

*Based on the work submitted to the literary competition of the Municipal Public Library in Zgorzelec "Zgorzelec - Görlitz. Limitless." Author Lilo Nischwitz (age 81) from Görlitz.*

## **HITCH-HIKING. POLAND 1979**

Hitchhiking through Poland... This was not a typical model of tourism practiced by East German citizens in those days. Insincere, two-faced times, which were characterized by official "friendship" and more or less hidden mutual dislike of ordinary people. The 1970s saw little border traffic, the work of thousands of Polish women in the East Germany, mass trips by Poles to German stores; for shoes, meat, citrus, textiles; long queues at the border. The average Görlitz resident saw only the inconveniences resulting from a partially open border for neighbours from the "fraternal" Polish People's Republic. He saw no benefits. But not everyone thought that way....

After four days of voyage around Poland, they were returning to East Germany: A 41-year-old Görlitz woman, a 14-year-old girl, a 10-year-old boy and ... three large backpacks, which were often a problem in catching the next hitchhiking opportunity. This is because they took up so much space that there was sometimes not enough for all the travelers. Then it was impossible to take advantage of the kindness of the drivers who stopped "at a stop".

- We were sitting in the cab of a Polish truck that was traveling toward Boleslawiec," the woman says. - At some point I put my wallet with documents and money on the bonnet. It was bothering my hands - I was looking for matches to light a cigarette for the driver who picked us up....

At the crossing Zgorzelec - Görlitz it turned out that our hitchhikers do not have documents. At first impulse they head to the headquarters of the Civic Militia, but they give up - there was no theft, after all, they themselves lost their documents... On the basis of made replacement documents, they cross the Neisse and cross into the East Germany. Two weeks later, a policeman from the Görlitz police station brought a wallet with documents and money, all intact. He said a man had found it in Poland and sent it by mail to the border guard station in Zgorzelec. From there to Görlitz, etc....

- I was extremely pleased and am to this day very grateful for this gesture. Month after month, I made repeated attempts to reach this honest man - I assume it was the driver from the above-mentioned truck. Unfortunately, the man who was so involved that the loss was returned to its owner could not be found. He remained anonymous. I was very sad about this. Since then, I have often confronted this experience with the prejudices and stereotypes so easily formed about Poles.

- Today, after 40 years, I once again say THANK YOU-DANKE to this man. And to each of us I direct the question: would the thought of the situation of an unknown person who lost something be able to motivate me to take active action as well? And one more reflection - maybe on the road to the necessary for all of us to live in peace, it is also good to seek mutual contacts and show respect and readiness for mutual understanding?

*(The Municipal Public Library in Zgorzelec would like to thank Mr. and Mrs. Sławomir and Andreas Vogel, who translated the text from German).*

*Tłumacz z języka polskiego na język angielski: Honorata Olszewska – praktykantka*