the toilet at night. He was one of the Ukrainian guards who signed a contract with Germans. As he was Ukrainian, he could partly understand what she was saying. Even though it was the first time they had met, he asked her to marry him. The next time she saw him was when he entered to her barrack during the night and told her to pack and to go with him. That was the time when she followed her instinct. Along with her, there was her sister and a neighbour's kid in the camp. She felt strange about leaving them alone so she had a strange fear telling her not to go. She will

never know what could have happened if she had left with him.

She also had a similar intuition one more time. It happened during the transportation when the same Ukrainian guard told her to hide under one cattle wagon. She was afraid because she didn't know what would happen if some of the other guards saw her after the train had left. Also, she was thinking about her sister and little child and what would happen if they followed her under the train. Maybe the guards would shoot them all. So again, she rejected the Ukrainian guard's proposition.

After five weeks of agonizing pain inside the camp, she left it at the end of February 1943. A certain Polishman called Andrej Enski bought a couple of wagons full of certain imprisoned people, who were sent to Siedlce to work at his farm. The irony is that leaving the camp wasn't a happy experience, nor was she enthusiastic about it in an expected way.

Namely, while they were getting into the wagons, a lot of people that weren't meant to get to the train tried to do so. She remembers the scenario of her mother with a pillow under her arm ready to go with them but she told her to stay because she had fears that all of them could get killed. Later, Maria realized that despite of the guard's threats, a lot of people entered the wagons and got away with it. She will also feel guilty and will be asking herself if her mother could have survived if she didn't tell her not to go. She regrets that because her parents were sent to Auschwitz 4 days later. Their destination isn't officially confirmed but they were located in the barrack number 11 which was colloquially cold

“the word of death” and all of the people from that barrack were sent to Auschwitz. Apparently, her mother was put into crematorium because she had asthma and missed one morning counting because of it. As far as she knows, her father probably got shot.

She stayed on Andrej Enski’s farm for just a 3-week period because the owner tried to use her for very hard labour and because of that, she confronted him. Then, he returned her to work in the Red Cross telling them she is mentally ill. That was the reason why she could stay in the Red Cross. From there she made contact with her uncle with whom she had been living and he picked her up from the Red Cross. He was living in Wysokie, the village 3 kilometres away from her childhood village. Again, she was living in terrible poverty and was also forced to work for German family as a servant only for food. She was there until the Soviets liberated Poland. An interesting thing happened days before. When the German family left their house, she entered their storage room to take some food for her but then she realized that the food was all covered with gasoline just to make it uneatable for the Polish people.

She remembers the day when the Soviet Army came into Wysokie. It was a sunny day and they were riding their horses while the Germans were hiding in the woods. As they were welcoming the Russians with flowers, The Germans opened fire towards the welcoming crowd. During that incident, her friend got shot in the belly. After the war, they managed to move back into her family’s old house. The house was completely devastated and all of the

doors and windows were missing. Later, at the age of 20, Maria got married with her husband Kloc with whom she got 3 children. To add up on the tragic part of this story, she also lost her husband in the 60’s. Nowadays, she lives alone in Zamość and her children are all grown up and welloff. Today, she believes that she survived those dramatic years because the Virgin Mary looked after her.

During our interview she was holding her own hands tight and at some moments she had tears in her eyes. Isn’t it sad?

This really nice lady will always be alone with her memories, because it is really hard for her to describe what she survived. Mrs. Kolc could not share what she has really gone through. These are the facts what you have read, but where is the meaning behind it? For instance, how did her soul change? It is her secret.

Birth and death are the only sure things in a person’s life and how to spend your time on the Earth between these? And as she said: appreciate and respect what You HAVE.

**Interview conducted by Yanitsa Serafimova, Anna Jónás, İbrahim Taha Uyar, Lucija Dugalija, Branimir Radaković and Ionica Olteanu, Maria Rubaj.**

*Taken from*  
**PARENTS**

*Waleria Kliszc*

There were a lot of innocent victims, including children, that were killed during these awful times, which our generation can't even imagine. It wasn't their fault that one nation wanted to dominate another and control the whole world because their policy and conception was that they were the chosen one.

If we would like to know the truth about history we need to speak with those victims. We can't rely just on books and films; we need to find other sources. Everybody needs to speak with people who met with no mercy. So it's really important to understand that we need to take responsibility for that part of history and face it.

**Pani Waleria Kliszczyk** (ur. 1931 r.) – *Displaced from village Grabowiec, taken from parents, she spent 1 month in camp in Zamość. After 3 days' trip in wagon, in February 1943, she was bought from Nazi Germans and saved by Poles from towns Kałuszyn and Mrozy.*

This is the story of one lady who has a stamp in her mind of these events. This brave old woman memorized everything that happened in that period of her life. Even 67 years later, those years are not obliterated from her memory. Deep and painful mark was left by these events, but in spite of this, she shares her hard story with young people. For her it is important to share with everyone because she doesn't want these bad things happen again to anyone. An 85-year old woman remembered her dark childhood like a horror film in which her and

her family were main characters. Waleria's family was close and kind. The bad events for her and her family started when she was 7 years old and at the same time her father passed away. At that moment all she had was her mother and two brothers.

