

[1/1] In March of 1943, we, who possessed foreign documents, received a command [1/2] to move into a building in Lwow. There we were under the guard of the Gestapo [1/3] and their *adlatusow*¹ the Ukrainian police. Twice daily for two hours apiece we were allowed [1/4] to go into the city for shopping. Each family had its own room [1/5] and shared a kitchen with several other families. Mrs. Berger lived with her² parents. [1/6] At that time your mother³ was lamenting the loss of her sister [1/7] from Vienna. During her convalescence, being a doctor for that block, [1/8] I gained from the Gestapo the right to stay outside the block until 7PM for your parents [1/9], and so your parents constantly passed their time in the nearby garden.⁴ You could [1/10] only bring into this so-called block however much furniture you could fit. [1/11] A good bed was a high priority, which is something your parents had. Life flowed [1/12] relatively calmly. We were separated from the Jewish life of Lwow, which was systematically [1/13] exterminated.⁵ Echoes of massacres and murders took its toll on us in the form of [1/14] a frightful depression, but we were safe. From the large group of “foreigners” [1/15] who were annihilated by the Gestapo there remained about 185 people waiting [1/16] for Austausch Lager⁶, from which, as the Gestapo surmised, we were supposed to be exchanged.⁷ [1/17] In the meantime I put father back on his feet after the flu, which, because [1/18] of his heart condition, posed an evident danger. 5 July 43 [1/19] we left Lwow in a train, and on 7 July we arrived in Bergen Belsen. The first [1/20] impression was horrendous. Brick barracks with *pryczami*⁸, the pasture was *unique / monotone / singular*⁹. [1/21] We encouraged each other by saying that it would not last long, since we were supposed to be exchanged. [1/22] They lied to us; Aufenthalts-Lager became our camp, from which only a handful [1/23] of us happily escaped to either Switzerland or Sweden. A release from work was the only grace [1/24] granted us. *Wikt*¹⁰ the same as used by condemned camp inmates [1/25], at first wasn’t all that bad, and anyway it was supplemented with supplies brought [1/26] from Lwow. However, the supplies soon ran out. The camp inmates proceeded to

¹ Adlatusow is not a common word. It is probably a colloquialism. Its tone suggests something derogatory, like the word “cronies”.

² This sentence refers to Rita’s parents, and Ms. Berger, her mother-in-law.

³ That is, the aforementioned Mrs. Berger, mother of Jakob Berger.

⁴ This sentence is one of the more obvious examples of Mr. Schwieger’s “choppy” style.

⁵ It is as if Dr. Schwieger cannot help but get as many details down on paper because he feels so overwhelmed by everything.

⁶ This is the German phrase for, “exchange camp”.

⁷ The word “exchanged” is a euphemism for being transferred to a different, as the context suggests, less harsh, concentration camp. This word is used, because the “harsher” camp, Bergen Belsen would get a fresh exchange of prisoners in return for those presumably sent to more benign places.

⁸ The meaning of the word, *pryczami*, cannot be found. It might be slang. There are not enough contextual clues to deduce its meaning.

⁹ The word is unusual, and its precise meaning cannot be determined.

¹⁰ This is a rarely used abbreviation. It means foodstuffs.

barter [1/27] food and cigarettes. Dollars, bread, and cigarettes were the official currency. [1/28] For a kilogram of bread one paid \$45, for a kilogram of butter \$120, sugar \$90, egg \$5

[2/1] for a cigarette \$1. Over a period of 20 months three times we received a single egg. Clothes [2/2], dresses, furs, gold were sold for nothing. Clothes *ang.*¹¹ were obtainable [2/3] for one-and-a-half of a kilogram of bread, a karat of crystal for 3-5 kg. Hunger raged in the whole camp. [2/4] There was no form of nourishment, suitable for cattle, which was not [2/5] consumed by us with full satisfaction. This took its toll on the health of your parents. [2/6] Mother¹² lost an alarming amount of weight, but she held on tight, despite [2/7] constant bile attacks, with each step supporting dad, sharing [2/8] with him, or totally giving up her own modest ration of bread. Dad lost a considerable amount of weight [2/9], down to nearly one-third of his former weight. Both constantly grumbled about feeling hungry. [2/10] Mother lived in the ladies barrack near ours and was continuously at dad's side. Shortly, [2/11] the effects of starvation took their toll and your father became *zamiemogl.*¹³ [2/12] Being the doctor of the camp I took special care of the people from Lwow. I tried to help dad [2/13] as much as I could; on the side I obtained some medicine for his heart. He received [2/14] double the daily portion of lunch, or a so-called diet, consisting [2/15] of milk grysik and potato soup. Your father fulfilled the honorary function of [2/16] heading the camp's court. Later, when hunger raged, his position as judge gained him [2/17] an additional half-liter of soup, made from carrots [2/18] or beets suitable for cattle. Toward the end of October '43 dad contracted [2/19] a lung infection and finally left his bed during the spring of '44 [2/20] to stroll outside, in the barrack's backyard. Mother did what she could to [2/21] get a piece of sugar for him, or bread, or potatoes. In the cold [2/22] barrack he had to rest with cold compresses on his head or after banki¹⁴. It was unbelievably hard to get medicines, [2/23], however I managed somehow and he *wybrnal*¹⁵; many inmates treated me coarsely [2/24] because I tried so hard for dad and mom. I took the position that [2/25] such a valuable person ought to be saved at all costs; they on the other hand judged that [2/26] that one ought to save the young. Lack of vitamins caused his bones to lose nutrients [2/27] and they became very brittle. Once he broke a rib. [2/28] He spent some time in the camp hospital, there a big misunderstanding came to a head [2/29] between myself and another camp doctor, caused by bitterness over

