

# Memories of the Expulsion from Gross Tuchen

by Heinz Radde

I was born 1942 at Gross Tuchen in Kreis Bütow. My father was a farmer. I live now in Switzerland. In the middle of December 1946 we had to leave Gross Tuchen; we were expelled. My father who was of the home guard and taken prisoner, was shot by the Russians. Our farm was isolated, far away from the village. We were exposed to the arbitrariness of Russians and Poles, and we lived in continuous fear. Our pregnant neighbor, Mrs. Pelz, was shot dead. There was plundering, rape and attacks. Sometimes they came in wagons and plundered anything from featherbeds to baby cups and carted it away. Sometimes there was wild shooting. Once, an Ukrainian Pole, who took over our farm later, gave himself a Sunday "treat" by ordering his bulldog to attack our little dog Pffiffi; he nearly chased him to death. We had to stand by and watch. My mother used to sneak out at night, making her way through the forest to go to the village Klein Massowitz to care for her sick mother until she died. She buried her herself secretly. Grandfather had been shot by the Russians already before.

## Expulsion came as a release

We felt relieved to leave the farm when the order came. At the time of the expulsion I was about four and a half years old. My memories are sketchy and perhaps not always exact, but some moments are deeply etched in my mind.

On a cold, clear winter morning my mother, her four children, grandma, two aunts, and two cousins had to report to the village. We each had a parcel to carry. Since I was too small to carry anything, I dragged a



*Most inhabitants of the county were expelled by deportation in freight trains from the railway station in Bütow between 1945 and 1946.*

schoolbag by its strap, just like a sleigh over the crunching snow. For days we were boxed in cattle wagons, it was bitter cold. Many of us froze our hands and toes. My mother hardly slept, she rubbed our hands and toes endlessly. Sometimes when the train stopped or was routed to an off-line we were plundered by Polish bandits who would take anything of value. We had a few men on board who barricaded the doors from the inside. I was very scared.

All of a sudden there was a cry on the train, "The Oder! The Oder!" I remember a picture in my mind as I saw the train car doors slightly open in the mist of the morning: the train rattled over a large bridge which was made of steel and covered a flat river valley. We were full of happiness and felt saved.

## The taste of frozen carrots

We were put in camps. When I think of them, I can only remember the hunger and cold. Many died. The taste of frozen carrots in hot water, with some barley added, will never be forgotten. Of course we did not have any milk. The grownups among themselves said about me, "We will probably not pull this little one through." Remarkably, I can still clearly see a picture of the ceiling of a grand room, as I remember the cracks through which the moon rays shone as we lay at night, cold under our thin blankets.

Our mother tried hard to find us accommodation in a private home and was finally successful in 1947 in Aken, a mostly undestroyed provincial town in Sachsen-Anhalt. There she found two tiny rooms under a roof with slanting walls, in a nice house on the outskirts of town. The five of us moved in, mother slept in the kitchen; we kids all slept in the other room. There were no furniture or light fixtures, we used candles but had to be thrifty. A neighbor built us a simple cupboard with four drawers, one for each of us children — what luxury.

## First package from America

We were constantly hungry. The older ones tried to find some potatoes and ears of grain after the harvest. I remember and still shudder at the bitter taste of the potato peelings that were used to cook some meals. Sometimes we only had sorrel, picked from the banks of the river Elbe. On Sundays there would be a dollop of whipped cream added, where it came from we never knew.

*Continued on next page*

## Expulsion from Gross Tuchen — continued

Then there was the first package from America! My mother was able to contact her brother in Oklahoma again. At the age of five I saw my first piece of chocolate and refused to eat the dark looking stuff. Mother stayed up night after night sewing and altering the used clothes from the Americans for us, and others to wear.

On Christmas Eve 1947 mother sent us into town to see the Christmas play, in the evening on our long way home we saw through the darkness a radiating bright light shining from where our rooms under the roof were. Our mother had saved all the coffee sent to us in the American packages, and traded it for books, toys and a real electric light bulb. Never again in my life did festive lighting appear so bright and magnificent as at that time.

### Pomerania was my homeland

From then on slowly it became better. The years were marked by hard work, especially for our mother. Many good people helped but there were also the stone hearted ones. For some of the locals we were still the fugitives as for so many others in the same situation. Only my sister Edith felt at home in Aken and started a family there. Our grandma, aunt, our mother and my brother Ulrich have all since died. My brother Karl and I left the town for good in our youth to further complete our studies.



*The author visits his hometown Gross Tuchen, now Tuchomie in Polish, in 2009, 63 years after the expulsion.*

The colloquial term for us was “expelled” or “fugitive,” but the East German authorities at that time used a third term. Their white-washing official name for us was “resettler.” Soon after the German reunification I went back to the town Aken and met my old Geography teacher. We remembered having argued at school about the term “homeland.” Dutifully, he tried to convince me that Aken now was my homeland because I grew up there. I stubbornly insisted that Pomerania was my homeland because my ancestors had lived there; I was born there and did not leave of my own free will. And all that only being five years old.