Laszlo N. Tauber, z'l

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Letters: 1938-1946

is made possible by a grant from the Laszlo N. Tauber Family Foundation.

121 Steuart Street, Suite 10
San Francisco, CA 94105
415-777-9060
www.hcnc.org

Monday-Thursday
10am - 5pm
“We live in the hope that we will be able to embrace you once again.”

During the years of the Holocaust, as avenues of escape from Nazi persecution in Germany and occupied Europe disappeared, many European families found themselves separated – on one side were family members safely living in the United States or England – on the other side, family and friends subject to ever increasing dangers were living under Nazi rule and the threat of extermination.

“So, that’s how things are here, it’s impossible to remain here.”

Communication was difficult. Letters were delayed; letters were opened by censors on both sides; and later, letters were returned to the sender. Delays meant that letters crossed each other, and family members on both sides waited anxiously for word – word about the safety and well being of their loved ones; word about the prospects for visas, boat tickets, and the means to escape Nazi-ruled Europe.

“Please use all of your resources, we are begging you.”

These letters were the only means of contact between parents and children, husbands and wives, friends and relatives who had been cruelly divided. As time passed and the hope of rescue grew remote, the letter writers continued to reach out to those they loved through their letters and postcards. Those in Europe, while anxious about their future, often sought to allay their loved ones’ fears. Those helplessly waiting in safety for news wrote and tried to reassure those in danger.

“In the meantime, I beg you again and again, do not lose courage, and support one another as well as you possibly can. Remember, things can’t go on like this forever.”

The letters in these display cases are those written by family and friends in Nazi-occupied Europe. The letters sent to them are lost. Selected from collections of the HCNC Archives, they provide an intimate view into the events of those years. Each letter is just one small part of a true story of real men, women and children trapped by dangerous events in a terrible time. The love, anguish, persistence, courage and heartbreak they express are a testament to each individual, the lives they led and those they lost.

“When will we see each other again?”
already had received
later news

You will be glad

to receive a letter.

To Paula Przyb, Miroslav Rickmann 58/15
Minulius / Bertram.

CABLES: "JONTDISCO" NEW YORK

TRANSMIGRATION BUREAU

San Francisco City
American National


in response of

U.S.

We get you know:

that Bersztel Zelma

San Francisco

1850 Fulton St.
“Make it possible for us to come to you! We are begging you.”

“Each day is priceless.”

“Our situation is such that you have to send us right away, without any delay, the papers and boat passes. Otherwise we are simply destined for the worst fate that is possible.”

Warsaw
January 18, 1940

My dear!

Just imagine -- we are presently living in Warsaw. Write and send your letters via the Red Cross to Edzia’s address.

Our situation is such that you have to send us right away, without any delay, the papers and boat passes. Otherwise we are simply destined for the worst fate that is possible. It is very easy to get papers and boat passes (this is what they told me in the U.S. Consulate) and many people left Poland that way, for example Mr. Orzechowski from Warsaw. Remember that this is our last resort and the only chance to survive. Contact our uncles right away, to tell them that they should do all that is possible to save our lives. They should not procrastinate about anything. Each day is priceless. Send the papers and boat passes for us to the American Consul in Warsaw, 29 Aleje Ujazdowskie. We are begging our uncle, simply falling on our knees, with tears in our eyes. The cost of all of this is very low. Where is Mom right now? Write to us about all of that via the Red Cross (this is the simplest way). Write a letter to our uncles right away about our case. We will not pull through much longer than spring. Regards from all of us to all of you, Tadek.

The Becker family of Poland was divided both by distance and by increasingly limited opportunities to emigrate. Martin Becker and his mother Zelda were living in the United States by 1938; father Abraham and brothers Tadek and Lolek lived in Warsaw.

Postcard after postcard to Martin and Zelda pled for assistance in obtaining exit visas and boat passes. But they were helpless to rescue the father and brothers who remained in Poland. Despite the terrible obstacles to escape and the deteriorating conditions in Warsaw, in one postcard Tadek reassured his mother that they were managing well and asked her not to worry. Abraham, Tadek and Lolek Becker perished in Treblinka.

