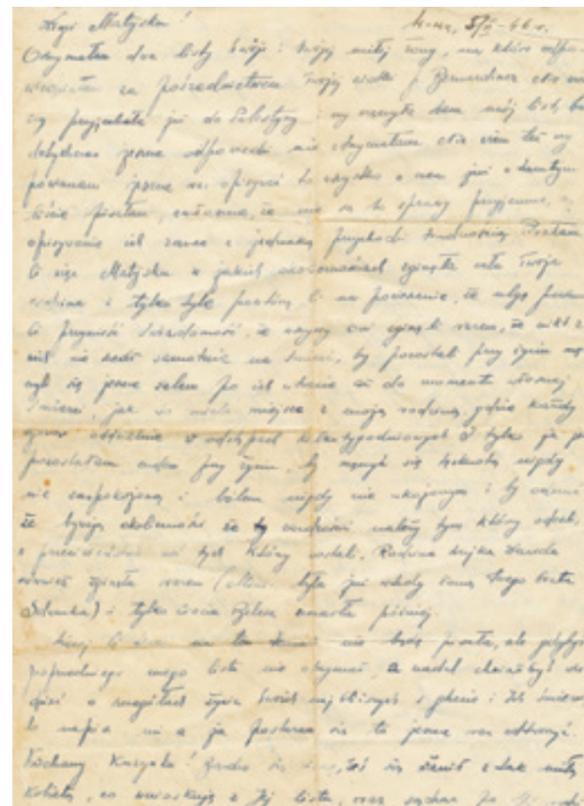


Family members had endeavoured to maintain contact throughout Hitler's reign. At war's end in 1945, reeling from the experience of and news about the Holocaust, millions of people searched for loved ones. Two-thirds of Europe's Jews, some six million people, had been murdered. The one-third who had survived wondered: who else is among the living?

Letter 1 / Helena Goldstein



Helena Goldstein, 1943



Letter written by Helena Goldstein to her cousin Matys Gwircman, 5 June, 1946.

Dear Matys,

I received two letters from you and your lovely wife and responded through the courtesy of your aunty Mrs. Bernardiner. I'm not sure whether she has already arrived in Palestine and handed over my letters as, so far, I have not received a reply. I don't know therefore, whether I should repeat everything I wrote about in my previous letters. Considering that all the matters are most depressing and writing about them comes to me with the utmost of difficulty.

I wrote to you about the circumstances in which your whole family perished. I repeat again, if it can be of any comfort for you, they perished together and none of them went to their deaths alone while those still alive had to suffer with grief until they themselves met with the same fate.

That's what happened to my family when each of them perished alone, at few weekly intervals. And so I was the only one to survive, to suffer from longing never appeased and hurt never relieved and feeling in envious of those that are gone in comparison to those that remained behind. The family of Uncle David also perished together. Mina was by then your brother Shlomek's wife. Only Auntie Bella was murdered later.

I won't write more on this subject, but in case you haven't received my previous letter and would like to learn the particulars of the life and death of your closest and dearest ones while in the ghetto, let me know and I shall endeavour to reproduce it in its entirety one more time.

My dear cousin, I am so happy for you that you married such a nice woman, which I deduce from her letter and also having met some of her family. I dare to presume that your parents as well as your siblings would be just so happy. I would like to get a photo of the 2 of you. I myself will send you one of me and my husband just as soon as I have one.

There was a great event in my life; my dearest sister

Fela and her husband Ignatz returned from Russia at long last and at long last we are together again. I'm sure it is not necessary to describe how happy it makes me to have my dearest sister, the only person closest to me, back with me.

The only thing which worries us now is the thought of leaving as soon as possible. If you could arrange something with Barias, it would be of great significance. Remember, our entire hope is with you and Uncle Isaac.

Another request. Somewhere in Palestine there should be my old friend from Lublin Esther Zandsztajn. If you could come across any traces of her and notify her that I am alive?

