

November 21, 1939

1303 East 41st Street
Seattle Washington

[1/1] My Dear!,

[1/2] I haven't written for a very long time. In the meantime I made [1/3] maddening efforts to contact Ulrich and my [1/4] family in Poland. The Results: In response to my [1/5] telegraphs the Federation of Polish Jews gave me the address of an organization through which [1/6] Ulrich attempted to make contact with me. I telegraphed [1/7] this organization in Bucharest, I paid them for [Ulrich's] response and haven't heard back from them [1/8] to this day—two weeks have passed, and [1/9] no answer. I lost ten dollars on these telegrams. However, [1/10] I did get a telegram from Lwow that said "all very well parents and [1/11] sister waiting". Thanks be to God for that. The telegram contains a couple more [1/12] words from which it appears that one of our people [1/13] escaped and has letters for me. I've begun the mad [1/14] dash to find this individual, whom I expect to show up in either France [1/15] or Britain. I must say that I don't quite understand the word, "waiting", [1/16] in the telegram. Speculating about it would be a waste, I can only wait until these letters [1/17] will surface, and then I will start asking questions about the [1/18] options in getting them out of there.¹

[1/19] My personal correspondences are on the back [1/20] burner, because of all these matters. To be specific, I still [1/21] have to write to the Schibs and Kibitzes, but then again, I have a [1/22] limited amount of time at my disposal.

[1/23] I'm very worried about what you wrote about your job search. [1/24] It's hard to say anything from this far away. [1/25] But don't jump into any sort of undertaking. It's better to [1/26] sit on it and find something [1/27] bearable.

[1/28] The news you sent about Tarnow really made me happy.² I wonder [1/29] how the political changes will affect the requests for [1/30] American visas. Maybe all the people we [1/31] care about will get out of Europe?³

[1/32] I don't have anything interesting to write about myself. [1/33] Work is a pleasure. I have 14 hours of lecturing each week. [1/34] It's a bit much, but not too hard. The people are good-humored and willing to help. [1/35] My personal life revolves around two groups: my colleagues [1/36] from the faculty and B'nai B'rith. They invite me over. They take me back home. [1/37] I am a member of

¹ Dr. Birnbaum acquired South American passports for his family, in the hope that they would help his family evade the Russians and Germans. Further translated documents from the collection suggest that these passports sealed the final fate of the Birnbaums and their relatives in an unexpected way.

² Tarnow is a city in South-Eastern Poland. It is not yet clear what the political changes were. It does appear that the first train transport to Auschwitz was from Tarnow and that the 700 prisoners from there were one of the first, if not the first, victims of the concentration camp.

³ Hardly any of the people they cared about made it out of Europe.

the Faculty Club, the BB lodge, they're making a [1/38] szajner balbues⁴ out of me. I'm thinking of getting skiing equipment, because the season [1/39] starts soon.

[1/40] My mathematical work is not progressing. The correspondence [1/41] with Europe is a huge distraction.

[1/42] I'd be happy if you and I could write about more [1/43] interesting and more pleasant things.

Yours Cordially⁵

⁴ The meaning of this phrase is not clear. It seems to be a hybrid of Polish and Hebrew words.

⁵ Written by Z.W. Birnbaum to an unknown recipient.