Translation by Ewa Basinska and Jeffrey Mifflin.
Nie wiem co robić, bo nie mam metaliścię, bez
jej zdania muszą panie i kandy

Kandy, gdyś w przeszłości nie
mieliśmy możliwości na
szale najznaczniejsze, jakie tylko istnieją.
Kandy osiągnęły teraz i to tak, że
mieliśmy w komisariacie (U.S.A.) i chęć na
niej pojechać, np. p. orszułkowej
Kandy. Kamieść się, co to jest niewie
sama, sama niesamowita i jedyna szansa.
Równocześnie nie metaliścię
wszystkie i niema oni robią wszystko o
moj liście, by uniknąć nieszcz
niech i niemniej nie zaleszą

Wiedza jest doskonałym środek
i Kandy osiągnęły metaliścię
i do Konforcji amerykańskiej
ranie, 27. Wczesne w
nie w przesadze. Kandy te są 6. kwiet
jest teraz Mama? Nigdy nam
nauki przez Czerwony Krzyż (tak najbardziej)
list do wszystkich i do wszystkich

Widziane
CZOVA

17/4 1014

U. Recker
Carleton College
Northfield, Minn

M.S.A
“Now, my dear children, I have to say goodbye, hope and wish all luck is with you. Thanks very much for everything, whatever you did for us. Goodbye and God bless you, your dear mother.”
“Whether you ever get this letter is a question.”

“Everything is so terrible and I am wondering when they take us away.”

The letters of Hans Esberg
Dr. Hans Esberg lived in San Francisco during the war years. His mother remained in Wolfenbüttel, Germany. She wrote a final letter to him in March 1943, shortly before her deportation to Theresienstadt, and entrusted it to a friend to deliver.

When the United States Army was fighting in Germany, this friend passed the letter on to an American soldier, himself an immigrant from Germany. The soldier, Berthold Berlizheimer, translated it into English and sent it to his wife in Los Angeles. Mrs. Berlizheimer in turn sent the letter to Dr. Esberg in San Francisco. But Dr. Esberg’s mother had already died in Theresienstadt by the time the letter was received, over two years after it had been written.
“We live in the hope that we will be able to embrace you once again.”

“I beg you again and again, do not lose courage”

The letters of Mae Berschtel Mendelsohn Mandl

The Berschtel family were among the over 17,000 Polish-born Jews who were forced from their homes and businesses in Germany in late October 1938 and relocated in Poland. Marie (Mae) Berschtel left shortly after for the United States where she married Felix (Peel) Mendelsohn. Mae’s brother and his wife escaped to Palestine. Mae’s parents and two sisters – Hilde and Anni – remained behind in Poland.

The letters to Mae from her parents and sisters were full of love and concern for her, and downplayed their hardships. The last postcard Mae received, dated October 12 1941, however, provides a glimpse into the privations the family was enduring. Mae Mandl’s parents and sisters perished during the Holocaust.

Mae Mandl’s parents wrote to her regularly – her father wrote in German and her mother wrote in Yiddish. But even their intimate correspondence was limited by the Nazis. In a letter dated May 22, 1941, Hilda’s father tells Mae that writing in Yiddish is no longer permitted: “Mother didn’t get to write.. one is only allowed to write in German.”
No letters since October -

Anxious about you - don't lose hope.

Write through Red Cross. Peel and I well

and happy. Love

POLSKI CZERWONY KRZYZ

Biuro Informacyjne

GRUD. 1942

Mie Mendelssohn

Chapter: San Francisco

Date: March 18, 1942

2015 Steiner Street

ADDRESSEE — DESTINATAIRE

Polish

Name: BERSZTEL

Christian name: Zelman

Street: Polna 17

Locality: Otwock

Province: near Warsaw

Birth—Naissance

Place and Date: Lublin — Poland 1879

Citizen of: Poland

Name of father: Bershzel unknown

Relationship to inquirer: Father

Country: Poland

Reply on the reverse side
Write very legibly

28 JUN 1942

Réponse au verso
Ecrire très lisiblement
“Besides this I beg you very much to let me have any available information as to what else or what more could be done to free my poor old parents from Theresienstadt.”

The letters of A. Leo Oppenheim
A. Leo Oppenheim and his wife Lilly left Vienna in 1938, and arrived in the United States in 1941. Dr. Oppenheim’s sister and her husband also managed to escape Austria. Their elderly parents – Alfred and Johanna Oppenheim – remained behind. Upon his arrival in the United States, Dr. Oppenheim worked to secure his parents safety. He obtained visas to Cuba for them, but the entrance of the United States into the war in December 1941 made it impossible for the Oppenheim parents to leave Germany. They were sent to Theresienstadt.

