



## **Arek's Story, Chapter 5**

The food was very very inadequate. In the morning about 5.30 we got a piece of black bread and some black coffee made of bindweed. Lunchtime we got some watery soup with a few leaves swimming round, that was it. That was your food for the day, day in, day out. After three weeks they selected some boys, older ones than me, and I stood in the second row, stood on my toes and I made myself taller because they were looking for taller boys, and we were chosen and we went to Auschwitz 1. And there we were put into a block four and we were there, I was a bit scared everywhere. I knew the same afternoon what happened to the other people what arrived with us. A foreman, a Jewish foreman said to me they had all been gassed and burned. And in Auschwitz 1 we slept each one in a small bed with a straw mattress and the food was a little bit better. There were political prisoners. Dutchmen, French, Norwegians, there were a few different nationalities, and Poles, the food was a little bit better. And then I was sent to a farm, remember Auschwitz was 30km big, it was a very large encampment. The small camps were wired with electric wire, fenced off and guarded by SS men. And we were chosen to work on the, on agriculture for the SS. First with two horses and ploughed the fields and for fertilisation they bring us ashes from the crematorium and I strew it on the ground and the bones, you could feel the bones. And also we took some ashes into the River Vistula which passed Auschwitz and we work afterwards, we were taken to work in the fishing commando. We used to catch fish. We had high boots, rubber boots, and nets and we used to sort the fish out and put them into water containers and then we used to load them on the train like oil wagons. And then we used to send them off to Germany.

### **You told me a story about pinching fish when you were in the Auschwitz camp, can you tell me about that on the film?**

I worked in the fishing commando and we were 5 boys, also working there with older people and one day the Kapo, who was a German Kapo, not Jewish, they took him out of prison and brought him to Auschwitz to be in charge of us and oh, he was like a tiger he was, he was a horrible person. And we worked in the fishing commando and it was just before Christmas. He noticed a bucket of fish swimming around in the bucket and I'm sure he knew who actually put these fish away but he didn't say, instead he called us boys over and he said, "you take, each one take about 2 or 3 fish with you to the camp" so we put them in

our trousers and the sergeant he put these fish away himself for Christmas and he comes back from his work and he looked in the bucket and he said "Where are my fish?" He asked the Kapo, the foreman. He didn't say nothing. He says "Where are my fish?". He asked three times. Nobody said a word. In the meantime they were already in our trousers. And so the SS man, officer he says "Now I want" – he realised that we must have them ourselves. He says "I give you now five minutes to put all the fish back in the bucket" and then the fish were dead already because we had them in our trousers and we tied our trousers on the bottom so they don't go down and he went up to a tree, cut a branch off and we all had about six whips over our bottoms and after we put the fish back but I had one fish left. When he hit me my trousers split and one of the fish was hanging out. And he looked at me, he says "Right". He took his revolver out, put it to my temple, "You stole the fish, you will eat it alive, as it is". He took me to a stream and I started tearing the fish to pieces. Full of blood and so on, it was horrendous, raw. And I was eating and munching and eating and suddenly the major passed in the horse-drawn carriage, the major passed and he asked him and so he took the revolver and put it in the holster and went to talk to him. When he did that I threw the bones and so on, because there was a stream running and I ate quite a lot of the fish, and – I never liked raw fish ever since. Terrible. And that was it and when I got back to the camp where the fishing commando was there was a major and we went into his room, all the boys because the sergeant told him what we did and right away he started kicking – he kicked me in the stomach and then that was it. About 10 minutes later I noticed the sergeant is beating that foreman, the Kapo outside, took a big stick and give him, because he knew who told us to take these fish, he knew we wouldn't have taken it on our own. And he gave him a good hiding and he was bleeding like mad. Yeah good, it was a very good thing because it was a shocking person. And we went back to the camp and we didn't go to work for about 2 days. We couldn't, we couldn't stand up. And for not going to work in Auschwitz you could have been shot. But we were so sore that we couldn't even stand up. Anyway after two, the third day we went back to work and we once again we worked in the fishing commando. The things that went on it was just unbelievable. And the elderly people, they didn't have a chance to talk to us and so on because we had to keep among our boys because they suffered and they starved and so on so they had no time for us. So we were together on our own.