

"Hi there,

My name is Lisa and I come from France. During the last event in Romania, I had presented an interview with my grandmother, whose own father lived through the Second World War, and she had told me about Constant, a Polish man who had come to France, in my village, Givet, hoping for a better life and to have access to more human rights. Being curious, I decided to do some research and speak with the daughter of this Polish man to learn more about her life.

So, I'm going to transcribe the interview for you.

"My name is Thérèse, I lived in Poland in the city of Bielsko-Biala, which is in the south of the country. When I was seven years old, my mother, unfortunately, passed away. At that time, in Poland, it was impossible for only one parent to raise their children, so before she died, she had made my father promise to remarry another woman so that I and my brother would not be placed. That's what he did, he remarried straight away. However, he died suddenly when I was fifteen. I was an orphan and my brother, and I knew very well that we were going to be placed with people we did not know. That is when my guardian angel arrived. My uncle Constant came to Poland to invite me to spend two months in France, to cheer me up after the death of my father. At that time, I did not know him at all, I had never heard of him yet, he was my mother's brother. My brother could not come with us, he was seventeen years old and had not yet done his compulsory military service so he could not leave the country. In 1967, I rushed to do my papers, my passport, and my visa to go to France. In the past, France was perceived as America, a country of luxury, a country of dreams where life would be much better, and what better for a teenager than to go to a rich country on vacation? I, who had never left Poland, was so happy.

I hadn't understood that it wasn't for the holidays... My uncle and his wife, Veronique, kept me at home and I never returned to Poland. What I did was illegal because if I had warned Poland that I was not planning to return, they would never have let me go! They partly adopted me because they couldn't have children.

When I arrived, I was so sad, I missed my country, I missed my brother, and I really felt that my freedoms had been violated because I had never decided to live in

France, my family had decided that behind my back, moreover, Constant didn't have the financial means to bring my brother after his military service.

I am going to explain my uncle's situation a little: He lived near the Auschwitz concentration camp, and he met a woman, Veronique, with whom he immediately fell in love, however, he had to leave for the war and then he was imprisoned in Switzerland.

After the war, he did not go back to Poland, he came to Sonne et Loire to work in a mine, and one fine day he received a letter from a man called Jean, who offered to come and work on his farm in the north of France, and Véronique worked there!

So he worked hard on the farm with his lover, they were lodged in a house where all the village workers lived. Small parenthesis, what is interesting is that this is the house in which I currently live and that I did not know, I only learned during my research.

They got married and when they adopted me, they bought a house in the same village. When they both died, it was me and my husband who took over the house, and we still live there today!

When I arrived in France, it was the owner of the farm who gave me a new first name:

Thérèse, because it sounded more French than Jadwiga, my Polish first name.

I didn't speak French, and the first year in France I worked as a nanny, minding a two-year-old girl. Her mother was a teacher and after work, she taught me, French, especially how to conjugate verbs. Then I went to school for three years.

Even if I was angry with my family for having made me leave Poland permanently, I can say that my freedoms were much more violated back there.

In Poland, my parents had a farm, we had to do everything illegally, like killing a pig, we had to do it at night because, under the communist Russian occupation, we had to share everything with the people. All our production was taken from us, we had to eat toast with margarine because the butter we made ourselves was shared with the people. At Christmas, I and my brother had an orange cut in half, it was a luxury

product, and there were not even bananas for example. In France, I had a much better life and that's why I never went back to live in Poland. »

It was a pleasure to meet Thérèse/Jadwiga and get to know her and her story. I found her testimony very interesting in terms of the question of her individual rights and her freedom - She was brought to France without her consent, without an explanation, and her entire identity (her past, her roots, her language, her family and even her name) were, in a way, erased and taken from her - and on the other hand, this very thing that took so much of her freedom away also offered her the opportunity to live a "much better life", if quoting her.

I find it interesting how her discourse is not black or white - It seems like she accepts her life story as it is - she shares it without it being clouded by regret or anger. Listening to her story and sharing it with you today, is, I think, a way of raising awareness, reflecting on the subject on different levels and perhaps even, in a way, a manner of protesting against the violations of her rights as a young girl.

Thank you for your attention!