Dr. Oppenheim’s efforts to secure his parents’ release continued long after their deaths. In 1945, he attempted to have them included in a prisoner exchange for Palestine, not knowing that they had perished in Theresienstadt the year before.
We are very sorry not to be able to assist you in this matter. We understand how anxious you are to help your parents. But in view of the latest military developments it would not be of any use to apply at this moment for certificates in behalf of the internees of Theresienstadt.

We do hope, that your parents will be amongst those, who are still detained there, and as soon as Tchecho-Slovakia will be liberated, you will be enabled to do so.
"May our dear God protect our loved ones and give them the strength to endure all the horrors."

The letters of Hilda Prager Silberberg

Hilda (Hilde) Prager emigrated to the United States from Germany in late 1938, leaving her mother Paula Prager behind in Nuremberg, Germany. Hilda and her mother enjoyed a close and loving relationship and corresponded frequently. From 1938-1941, Paula Prager wrote to her daughter Hilda weekly.

Hilda's last letter to her mother, dated November 30, 1941, was returned to her in July 1942 with the note: "Return to Sender. Services Suspended." Despite the best efforts of Hilda and her husband Otto Silberberg to bring Mrs. Prager to the United States, she was deported from Nuremberg in early 1942. Hilda's cousin wrote her on April 29, 1942: "What we have suspected for a long time has now become a fact. [They] have gone on a long journey and it will be a long time until we hear anything from them." Pauline Prager was deported to Izbica, Poland, and perished in an extermination camp.

Hilda kept all her correspondence from family and friends until her death. There were over 135 letters from her mother alone.

1850 Fulton St.
San Francisco California
November 30 1941

To: Paula Prager
58/ II
Obere Pirkheimer Strasse
Nuremberg, Germany

My Very Dearest Mama:

We received your dear letter and are so happy to learn that you are all in good health and getting by. We are the same, thanks be to God. We never did get the letter, in which you write that we shouldn't do anything else about the Cuba matter (you wrote about that on November 11), and we never got your telegram of November 11. The only one we got was from the Hamburg-America Line (Hapag) on November 20, and we wrote you about that last week.

Dear Mama, it is in no way a sacrifice by us, to do everything for you, and on our side everything has happened so that you might come. We are able to fulfill all the conditions set by Cuba, and would do so only too gladly. As you know, and know better than we do, there is no exit permit, as Hugo telegraphed me on Friday. It was a real blow to us and we only hope, that this is only a temporary measure, and that with God's help we shall see each other soon. In any case, dear little mother, everything is prepared, and at the moment, when you telegraph that you can come, we will take further steps. You can well imagine how awful it is for us to be so near the goal and for everything to be postponed all over again. For the third time now. ... We want to remain brave and not lose our courage. Papa always used to say, the old God still lives and will help us. ...Greet all the dear ones from me. Be kissed and greeted yourself in the most loving way. Hold your head high! In all faithfulness! Your Hilde
My Dear Mother!

I am terribly sorry that everything has been deferred, although not cancelled; there’s no way to fight against current conditions. Keep on living well and be most lovingly greeted and kissed

Otto

Translation by John Bass
“Please do absolutely all in your power to save us.”

“It is vital that not a single moment be lost as it is a question of life and death…. It depends on you alone.”

Letters sent to Harry Goodman
Harry Goodman was the secretary of Agudath Israel, a political arm of Orthodox Jewry, located in London. He spent the war years desperately trying to rescue Jews trapped in Europe.

These letters, smuggled out of Camp Vittel in France, were written on cigarette paper and the lining of a jacket. They provide names of over 250 Polish Jews about to be deported from the camp to the East, and beg for assistance in saving their lives.
FAMILIES HERE

1) Schwarzbard Chiel, Perla, Martin [Marta Deported 7.9.42], Westerbourg Holland not on Costa Rica Pass. 1911, Messengers
D.R. Schwarzbard Queens Court Queensway London

2) Juskowicz Moshe, Renia, Jackline, Paraguay Message
Fanny Friedman London WI 60 Clarewood Court S.
Sister Tela Sossi, Sidor Bergan

3) Eisenzweig Szija, Gina, Gutta, Paraguay Message
Goodman, Aronson Israel-Haifa Goulak Str. 6/2, Guest House Horowitz, Tel Aviv Bezalel 9, Sternbuch Suisse St.
Yad Iaakov Str. 39

4) Maria Szpinadel-Kahan, Nation, Bolivia

5) Flora Boteva, Unit 59, Yugoslavia
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