



Name: Zoni Weisz

Date of birth: 4th March 1937

Nationality: Dutch

Ethnicity: Sinti

Zoni Weisz was born in the Netherlands in 1937. He was the eldest among his siblings, two sisters and one brother. With his family, he lived his childhood inside a wagon near Zutphen in the Netherlands. There, he enjoyed a happy life until 1943. That year, his father decided to move to a house in town, because living in a wagon was no longer safe: someone could have

targeted them as Gypsies. For a year, Zoni's family managed to live quite well thanks to the little shop of musical instruments that the father opened in town. When all seemed going well, history rudely struck Zoni's family. On the 16th May 1943, Dutch police came to their house and took all the family members. But Zoni was in his aunt's house and was not arrested. Soon, he heard the news that his family and all other Sinti and Roma nearby had been deported to Westerbork, a temporary concentration camp, the final destination being Auschwitz. Three days later, on 19th May, Zoni and his aunt's family got arrested too.

On that very day, trains from Westerbork were already on their way to Auschwitz. The police then took Zoni and his aunt's family to Assen's station, where the death train ought to pass. Surrounded by policemen everywhere, Zoni waited for the train to come. The cattle wagons arrived and Zoni recognised his sister's blue jacket hanging from one of them. He was ready to join his family for their last journey. Nearby there was a policeman, who had always been good to Zoni and his aunt's family. When the train was being charged with new deportees, he looked at them and said: "when I take my cap off, you have to run for your life". He took it off and they ran. Zoni and his aunt's family began hiding in the bushes, hardly starving. When the war finally ended, Zoni was brought to his grandparents in Nijmegen. His grandmother, who was not Sinti, decided to change his name in Johan, according to his legal registration, because she did not want him to have a Sinti name. So not only did he lose his family, but also his identity. Many years later, Zoni received a letter from the Red Cross stating that his father had died in Mittelbau-Dora concentration camp. But for his mother, his sisters and his little brother, no letter made him know their fate.