In the meantime dear Matys, kisses and regards from myself, Fela, Ignatz and my husband Olek

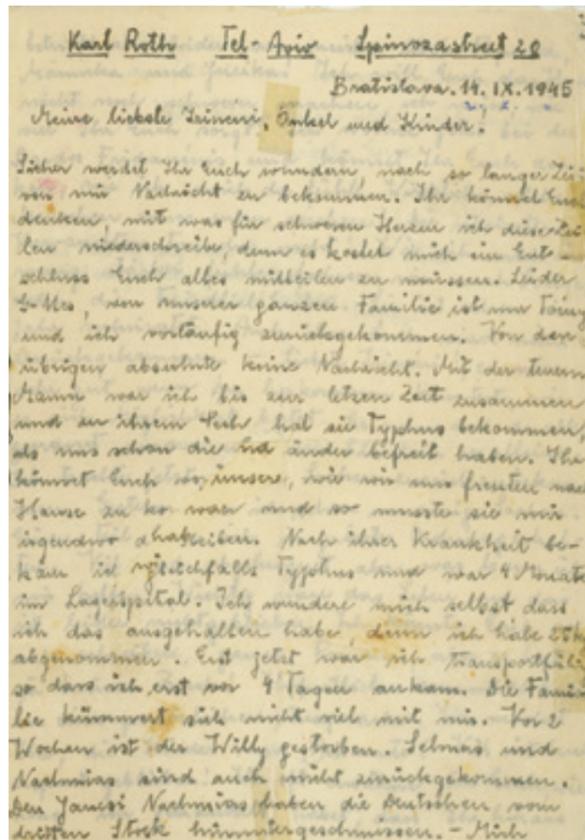
Your Hela

If you need any information about us, Uncle Izaak will help you.

Letter 2 / Olga Horak



Olga Horak, 1950.



Olga Horak, the sole survivor of her family, wrote this letter from Bratislava to her Aunt Irene and Uncle Charles in Palestine, 14 September 1945.

My dear Aunt Irene, Uncle Charles and children,

You surely will be surprised to get news from me after such a long time. You can imagine how painful it is for me to write this letter. It is a hard decision to let you know about all. Unfortunately from the entire family only Tommy and I have returned so far. There is absolutely no news about anyone else. I was together with my dearest mother until the very last moment. Unfortunately, she had typhus when we were liberated by the British. You can't imagine how happy we were to prepare ourselves to return home but she did not make it and died. Shortly after I was also stricken with typhus and was in a camp sick bay for four months. I myself am surprised how I endured all this. I have lost 25 kg. I was declared able for transport and repatriated four days ago. The family does not look after me. Two weeks ago Uncle William passed away. Stern and the Nachmias family have not returned either. My cousin Jancsi (Eugene) Nachmias was thrown out from the third floor window by the Nazis. I'm very affected by the loss of my dearest mama, papa and Judith. I do not want to give you more heartache because I know how worried you were. I'm living now with Aunt Freda, the Bardos family and I feel good with them. Indeed such people are hard to be found. My nearest relatives didn't do anything for me. As soon as I feel a bit stronger I will travel to Sala together with Erica Friedlieb. She got married a year ago. Her closest family has also not returned home. My dearest Aunt Irene, it would be good if you could come here as soon as the possibility arises. There are so many things in need of attention, and I am so very alone. I'm trying to collect a few things that were left in safekeeping. I went to collect a few things yesterday, which were in good order. A lot is denied but I don't really care. When life is gone it can't be replaced. I could write novels, but now it is meaningless. I hope we could soon meet and then I will tell you in person. How are you, the children and your friends? A lot you have been spared. I think about your clever decision that you left in time. I hope to get from you informative and long letters soon. I send you kisses.

Fondly yours
Olly



- 1/ In the post-war era, survivors, for the first-time since the Nazi's rise to power, are unrestricted in what they can say. How does this affect what is said?
- 2/ What qualities can you find in the voice of the letter-writers?
- 3/ How has language been used to effectively communicate meaning?
- 4/ Reread Olga's letter. What are the immediate priorities of survival after the war for Olga? In what way is her youth both a benefit and a hindrance to her survival?
- 5/ At the end of the war, survivors now have to grapple with the question of why they survived and others didn't. How do you think they make sense of their wartime experiences?
- 6/ How do you come to terms with telling people what happened to you and your loved ones?
- 7/ Survivors had to rebuild their lives. Identify the choices and actions they faced.
- 8/ 'Chaja' "was not a good name" according to Helena Goldstein, who changed her name from 'Chaja' to 'Helena'. Why does Helena think this? What does it reflect about the political and social conditions at the end of war?
- 9/ Also, Helena said, "no one had any papers and could invent a new identity because no one could prove that it wasn't so." How does this statement tell us about Helena's attempt to deal with the past and think about the future?