Displacement started on the 19th of February in a small village near Zamość – Grabowiec. It was a usual morning when soldiers came and knocked on their door. They entered and told them that they had only 15 minutes to take their whole life in one hand and leave their home without any explanation. When they came on the square they were hastily informed what would happen next. This small girl was really scared and she couldn't understand what was happening with her and her family. Mrs Waleria explained that no one tried to escape because everyone was already afraid enough. She also told that there was one man from their village who refused to leave his home.

The Nazi soldiers shot him with no mercy in front of everyone and it was also an example of punishment in case someone else would decide to escape. The soldiers pushed all of them into the carts. They had to travel long and cold road to Zamość only with little amount of bread in their hands. The only thing that came to her mind was that she just wanted to stay with her mother. After a long and exhausting travel they finally arrived at the camp in Zamość city where they were pushed straight to the barracks without any directions from the guards. She and her mother were separated from her brother and he was

sent to another barrack. There was no possibility to contact him because of the distance between the barracks. In this case they had no idea whether her brother was still alive or not. She described that this moment was very painful. What was the first reaction when they came to the camp? It was easy, everyone had the same idea, they were going to die.

In the camp there was also a doctor who was responsible for separation. He had to decide who's healthy and at the same time capable of working. When the doctor came to her and her mother, he didn't detach her from her mother and that was the reason why she felt thankful for him. She can describe the cellar where she spent two weeks. It was a small, dark, cold and also smelly place without any window with just a small hole in the door to let the light in. There was nothing in the cellar, no bed, no chair. It seemed it was made for animals rather than for humans. That was all they got. They didn't sleep at night, they cried and prayed all night long. In the morning the Nazis brought them stale bread and something like coffee and also pyjamas.

Every day was almost the same. At the camp there was no activity, the kids could play only with their hands. The children under 14 stayed in the barrack, those over 14 were taken for hard work.

After these continuous and horrible weeks, the German soldiers took them and brought to the train station in Zamość at the last night. It was the same scenario as before. No one gave them any proper

information about the trip. Suddenly, in the middle of the journey, the train stopped and nothing happened. All the passengers were confused. For hours they were standing and freezing out because of the very low temperature, outside it was about  $-30^{\circ}$ . The weather that winter was one of the coldest, besides they had nothing to warm up, no warm clothing or blanket. They thought that was the purpose of the soldiers to kill those innocent people in this way. Right now in the same place there's a monument which is a reminder of every single child who died during this journey. She tried to describe the wagon as a cold, dark and smelly place. The passengers separated one part of wagon to use it as a toilet. This travel was prolonged to the whole night. In the morning, the train finally arrived in Mrozy.

After their arrival, an engine-driver helped them to be sold to one rich Polishman. His name was Karpinsky, she and her mother were helping him in his house. Her mother helped in the housekeeping and she was playing with Karpinsky's children. With this story, the dark side of her story finished. Waleria described her life in the house with good feelings.

She told that the Germans appreciated those people who had some kind of skills, like her sister's skill for sewing clothes. Germans kept her in Zamość because of her sewing skills. She explained that the other important job was carpenter. There is not enough information about her older brother who died in Berlin during the war. But she was more open when she started to talk about her second



brother. She also added that during the replacement he was taken for work to Berlin. And that was all she and her mother found out about him. After their return home they finally met with him. He travelled a long way from Berlin to Poland. He took a bicycle which was already broken and, for that reason, he came home hitchhiking. In conclusion she was asked how she feels about Germany and the Germans themselves. She openly said that she is not sympathizing with them. It is also really difficult to talk about this part of her life.

She doesn't want to watch documentaries about the Second World War. Even if she cannot watch them, she continues to live in Zamość.

She is avoiding to visit camp areas in the city and she doesn't walk around that area. But she visited Auster camp once in her life.

She was gently asked to share her opinion about our generations. The purpose was to learn more about her point of view. Her understatement wasn't way too much optimistic. She can see that the world's changed and people are also different that they were before. Nowadays, there is more hatred and it's not all right at all in her opinion. As we are younger generation, Mrs. Waleria wanted to give us a small piece of advice. According to her advice we should try to show more respect and also love to each other. Only in this way we can prevent next conflicts and wars and keep peace all around the world. We should follow her advice because she was the one

who suffered more than we can even imagine and in those days when she was basically living in hell on earth she didn't lose her faith in God. There was a moment when she asked herself „Why did that all happen to me and my family?” - but she stayed strong until now despite of the fact that she lost so much in her entire life.

**Interview conducted by Nelli Bdojan, Engi Pálma, Pavla Tsvetkova, Miroslava Deneva, Daniela Petre, Muhammet Altuntas, Ewa Kostrubiec.**









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