

Pinner Philosophy Group
Philosopher's Christmas 2025

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Extract from a book about his mother's experiences

From Anastazja's Story – A story of the Warsaw Rising 1944

Christmas 1944 in Aufnahme barrack, Sandbostel PoW camp in Germany

The barrack commander stood in the middle of the hut and let them know the good news. "Anyone with a brother or husband in the men's camp may have them join her here for Christmas Eve," she said. "The guards are taking applications from the men's camp. You must let me know who you have and we'll co-ordinate the list of names with the Germans." With astonishing speed, families were formed, long lost brothers and sisters found and uncles identified. Jean, of course, was Anastazja's brother. But she soon discovered that she had six more. On Christmas Eve, towards noon, they all arrived, a platoon of men for the whole of Aufnahme barrack. The hut was packed. Anastazja had the largest number of brothers in the barrack: seven brothers, two French and five Polish. Jean's friend had brought a cake with him that he had baked specially for the occasion. It was made of rice and sugar and raisins in an interesting mixture that was somehow right for the season's celebration. Anastazja cut the cake with her spoon and handed out the feast of Christmas Eve, like a traditional Polish family gathering in vigil for the birth of Christ. They ate with gusto and Anastazja had just a few crumbs for herself, just enough to taste the cake and know what this culinary creation was like. Jean showed them French dance steps by humming a tune as he pranced up and down the narrow corridor between the blankets on the floor. The other girls and men chatted and joked and merriment shone through the squalor and the cold. It was a happy Christmas Eve for Anastazja and her seven brothers and all the girls of Aufnahme barrack.

[Based on Anastazja's recollections as recorded by her son.]

