



Martin's Story, Chapter 5

Well eventually we were stopped, the whole column was stopped, beside a railway line and we were told “You must now walk along this railway line, the SS men they stay here, you go further. You walk between the rails. If you walk on either side of the railway line there are ditches”, and it was dark of course, “you will fall into a ditch. So walk between the railway lines”. Again it doesn't sound too terrible but walking between railway lines in the dark is something that is much more difficult than it sounds. You can't see where you are going, there are sleepers, you can easily trip, and of course you've got a whole mass of people walking behind you and you can't stop a whole column of people because somebody has fallen so you find you'll be trampled and other people will trip over you as well and so on. So there were quite a few incidents like that. We walked for some hours, I can't say how long, until eventually to our left in the distance we saw some lights, so there was some sign of habitation there, and we left the railway line and we walked across a ploughed field – again that's not too easy in the dark but we had to do it – and we got to what was, really I hesitate to call it a village, it was more like a small hamlet. And we just stayed there not knowing what was going to happen. Well we were in fact in Poland. Some hours later police and soldiers came along, Polish soldiers that is, and of course they had known nothing of our coming, it was all done secretly so far as they were concerned. They did try to force some people back into Germany but not us. And what in fact they did was to try to force us to stay at this place called Zbaszyn which was really in no-man's land but everything was so chaotic, it was possible for a few people including us to get away. And we got away and eventually managed to get to some relations in Krakow. But we arrived on their doorstep, they knew nothing about our coming.

And what had you been allowed to take with you?

Just what we could grab on the spur of the moment. Nothing else. And we were watched while we were doing it so that we didn't take any valuables. Not that we had many valuables but of course some people would have valuables. We were watched to make sure we didn't take money or anything like that. I don't know how much money there would have been in the house anyway but they made sure that we didn't take anything of value.

And how did you cope for your food?

Effectively we went without whilst we were on the march.