

**Before the war (1939), my brother Wacek often took me to school.**

I was so excited that I would start learning on September 1, 1939, with the approval of the headmaster, Stodulski, even though I was not yet 7 years old. September 1939 turned my childhood and dreams of education into a nightmare, as well as our family happiness.

**By order of the Germans, we had to leave our homes, and those who stayed were shot.**

Before fleeing, my mother managed to bake 6 loaves of bread, which saved us from starving to death. I saw bombs falling over Wieluń.

Over Trębaczew, our village, planes flew, shooting from machine guns. We sought shelter in the basement under the barn. Early in the morning, with great sorrow and sadness, we set off on an unknown journey. There was no horse, so everyone took what they could carry on their backs, and with our cow, our beloved Czarnulka, who gave us milk, we fled as far as we could. Walking through the forest for many kilometers, I was very tired, my legs swollen. Leaning on a stick, I walked behind everyone.

**At one point, a Polish soldier approached me, gave me his last candy, patted me on the head, and said, “You little one, you will always remember this war.”**

It has been 80 years, and I still remember his words, which still echo in my ears.

**During this escape, my two brothers, Wicek and Adaś, separated, hoping to get to another country.**

They didn't succeed; they were arrested and taken to Germany for forced labor. Antek also shared their fate.

The journey of nightmares divided us by fate.

**When we returned from the escape, all we found were the walls of our beautiful house, which the Nazis had burned down, along with the entire village, leaving only a few houses for themselves.**

We settled in the barn, which had only a small amount of straw left, most of it taken by the Nazis. In this barn, with my uncle Janek's family (my mother's brother) and neighbors, we slept until the harsh frosts.

Then we moved to the basement under the barn, where there were two small rooms with tiny windows. The stove – the “koza” – served us for cooking and heating. We slept on the floor covered with straw, with water dripping from the walls. We spent the entire winter and spring in such conditions. During this time, my father, Kuba, and Wacek managed to renovate one room with a roof covering in the burned house.

**The Nazi occupation caused great poverty, hunger, filth, and disease.**

Schools were closed, and even very young people were used for work on German trenches. Only three children and the parents remained in the house, who were very worried about the three sons working in Germany. We hoped that somehow we would survive the nightmare of occupation. However, our fate was still cruel.

**Since my father refused to sign the German list, to which he was urged several times, as his signature would allow for sending Witek, Adaś, and Antek to the German front, he said: “I was, I am, and I will be Polish.”**

So, at the beginning of 1944, our family of five was taken for forced labor to France.

**On this journey, we stayed in two German camps:**

in Poznań and Meteu, where we underwent humiliating body inspections.

Fathers and sons were separated from mothers and daughters. In Poznań, we stayed for almost two weeks, and we were fed with soup – water and a piece of bread a day. In France, we worked for a German in a farm.

**Despite all these misfortunes, the whole family survived the occupation.**

The three oldest brothers brought beautiful wives back.

We returned from France at the end of 1945. Before returning to Poland, we stayed in three transition camps (the last one near the Spanish border), where Poles from all over France were brought. During transport from one camp to another, the truck carrying about 47 people crashed into a concrete wall. Among the injured were my father with a head wound, my brother Kuba with broken ribs, and I, who lost consciousness. Fortunately, everything ended well.