¹¹ The abbreviation *ang.* might be an abbreviation of a type of clothing.

¹² That is, Mrs. Berger, Rita's mother.

¹³ The word either means "exhausted", "unable to work", or "became incapacitated."

¹⁴ A homeopathic cure where shot-glass-sized, bulbous, heated glass-objects are placed on a patient's back, after being heated with a flame. This heat produces a vacuum in the little glass cylinder, which then is placed on the patient's back and sucks on the skin. This supposedly gets blood circulation and the immune system going. The procedure sounds bogus, but is surprisingly effective. It is done with the utmost care to keep the patient very warm, as the procedure temporarily weakens the immune system before giving back the body its strength. Hence, this passage indicates that the father was constantly exposed to acute health hazards, even when convalescing.

¹⁵ The meaning is unknown; suggest the onslaught of a very serious health problem, maybe death.

[3/1] the hunger of others, and later explained by your dad in a letter, which [3/2] I managed to salvage and am sending to you. The spring of '44 arrived and along with it spring [3/3] blossomed in our hearts. Rumors that we were going to be exchanged began to spread, that we had to [3/4] first be moved to other, free, camps, from which you could write [3/5], thanks to the Red Cross, plus you could also get care packages. Not even one package arrived during our stay in Bergen Belsen [3/6], because the Germans stole everything. We had no idea about what was going on in the world either. [3/7] The day of 17 May the first transport departed, and with it, your parents, [3/8] and Ms. Berger, and my sister. The attempt to find out [3/9] where they were taken was futile. What I think about their fate, I can't say. [3/10] I can tell you this much, thinking about their fate causes me unrest. I tremble at [3/11] the thought and I fear too, that they were sent to Auschwitz, but I've talked to [3/12] people from there, they don't give straightforward answers, some of them even [3/13] wanted to see certain people from our camp in Auschwitz, some judge, that there was such a transport [3/14] and that its contents were immediately eradicated, others believe that there was no such transport to Auschwitz. [3/14] There still remains a ray of hope that they survived. It could be that they were taken east of the Elbe [3/15], saved by the Soviet Army. No letters from those liberated in that region have yet made their way to Paris [3/16] and neither can you send letters there through the mail. One has to [3/17] arm oneself with patience, waiting and praying to God, that the living will be found. [3/18] One has to believe that they're still alive, as long as they are on the other side [3/19] of the Elbe, and that they just haven't made contact through the mail. I keep making efforts [3/20] to get in touch with them, if I discover anything I will send you a cable. In vain they envied your parents [3/21] for being sent to a better camp. (This is followed by a narrative of his liberation [3/22] in which one bit of information is worthy of attention, the he, along with the family, brought to the Belsen camp [3/23] 18 chests.)¹⁶

[3/24] Ms. Berger held up fairly well during the whole ordeal. She knows how to [3/25] adjust to the small amounts of food in the camp and she was always in [3/26] good spirits. She kept getting hernias because of the weight she had lost [3/27], several times it was very serious, but every time she managed to pull herself

[4/1] out of it. There was no way to get her a special belt. And that's how Ms. Berger [4/2] and the whole Birnbaum family with Ms. Nusia left with your family [4/3] about your husband and brother I know everything, repeatedly I looked at [4/4] photographs of yourself with your husband, it seems that they were wedding pictures, and I read a letter in English from your brother in Kenya.

[4/5] I am also in possession of a few words from your mom, written [4/6] on a piece of tobacco paper. The contents are as follows:

¹⁶ The unspecified relative of Rita, the initial Polish editor of the letter, made this parenthetical note and omission. One should note that "chests" refers to large containers for personal belongings.

[4/7] Meine Teueren. Wir haben leihwiese 275 efekt. Dollar U.S.A. von
[4/8] Dr. S¹⁷ uebernommen und bitten dieselben unverzueglich dem Ueberbringer
[4/9] restlos auszuzahlen. Viele gut Kusse von mir un Pa. Eure Mutti.¹⁸

[4/10] I don't want to part with this piece of writing just yet, I will mail it
[4/11] in due time.

¹⁷ Could this be Dr. Schwieger?

¹⁸ This tobacco paper passage might be asking for money. The money is needed to either pay back Dr. S. or he will be the intermediary who will deliver it.