

I was born in 1937 in Stepan, in Volhynia region – rather small town with local government office. In total there must have been around 2500 -3000 people living there. 40 percent of them were Ukrainians, 50 percent were Jews and the rest were Polish. That means that Polish people were the minority – around 10 percent. But the life there was passing alright. My mother and my father were teachers in primary school. Both were graduates of vocational schools, my mother in Lviv and my father in Kielce. That's also where each of them came from. They started to work in 1922 in Stepan.

In 1939 I was 7 year-old, I've just finished the first class of primary school. This year was specially interesting for me, as we had very interesting holidays: a trip to the Polish seaside (which is rather modest one). We have been to Hel. All of that trip was taking place in August, with rather nice weather. You could already feel some anxiety in the air, some movements of the army. In Hel as well there was already one military unit, so you could say that we had an insight into the situation proving that something bad was going on. On our way back to Stepan we stopped in Warsaw, or more precisely in Rembertów, next to Warsaw. That was the place where my mother's sister lived. (My mother had two sisters: one living in Rembertów, one in Lviv.) Her husband was a Polish Army's captain. Rembertów was a place where some army units had their base.

Anyway... a family gathering took place in Rembertów. There was family from Lviv, we, from Stepan and the family in Rembertów. Three sisters met. It was a beautiful moment. As later it turned to be, it had been the last family gathering.

We came back to Stepan and at the same moment my father got his “mobilization card” and was called up into the army. He's been an officer in army's reserves – his rank was second lieutenant. He's even been a commander of the reservists' in the region. And so he was obliged to report for duty on 31st of August, in Włodzimierz Wołyński, at the very border of Poland at the time.

We said goodbye to our father on 31st of August. It was organized very ceremoniously. It took place in the city's main market. There was a lot of his friends, colleagues, his pupils who he had used to meet everyday. My father was a very active person. Having a lot of talents he would run a lot of special interests groups, like model-making for example. He was an author of a balloon that made it all the way to Denmark. So the farewell was very festive, but also very sad for us, as we were saying goodbye to our father, who had to go towards unknown, towards some kind of a war.

A week passed and we got a telegram from him. He was asking us to send him: his gun, binoculars and the rules of infantry. We did that of course – still we never learned if he got the package, if he ever made any use of these things.

Anyway, 1st of September came and the school was supposed to start. It didn't. The days had past and 17th of September came, from the other side, the Soviets are coming. We've seen this army, looking like something the cat brought in, soldiers with the machine guns hanging on the strings, with some bags on their backs, with greatcoats hanging till their ankles. The situation made us a bit anxious. We were worried a lot about our father, what is going on with him. But there was no information coming.

When they came they took the barracks of Polish reservists. With time passing we could start to see that the locals were changing their approach towards us, especially the Ukrainians, the ones having more eager for war attitude. Ones, even a group of them came to our house, to my mother, asking for a gun, as they knew my father was a soldier. My mother told them that she was not giving them anything as she didn't have a gun. They stepped away, but at the same time threatened her: “We will be back again soon”.

Eventually the school started, though not the Polish one any more, but the Ukrainian one. I had to start over from the first class, now with the Ukrainian language. It was an artificial change.

One year passed... Christmas... but there was still no news about our father.

When March came we finally got a letter from him. It stated that our father was together

with other prisoners in Kozielsk. It wasn't too comforting. He was telling that they're getting worse every moment. He wanted us to send him something. We prepared a package with food and clothes. We managed to send it, but unfortunately it never reached him.

13th of April... The night 12th/13th of April. We lived in the school at this time. There were two flats for teachers there. My mother was still a teacher then. They came. Two military man. Maybe one was without the uniform. They were banging on the doors really loud. My mother was terrified. She didn't open. There was one of ours neighbour there too. He was a handicapped man.

The doors were finally opened and they entered. There was an order to pack quickly, because we were supposed to be taken to our father. That was the idea: *that we will be taken to our father*. All of this packing was very strange... how can one pack in the middle of the night, for such a trip, with two kids (I was 7 at the time, my sister just 5 years older than me)? Our neighbour was helping. We were putting everything in some clothes and bags, to take as much as possible. Meanwhile some peasant wagons came. We packed everything there and went to the train station in Malynsk, around 15 km from Stepan. They brought us to the side rails, where they had these cargo cars of a train. And they packed us there.

There were double wooden cots on each side of the doors. We had to put all our stuff and us there. They rapidly slam shut the doors. There were some beds free, so they would add some people from time to time on the way, so eventually it was full. We were on the way towards unknown for two weeks. Without food, practically without anything. Sometimes they would give us some old bread, black in color. After two weeks we reached Kazakhstan steppe.

There was no moment on the way, that we would believe that we were going to our father. We just knew that the windows were having bars and we are heading towards the East.

In Kazakhstan, our first thoughts were about where to live. We got a shelter form there, a dugout, earlier used to keep cattle. There was some kind of bed prepared, still no oven or nothing. We were in a misery. But there was no chance of cancellation, no chance of changing this situation, no protest, just an urge to understand this new environment. We spend there 6 years, came back in 1946.

We were coming back for two months. Again in this cargo cars. There were just no bars any more. You could say that we had some kind of freedom already then. You could jump out of the train on the stations, look for some useful thing, exchange something so to get something to eat. First we passed our mother-region, old Polish eastern lands. In Skarżysko, at the trains station, my mother send a letter to our father's family from Kielce. His parents and siblings, 5 brothers and 3 sisters used to live there.

Their house was destroyed by a bomb during the war. Even though they got the letter. They got it as they didn't move too far from their original spot. The post could somehow find them. From the letter they got the idea about us coming back, unfortunately without the father, to Poland.

The major question back then, just after war, was how to find each other. It was such a mess in Poland at the moment. A friend of one of my father's brothers, was the one who decided to find us. We met only in Gryfino, close to our border with Germany. As the city was partly destroyed, the governmental idea for us was to become its' new citizens. When he eventually found us, he told us to follow him to Kielce. There were actually more families like that in Gryfino. We gathered and asked for a ride back. One full carriage was then detached and attached from station to station. The train eventually reached Kielce.

We lived at our father's family for a while. With his brother first and then with his sister. After Siberia, that was the beginning of our new life. One thing that I had from Russia was

a certificate of finishing the 6th grade. Back in Poland I was able to start school in 7th. I stayed in Kielce until my final tests in high school. After that I started my studies at the Technical University in Łódź.

Until 1946, the moment we were back in Poland, we didn't receive any kind of information about either our father, nor the war itself. There was only Soviet propaganda there. We were hoping that he was alive. There was at least a shadow of hope still there.

In Kielce we asked the Red Cross to start the search. There was no information for a long time. It eventually came straight from Geneva, Switzerland. The letter stated that our father was on the list of Katyń massacre victims. I couldn't understand, how was it possible, our father was in Kozielsk. We simply didn't understand the technology of this mass murder back then. Communist propaganda was clearly stating that Katyń massacre was a German fault. But we knew them already too well. We knew exactly how it is.

My father was a very warm person, very talented. He played violin, he was making models. A lot of those things you start to forget very quickly. His picture is sadly, very distant to me today.